



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 19 February 2013

Session 4

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## Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 19 February 2013*

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

### Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Right Rev Albert Bogle, the moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

**The Right Rev Albert Bogle (Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland):** I am delighted to be able to bring to the Parliament the greetings of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and I hope that, over the next few days, I will be able to catch up with many of you going about your daily business here in the Parliament.

We cannot hide from the contradictions of our shrinking planet. Even if we wanted to, the technology in our hands forces us to look at a world that seems to be broken for some while for others it is a world of opportunity and hope.

It is that knowledge that turns us from independent individuals into interdependent communities. The retort of Citizen Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?", demands an answer in the affirmative from all of us—"Yes, I am my brother's keeper." In a strange reversal of lyrics, it is you and I who have the whole world in our hands.

The roles and motives of professional politicians are often questioned not only by the media but too often by those whom we want most to serve. That continual scrutiny brings with it unique pressures and demands on family life. The burn-out among politicians, doctors and nurses and ministers is higher than many dare to admit. We are losing some of our best people from our public service.

The personal cost among those who seek to be their brother's keeper is often high. Learning how to sustain ourselves, keep focus and hold our vision is not always easy.

Christians believe that, when we come before God in prayer, we find a new strength. The Hebrew writer describes it in the book of Isaiah:

"But those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not grow faint."

May the presence of the Almighty raise us up to more than we could ever be on our own. Amen.

## Business Motion

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-05665, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme for today. I ask any member who wishes to speak against the motion to press their request-to-speak button now and I invite Joe FitzPatrick to move the motion.

14:03

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick):** I confirm that the revision to business will allow for a ministerial statement on horsemeat substitution in Europe.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 19 February 2013—

after

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

insert

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Horsemeat Substitution in Europe

*Motion agreed to.*

## Topical Question Time

14:04

### **Structural Funds (European Union Financial Framework)**

**1. Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what implications the agreement on the European Union financial framework for 2014 to 2020 has for the allocation of structural funds in Scotland. (S4T-00250)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon):** The recent agreement reached on the multi-annual financial framework by the European Council could have significant implications for the allocation of structural funds in Scotland. The framework contains detailed arrangements for allocating structural funds according to unemployment, youth unemployment, regional gross domestic product, total regional population, population density and other technical factors. The United Kingdom's overall allocation for 2014 to 2020 will fall by approximately 6 per cent. However, initial calculations of how much each part of the UK would receive has produced some very concerning results and could see Scotland face an overall reduction of over 30 per cent, with by far the biggest reduction occurring in the Highlands and Islands.

Wales and Northern Ireland would also face significant net reductions, while England would receive an increase. Clearly, I am very concerned by what would be a disproportionate reduction in European structural funding for Scotland. I have therefore spoken to the other devolved Governments and the UK Government. There is an agreement that our officials will work together—first, to better understand the basis for those initial calculations and, secondly, to identify alternative allocation methodologies that not only respect the principles and objectives of the financial framework but ensure a fair allocation of funding across the UK. I will, of course, keep the Parliament updated.

**Christina McKelvie:** That is concerning indeed. Will the Deputy First Minister confirm when the allocation formula was calculated and whether her devolved counterparts share her concerns? What prospects are there for getting an improved deal?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** As I indicated in my original answer, the final formulation was agreed at the European Council meeting that took place on 7 and 8 February, when it was part of the package that was presented by Herman van Rompuy. Although we would have had earlier versions of

the methodology, it was not possible to accurately estimate regional receipts in advance of the final formula and budget figures being agreed, which happened at the European Council.

It is fair to say that the devolved Administrations have an interest in securing a fairer allocation of funds within the UK. Although different nations in the UK will have slightly different emphases and interests, we are working together to identify a solution that is suitable for us all. As I said earlier, I spoke last week to Michael Fallon, the responsible UK minister, and he, too, indicated a willingness to discuss how we could reach a fairer allocation.

In response to the last part of Christina McKelvie's question, I say that the prospects are good, and I am optimistic that we can get to a much better and fairer allocation. However, there is work to do to get there, and I will keep Parliament updated on the progress of that work.

**Christina McKelvie:** Will the Deputy First Minister give an insight into the agreements that were reached by other member states and whether they have secured different deals?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Obviously, this is an agreement that was reached by member states. The allocations across Europe are based on the same formula. However, as members will be aware from the news coverage of the final Council conclusions, several member states secured special allocations—or top-ups—as part of the overall deal. For example, Hungary, Germany, Belgium, Malta and Cyprus negotiated agreements of that nature.

As I understand it, the UK did not seek to negotiate such a deal. Obviously, the UK had set particular objectives for the conclusion of the deal. The basic formula applies across all member states, but there will be differences in the final position of individual member states depending on the detail of that final agreement.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's assurances that there are on-going discussions and that she will keep Parliament informed.

The cabinet secretary is right to say that there are concerns across the Highlands and Islands. Is she aware of specific concerns about the fact that structural funding will not be available across the Highlands and Islands and that specific areas, notably Orkney and Shetland, may lose out as a consequence? Will she encourage her officials to pick up that point specifically in the on-going discussions with UK officials?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I acknowledge Liam McArthur's constituency perspective. I should have said earlier that I updated the European and External Relations Committee in writing last week

about the issue, and I will continue to keep it updated.

I am certainly aware of concerns that exist in the Highlands and Islands generally and, indeed, in particular parts of the region. In my first answer, I said that the initial allocations—I stress that they are initial and that there is a lot of work to be done on them—would indicate a cut of more than 30 per cent for Scotland but a bigger reduction for the Highlands and Islands. The Highlands and Islands are categorised as a transition area, so there are particular challenges that will be uppermost in our minds as we try to reach a much better outcome than where we are now. I am happy to keep Liam McArthur updated on the particular issues relating to his constituency.

### Paediatric Services

**2. Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to national health service boards for the delivery of paediatric services. (S4T-00253)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil):** In response to changing demands for paediatric services, the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland have invested significantly in the NHS workforce, resulting in increased numbers of consultants, trainees and advanced nurse practitioners in paediatric services.

The Scottish Government submitted evidence to the Migration Advisory Committee that all grades of paediatric doctors should remain on the shortage occupation list, to ensure that all avenues remain open when recruiting.

We are working with NHS Education for Scotland to develop a sustainable training programme that will increase the number of advanced nurse practitioners in paediatric services in the NHS in Scotland.

**Jim Hume:** Last June, the children's ward at St John's hospital in Livingston was forced to close for three weeks, due to chronic staff shortages, which left patients and parents in limbo. That should have been the moment for decisive action. Instead, yesterday—eight months on—we learned of the true scale of the problem nationwide: NHS Forth Valley has half the doctors that are required; NHS Dumfries and Galloway should have seven but has fewer than three; and in NHS Borders two posts have been vacant for two years.

Dr Andrew Eccleston, of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, said:

“There is a national crisis in terms of paediatric staff.”

Does the cabinet secretary agree?

**Alex Neil:** There is an international shortage of paediatric consultants. Despite that, we have increased the number of paediatric consultants operating in Scotland by 34 per cent since we came to power in 2007. As well as increasing the number of consultant paediatricians, we have expanded other relevant occupations. The whole-time-equivalent number of advanced nurse practitioners has expanded from 27.4 in 2009 to 44.7 in September 2012. I do not accept that we have been anything other than active, as I said in my reply to the member's initial question.

**Jim Hume:** It is consultants themselves who are beginning to question the future of vital paediatric services in communities across Scotland. The last time that the cabinet secretary was confronted with uncomfortable headlines, he was concerned enough to produce an emergency action plan worth £1 million. It seems that headlines motivate him into action, so will he advise the Parliament when an action plan on paediatric staff shortages will be produced and how much funding he is willing to allocate? Will he assure us that no paediatric services in Scotland will close?

**Alex Neil:** Mr Hume has a cheek, given that he represents a party that in government is cutting the budget in Scotland by 8 per cent for revenue and 26 per cent for capital. Far from waiting for headlines, as he clearly did before he was motivated to ask the question, we have been involved in a host of action items to deal with the problem, not since last week but over the past few years, because of the mess that we inherited from the previous, Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration.

**Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** It appears that the message that should go out from the cabinet secretary and the Parliament is that there is no problem and doctors are completely wrong in saying that there is.

Will the cabinet secretary answer the second part of Jim Hume's question? Will the Government give the public in Scotland an absolute guarantee that children's wards will not close in future due to staff shortages? If he cannot give that guarantee, all the stuff about additional consultants and so on is worthless. The public are entitled to know whether their children's wards will remain open. Can he guarantee that?

**Alex Neil:** First, I did not say that there is no problem; I said that there is a shortage of paediatric consultants in Scotland. There is a shortage of paediatric consultants in England. There is a shortage of paediatric consultants in Wales. There is a shortage of paediatric consultants internationally. There is an international problem, which is made worse by the fact that the Labour Government followed a right-wing agenda on immigration and cut off

opportunities to recruit people from outside the European Union. I therefore do not think Dr Simpson is in a very good position to criticise.

As has been evident from the action that I have taken to keep St John's paediatric services going 24/7, I am absolutely committed to maintaining the quality and quantity of paediatric services throughout Scotland.

**Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP):** Given that it is of course the responsibility of NHS boards to plan and deliver clinical services taking into account local demands, demographic changes and other relevant local issues, will the cabinet secretary clarify again the number of consultants specialising in paediatrics who are currently employed by the NHS and how that compares with the number employed when the Scottish National Party first came to office in 2007?

**Alex Neil:** At the moment, there are 223.8 whole-time-equivalent paediatric consultants in Scotland, compared with 167.2 in September 2006. That unprecedented 34 per cent increase in the number of paediatric consultants in Scotland is something that we are very proud of.

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** That ends topical questions.

## Horsemeat Substitution in Europe

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is a statement by Richard Lochhead, on horsemeat substitution in Europe. As the cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:16

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):** I want to update Parliament on recent developments with regard to horsemeat and food fraud.

As a result of the revelation of horsemeat being found in mislabelled processed beef products in Europe, consumer confidence has been severely dented and shockwaves have been sent through the food industry. It is wholly unacceptable that consumers have been buying products labelled beef that turn out to contain horsemeat, and the mislabelling of food products through deliberate and illegal meat substitution will not be tolerated. It is the clear responsibility of those who supply and sell food to ensure that consumers are not misled, and Europe's food industry now faces the massive challenge of rebuilding trust in its products. At least a dozen countries are now affected and, as exemplified by last night's announcement from Nestlé, it is likely that there will be further revelations across Europe in the coming weeks and months.

That is why the Scottish Government has been calling for strong action at a European level. That is now happening, with European Governments, enforcement authorities, food industries and agencies taking the necessary action to get to the bottom of the issue. It is important to note that, in Scotland, there is no slaughtering of horses for human consumption, and no food manufacturing firm has been implicated in the horsemeat scandal and illegal substitution of meat. Indeed, all the evidence points to the affected meat originating from outwith Scotland.

It is also important to note that, to date, this is an issue of food fraud with no evidence of any implications for human health. The Food Standards Agency in Scotland and the Scottish Government are acting to prevent horsemeat from entering our food chain and to reassure consumers. As Parliament will be aware, even though it remains part of the United Kingdom FSA, the agency in Scotland answers to Scottish ministers and is responsible for food labelling. South of the border, Whitehall hived off aspects of labelling and standards to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.



After being notified on 14 January by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland of its survey of horse and pig DNA in frozen burgers, the FSA put in place an action plan across the UK. The Tesco product in question had been on sale throughout the UK, including Scotland. Two plants in the Republic of Ireland and one in England were implicated in the survey, and the affected retailers immediately withdrew potentially affected products from sale.

Parliament will also be aware that as part of the investigation products have been withdrawn due to trace crossover of pork, for instance, into beef products. Although that is more likely a result of poor practice rather than fraudulent behaviour, it remains an issue that the industry must take very seriously.

Three strands of horsemeat surveillance, one of which was initiated in Scotland, are now under way. The first is a robust UK-wide authenticity survey, with 28 local authorities taking samples of beef products from all parts of the food chain. Two councils in Scotland are participating in that survey, the results of which will be published in March.

Secondly, local authorities are carrying out inspection visits to all Scotland's 229 approved meat-processing premises and 29 cold stores. I asked the FSA to instigate those inspections on 24 January. We were the first part of the UK to do that. Sixty per cent of the inspections have already started, and to date 47 per cent have been completed. No issues to cause concern have been detected. The vast majority of the remainder of the inspections are due to be completed by the end of this week, and the whole exercise will be completed by next Friday.

Thirdly, the FSA instructed the food industry to test all processed beef products for the presence of horse DNA and to share the results with it. Last Friday, across the UK, the food industry published the first set of results. Some 2,501 results were published, and 2,472 of them—almost 99 per cent—were negative for the presence of horse DNA at or above the level of 1 per cent. The FSA will publish a further update this coming Friday. No new products were affected. All the positive results related to seven products that have already been reported and, where appropriate, action has been taken to remove relevant products from sale and to notify consumers.

Of course, there have been further product withdrawals since Friday. Where products have been found to contain horse DNA, they have been tested for the presence of the veterinary drug phenylbutazone, which is known as bute. All the tests on food for that drug have come back negative so far. Since 30 January, the FSA has

been testing 100 per cent of horse carcasses for bute.

I repeat: there is no horsemeat processing in Scotland. Bute is not allowed to enter the food chain, but in the unlikely event that people have eaten products that contain contaminated horsemeat, the risk of damage to health is very low. The chief medical officer for Scotland, Sir Harry Burns, has said that the samples found were

"still at a level many hundred times lower than those previously used in humans on a daily basis."

We have also taken steps to check that no horsemeat is present in the food that is provided to our schools, hospitals and prisons. Assurances have been sought from all those who supply food to the public sector in Scotland. Significant testing and tracing are going on throughout public sector providers, and that is also happening throughout those who sell or manufacture food in the UK generally.

To date, there is no evidence of horsemeat in public sector catering in Scotland. Sustainably produced food and drink is a high priority for Scotland, and food and drink contracts are awarded in a way that balances price and quality before they are awarded. It is not necessarily the lowest price that wins; quality is vital in the public sector. We should all take that on board.

As well as taking those immediate actions, we are, of course, turning our attention to the future. Others must do that as well. Rules on the composition and labelling of foods are, in the main, set at a European level. Due to that strong European component, I have asked for a meeting with the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, Commissioner Borg, to stress the need for safe and effective controls being available to us at a national level. In the meantime, at last week's meeting—which happened at last—of EU ministers, ministers finally set out plans to accelerate further labelling measures.

The enforcement of European legislation is within the competence of the Scottish Parliament, but a strong and strategic voice in Europe is, of course, needed to co-ordinate action across the whole of Europe. I have long argued for a stronger UK line on labelling in European negotiations, and over the years I have written to the secretaries of state Hilary Benn and Caroline Spelman to press for quicker action and stronger legislation. I will continue to raise those issues with current DEFRA ministers. Indeed, I have been in regular contact with ministerial colleagues in England, Wales and Northern Ireland over the past few weeks, and I have also discussed the issue numerous times with retailers and the food industry and, of course, with Scotland's farmers and primary producers.

Yesterday, I was in London with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Owen Paterson, and met the chief executives of most of the major retailers and the food service sector in the UK. Tomorrow, I will host another industry stakeholder meeting in Edinburgh with the Minister for Public Health, Michael Matheson, with whom I have been working very closely in recent weeks. The minister is also taking forward our proposal for a stand-alone food standards body in Scotland. The consultation on the new body is imminent, and ministers are currently considering the implications for that process of the horsemeat scandal. The minister is seeking the opportunity to make a statement in Parliament next week to update members. I can also inform members that the minister will establish an expert group to advise on any changes that are required to the FSA in Scotland ahead of the creation of the new body.

No matter how far we go, legislation and enforcement are only a small part of the picture. Responsibility lies with those who produce, manufacture and sell food. There is a clear need for the food sector to restore consumer confidence. Given the greater awareness that exists of the complexity of food supply chains, which is causing much concern, it is clear that the people of Scotland are now taking an even closer interest in where the food on their plate comes from.

There is clear evidence that people are looking for provenance and the Scotch brand, which is associated with traceability and quality. Some butchers report that sales have gone up by more than a fifth since the crisis started, and meat-processing companies in Scotland are reporting an increase in orders for Scotch beef. I urge consumers to seek out the Scotch label.

Although we cannot be complacent on enforcement and strong standards in this country, we must do all that we can to promote and protect our world-renowned Scotch brands, particularly beef. Fortunately, we do not have the complex and sometimes murky web of supply chains that stretches across Europe. We have farmers with traceability systems for their meat through the Scotch label. That is why many customers are realising that they can trust the Scotch label when they buy meat.

I urge our retailers to shorten supply chains and to source closer to home. We must be ready to do that. I will announce another expert group to advise on how we can take forward the Scottish food industry's work on traceability and provenance. In addition, I am asking Quality Meat Scotland to explore how we can extend the principles behind the Scotch label and assurance schemes to the processing sector in Scotland. To

strengthen the Scotch label and boost consumer confidence, last week I announced £1 million for developing new markets for beef, lamb and pork, and the marketing of the Scotch brands.

Consumers need to be confident that food is what it says on the label. When the issue first came to light in Ireland, the Scottish Government and the FSA in Scotland took urgent action and swiftly implemented additional inspections in meat-processing plants. Scotland was the first part of the UK to order those tests, which complement the new EU-wide testing regime that was agreed following a meeting in Brussels last week.

The horsemeat scandal has undermined consumer trust in some parts of the food industry, but it might be a watershed moment in how people think about food, which could end up being a good thing. There is an absolute need for every step of the food chain to take responsibility for the food that it produces and to ensure that Scottish consumers can have total confidence that what they buy is what it says on the label.

**The Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I can allow about 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement, although it is fair to say that the Scottish Government's reaction has been slow. We fully support efforts to promote the Scottish meat sector and its produce, but Scottish consumers are as likely to have eaten contaminated products as consumers elsewhere in the UK.

Greater local sourcing and shorter supply chains are part of the solution, but such food is often outwith the budgets of hard-pressed families. Regardless of income, consumers deserve to have confidence in the products that they buy and to know where those products have come from. In his statement, the cabinet secretary recognised potential weaknesses in the processing sector. What assurances can he give that those will be addressed?

Given what we now know about the regulatory regime in Scotland—a third fewer food safety inspections are carried out than in 2008 and there has been a 50 per cent fall in the number of meat inspectors, as well as a drop in the number of local authority environmental health officers and specialist food safety officers—we must ask whether the cabinet secretary believes that the regulatory system is robust enough. Does he agree that light-touch regulation has failed the sector and the consumer?

It has taken a crisis to kick the Government into action on a stand-alone food standards body. This

has been a missed opportunity. The Government promised a consultation by the end of the year, and now we are to get a statement next week. Will it now fast-track the establishment of such a body?

**Richard Lochhead:** I welcome some of Claire Baker's comments, but I cannot take lessons on being slow to respond from someone who has not lodged an oral question, a First Minister's question time question or a topical question on the issue over the past few weeks. We all recognise that the issue is an extremely serious one, which we should treat very seriously.

Claire Baker makes a good point about processed meat, but we must bear it in mind that the finding of horsemeat in products relates to imported processed beef products and that there is no evidence that any company in Scotland is implicated in deliberate meat substitution. Therefore, the quality of imported processed beef products is an important issue.

We have a processing sector in this country. We should take advantage of that and try to persuade retailers and the food service sector to source more locally, so that our meat processors can secure those contracts. Consumers want to see shorter supply chains, and I have mentioned some measures to take that forward.

Claire Baker referred to the proposal to establish a stand-alone food standards body in Scotland, and I will explain to her why that has come about. In 2010, the UK Government decided to dismantle the FSA in the UK by transferring responsibility for nutrition and labelling to ministers in the UK Government and away from the FSA. Given that the FSA is a body that is at arm's length from Government, so that it can give independent advice, we took a decision that would leave those responsibilities with the FSA. That is why the UK Government is being criticised for its decision south of the border, while our decision north of the border has been welcomed, and it is the reason for the consultation on the stand-alone food standards body.

I am sure that Claire Baker will agree that it makes sense that the consultation should take into account some of the issues that the horsemeat scandal has thrown up. As I said, Michael Matheson will make a statement to Parliament next week about that.

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for the copy of his statement. Understandably, he highlighted in the statement the fine qualities of Scotch beef. However, the problem is surely not whether the beef is Scottish, English, Irish, Welsh or from anywhere else or whether it is 100 per cent beef when it leaves the farm; the problems come later in the chain. Obviously, the

considerable reduction in food safety testing and in the number of environmental health officers is a major cause of concern that must be addressed, but the real issue is, as the cabinet secretary said, the consumer's loss of trust in what was supposed to be a robust food chain.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the supermarkets' relentless grinding down of the prices that they pay their suppliers inevitably leads to those suppliers trying almost anything to make a profit? Given that food labelling and food safety are already within the remit of the FSA in Scotland, what difference does the cabinet secretary think that a stand-alone Scottish FSA could make in situations like the current one? What assurances can he give that the regulatory changes that will inevitably be introduced on the back of this fiasco will be of a sufficiently permanent nature to restore the trust that has been lost, and will not be allowed just to fall into disuse, as has happened too often in the past?

**Richard Lochhead:** Alex Fergusson asked a number of questions. I will address first the issue of staff numbers and the number of food tests in Scotland decreasing. To put the testing issue into context, in 2009-10, Scotland's local authorities carried out 11.6 per cent of the UK total of food tests; the figure is now 13.3 per cent. Yes, there have been similar reductions in the number of meat and hygiene staff across the UK both north and south of the border. That is due to European legislation changing and the fact that in Scotland—unfortunately, some may say—some meat plants have closed down in recent years, so meat inspectors are no longer based in those plants. The staff numbers therefore fluctuate, but of course we must keep them under review in light of the horsemeat scandal as we move forward to a stand-alone food standards body in Scotland.

Alex Fergusson asked what the benefit of such a body in Scotland would be. We would argue that it would be independent and more focused. As part of the consultation process and to take the debate forward, we very much look forward to Parliament's input on the scope of the body's area of responsibility. A stand-alone food standards body in Scotland could achieve lots of exciting things for the wider food sector and food safety in this country.

On how long regulatory changes will last for, the horsemeat scandal is a wake-up call for the processing sector throughout Europe, with more than a dozen countries involved—the next few days' headlines will undoubtedly show that even more countries are involved. It is therefore vital that European authorities sort out the situation, get to the heart of the matter and understand what caused the food fraud and how we can ensure that it does not happen again. I am pleased that effort

is now going to be made to accelerate country-of-origin labelling for processed meat produce in Europe, which could help Scotland greatly.

**The Presiding Officer:** Many members wish to ask a question, but I am confident that we can get through everybody. I call Angus MacDonald, to be followed by Hanzala Malik.

**Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I welcome the Scottish Government's swift actions when the matter first came to light. In light of the horsemeat scandal, what measures is the cabinet secretary taking to guarantee the acclaimed quality and reputation of Scotch beef, lamb and pork? What work has been undertaken to promote the Scotch brand?

**Richard Lochhead:** Angus MacDonald makes a very good point, which I know all members take seriously: we are lucky in Scotland because we have a fantastic reputation for provenance and quality. The last thing that anyone in this chamber wants to see is the Scotch brand and our primary producers—those who produce the raw materials that go into local factories in Scotland and produce first-class products—suffering any collateral damage because of criminal activity in Europe.

We have to make every effort to promote and protect the Scotch brand, which is why last week at the NFU Scotland conference in St Andrews I announced £1 million to help Quality Meat Scotland and the wider industry take forward the Scotch label. As I said, there is also an opportunity to extend the principles behind the Scotch label into meat processing in Scotland. There is huge consumer demand from retailers and food service companies to shorten the supply chain and source closer to home.

**Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab):** Although the bulk of the statement and press reports have focused on horsemeat, the cabinet secretary may be aware that there has been at least one case of pork being found in food that was labelled "halal". That is obviously of high concern to those who adhere to religious dietary requirements. Although I am very pleased that Scottish meat is trusted over meat from other countries, can the cabinet secretary assure Parliament that, along with checks for horsemeat, he will ensure that meat in Scotland is not wrongly labelled "halal" or "kosher"?

**Richard Lochhead:** Hanzala Malik raises a very important point that we are looking at seriously. Indeed, Michael Matheson, the Minister for Public Health, spoke to faith groups yesterday to gauge their views on the issue.

Clearly, the labelling system applies to halal and kosher foods in exactly the same way as it does to other foods, and we expect manufacturers of such foods to adhere to it. As Hanzala Malik mentioned,

there has been an element of crossover of pork in beef products. It should be said that, through due diligence, the food manufacturing service and retailers routinely carry out tests to ensure that what is on the label is what is in the product. That includes testing for pork. Clearly, the issue of the past few weeks has been horsemeat, which is why extra testing has been taking place. Routine testing is very important to identify crossover. The lesson for all meat processors in all countries is that what is on the label must be what is in the product.

**Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** I welcome the prospect of an expert group looking at the FSA in Scotland. It was right that the FSA's role in Scotland was protected when the UK Government took the decision to dismantle it south of the border. However, I am disappointed that the Westminster Government recently refused to devolve full powers over consumer protection to this Parliament.

Will the cabinet secretary ask the Minister for Public Health to broaden the expert group's remit to include all consumer protection functions so that we can take a holistic approach to this very important matter?

**Richard Lochhead:** We will look closely at consumer protection and I am sure that Michael Matheson will take on board Dave Thompson's comments on the membership of the expert group that will be set up in the near future to look at any changes to the FSA and how those will be guided.

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** The cabinet secretary will be aware that I have campaigned for local food procurement for a long time. In fact, nearly six years ago today I held a members' business debate on the issue, in which I called on the Government to work in conjunction with the public sector on procuring food for our public services. The then minister, Michael Russell MSP—some members may remember him—said:

"We have to have confidence in the way that our food is produced".—[*Official Report*, 21 June 2007; c 1119.]

To date—nearly six years on—we are still no further forward regarding local food procurement.

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Hume, can we get a bit further with the question, please?

**Jim Hume:** Does the cabinet secretary agree that this is an opportune moment to push local food procurement up the political agenda and deliver more local food procurement in Scotland?

**Richard Lochhead:** I have spoken about the food service sector and retailers; in the context of Mr Hume's question, it is the food service sector that supplies the public sector and other organisations in Scotland. The food service sector must play a role in sourcing closer to home. It has

a fantastic opportunity to do that, which is why I am keen to expand the principles behind the Scotch label into the meat-processing sector, as well as the fresh meat sector. That is a big opportunity.

There has been enormous progress in public procurement over the past few years. The standards in our schools, hospitals and prisons are much higher than they have ever been—there is plenty of evidence that that is the case. Of course, the procurement guidelines that have been issued by this Government have had an effect by persuading all procurement exercises to take into account quality and not just price.

**Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP):** I alert members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am an honorary vice-president of the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland.

Does the cabinet secretary believe that Scottish food safety has been compromised by the drop over a number of years in the number of environmental health officers and food safety officers employed by local authorities? What pressure can the Scottish Government bring to bear on local authorities to halt and even reverse the decline in the number of EHOs and food safety officers that they employ?

**Richard Lochhead:** Stewart Maxwell's question largely relates to food safety as opposed to meat substitution and labelling, which is what my statement was about. Of course, those officers play a very important role because the majority of tests that are carried out by local government officers—including environmental health officers—relate to food issues, particularly food safety, so their role is essential in giving the public reassurance.

Audit Scotland has just produced a report that covers food safety services. There has to be a plan for the years ahead as regards how such services are funded and how we work together with the FSA and environmental health officers, but the report contains some positive comments. Local authorities need to take food safety seriously, and I am sure that they are taking it seriously. There is no evidence that food safety has been compromised.

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Does the cabinet secretary share the concern of some in the farming industry that the scandal will deter some consumers from eating any meat, even though Scottish pork, lamb and beef are world class, safe, healthy and 100 per cent traceable? Will he consider what extra support he might give to Quality Meat Scotland if meat sales in Scotland show any decline?

**Richard Lochhead:** The good news for the Scotch label is that Scottish meat is not showing a decline; it is showing an increase in sales. Many butchers whom I have spoken to have said that they have had a 20 to 25 per cent increase in sales over the past couple of weeks; indeed, some meat companies in Scotland are getting more orders from outside Scotland for Scottish meat. That is good news. However, the member is quite right to raise the fact that primary producers—farmers in particular—are angry about the scandal because it has had an impact on consumers and their view of meat.

In Scotland we do not supply the world with commodity meat; we supply high-value, good-quality meat. We have a distinctive message, and I will support our primary producers in the agricultural sector and in the wider food sector to promote that message as much as possible.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I declare an interest as a member of the cross-party group on animal welfare and as a member of the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

The unregulated placing of horsemeat on the European market raises serious concerns not only about public health but about animal welfare. Does the cabinet secretary agree that Scotland and the rest of the UK must take every possible step to ensure that we never again provide a market for this heartless trade? If he does, will he ask the European Commission to act now to ensure that all existing animal welfare legislation is enforced in every EU member state and that any meat or live animals imported from third countries meet the same animal welfare standards?

**Richard Lochhead:** Yes, the spotlight will be on the horse trade in Europe as never before and on the associated welfare issues. I am happy to raise the issues that Christine Grahame has mentioned.

**Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab):** The minister mentioned law enforcement efforts across the EU. In light of media reports indicating that those involved in the horse trade have used Scottish ports to deliver a substantial number of horses into the food chain, does the Government have a means to monitor such trade going through our ports? Was the minister aware of the development of such a supply route and has he taken any steps to initiate a high-level strategy in preparation for any criminal investigations should fraud, money laundering or the involvement of organised crime be identified?

**Richard Lochhead:** We are keen to discuss with the UK authorities trade through Scotland of horses. It is not a huge issue for Scotland in terms of trade routes but I am happy to investigate

Graeme Pearson's point to find out exactly the extent of the issue.

I know that intensive investigations into the horse trade are going on at the moment, which will involve all of the UK and, indeed, other European countries. I am happy to look at those investigations.

I should also mention that all member states have been asked to give any information that they have about that horse trade to Europol, which is co-ordinating efforts across Europe to make sure that we are on top of those issues.

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** I note that some flexibility could exist in EU law with regard to quality and standards of labelling. Will the Government look at the potential of labelling the source of all ingredients, whether in processed food or on restaurant menus, and remind the Scottish Retail Consortium that the costs of such labelling should be borne by the processors, supermarkets and restaurants and not by the consumer?

**Richard Lochhead:** As I said, I am keen to set up an expert working group to look at issues of provenance and traceability in Scotland, so I will certainly taken on board Rob Gibson's comments.

One small note of caution is that, in a context where illegal meat substitution—food fraud—has been taking place in Europe, with some products being imported into the UK, we need to be careful about introducing knee-jerk regulation that could have a detrimental impact on small food businesses in Scotland. We do not want those businesses to suffer because of the illegal activity that has happened on the European continent. However, the member raises an important issue that requires further investigation.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** We have a food industry with a long and complex supply chain dominated by huge profit-focused companies, and we have cuts in local authority inspections that mean that some plants are visited only once every three months, or less frequently, on a pre-announced basis. Re-establishing trust in that failed system requires fundamental change. The Soil Association's food for life catering mark—an initiative that the cabinet secretary has supported—means that one in 10 schools in Scotland now know where their food comes from. What action will the cabinet secretary take to help to deliver the commonsense short supply chain that would ensure that a similar level of transparency, control and peace of mind becomes the norm and applies to all food bought and served in Scotland?

**Richard Lochhead:** I do not think that we will ever be in the position of stopping food imports into Scotland—I do not think that consumers

necessarily want that—but I certainly agree that all of us in this country want to support the principle and vision that the member has outlined. Over the past few years, we have put a huge amount of effort into that vision, since we started off Scotland's first ever national food policy a few years ago. Over that time, among UK retailers the sourcing of Scottish brands has increased by a third. I want to continue down that road because I think that sourcing closer to home is the right way to go where we can supply the products. Clearly, there will appear on our shelves products that consumers want to buy that come from overseas. As long as those products meet the same standards as those that producers in this country are required to meet, I think that that is acceptable. I agree with the good work that the Soil Association has done in our schools. As the member said, we funded that through our food policy, and we will look for opportunities to support such initiatives in the future.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** As the cabinet secretary has outlined, local authorities are carrying out inspection visits to all 229 approved meat-processing premises and 29 cold stores in Scotland. At present, the industry is indeed under great scrutiny. However, in view of the cuts to inspection resources that other members have highlighted and given the need to develop new protocols, can the cabinet secretary reassure the Parliament that there will be a suitably robust framework for future inspections, not just in the light of the present concerns about horsemeat but in a broader context to deal with any further potential meat contamination? What will the review process be?

**Richard Lochhead:** As I said, the consultation on the stand-alone food standards body for Scotland will take those issues into account. We are about to launch a consultation on an independent food standards body for Scotland against the backdrop of a European scandal relating to horsemeat, so it is important that we take on board any lessons that can be learned on the issue from across Europe. However, I reiterate that there needs to be a European response.

The FSA in Scotland does a lot of good work and is working extremely hard at the moment. I pay tribute to the FSA staff and to our environmental health officers, who are carrying out the meat premises inspections at the local level. There is a lot of good work going on, so I do not want us to start disparaging our agencies here in Scotland because of international criminal activity elsewhere in Europe. Of course, there will be lessons to be learned, so the member is quite right that we need to review matters to ensure that we have a robust belt-and-braces approach to food standards and food safety in this country. We will ensure that that happens, and we look forward to

the input on that from the other parties in the Parliament.

**Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):**

The cabinet secretary has highlighted the steps that are being taken to check that no horsemeat is present in the food that is provided to our schools, hospitals and prisons. Given that a number of vital services in our communities are outsourced, what steps are being taken to check on the supply chain of services to the elderly or vulnerable that are delivered by non-public sector bodies such as care homes?

**Richard Lochhead:** Jayne Baxter raises an important issue. I assure her that the product testing that is being undertaken by local authorities will be not just in relation to schools but in relation to care homes as well. As regards the food service sector, which may supply private care homes, a huge amount of testing is going on. I understand that, a week or two ago, one food service company even sent 400 samples to the United States to be tested because the laboratories in the UK were at full capacity. That just shows how seriously the testing is being taken, and such testing applies not only right across the public sector but in care homes. As yet, thankfully, no issues of concern have been highlighted, but the testing is on-going and we cannot be complacent.

## Tuition Fees

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-05652, in the name of Michael Russell, on tuition fees.

14:51

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):**

I am grateful for the opportunity to bring this important issue before Parliament. The importance of education can always be seen from the number of debates on education in Parliament and from the attention that is paid to the matter by politicians; indeed, there have this very week been two speeches on education by senior Scottish politicians.

When we consider any matter—but especially education—we should proceed from the principles that underpin what we are discussing to the clear objectives and how we deliver the principles. Education is the means by which we can become what we can be; it is the means by which we realise our potential, satisfy our ambition and maximise the contribution that we make to life in Scotland and beyond.

Jean Piaget, the Swiss philosopher and educator, in describing the type of education that he wished to see, wrote:

“The principal goal of education ... should be creating men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done; men and women who are creative, inventive and discoverers, who can be critical and verify, and not accept, everything they are offered.”

A society of such individuals is something more than a society of individuals; it becomes a questioning and creative society that improves itself and increases its store of ability and expertise. It is the route to national progress and international excellence. It is what Scotland should be.

Most of all, the issue is about equity. If members believe, as I do, that potential and ambition are spread equally throughout society, they should be as determined as I am—as we should all be—to ensure that the opportunities that are represented by education are available to all. That is the principle. In order to do that, it is abundantly clear that we must have access to education that is based on the ability to learn, not on the ability to pay. It is as simple as that.

Our history as a nation is based on that principle and on the issues that I have outlined. Scotland is a country that has education in its DNA. It is a learning nation. It has not always lived up to that ambition, but it has always known of it and

recognised that it should try. The Government is trying to live up to that and it recognises that access for all has not yet been fully achieved. All barriers must be dismantled: barriers of expectation, of lack of ambition and of cost.

The Government has made a clear promise to the people of Scotland that we

“will not introduce upfront or backdoor tuition fees.”

That says to the people of Scotland that, no matter where you live, what the tradition in your family or community is, what all your friends are aiming for or what some might expect of you, if you have the ambition and the ability, this Government will stand four-square with you and give you the opportunity and the support to be all that you can be.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** What would the cabinet secretary say to students from the rest of the United Kingdom, and to Professor Gavin McCrone, who says that the Scottish Government’s current funding position is

“impossible to defend on the basis of equity”?

**Michael Russell:** I would say that they are wrong. I would also say that Liz Smith’s amendment is wrong. It uses the word “discriminatory”, but no legal case has found the Government’s position to be “discriminatory”. It is wrong that an amendment should mislead Parliament in that way and it is utterly wrong to say that the policy is discriminatory, because it is not.

Let me get back to the reality of what we are trying to achieve in education.

Scotland recognises the importance of free education. To be fair, so does England, I think; it is just that its political parties do not. To argue otherwise is to fail to understand what debt and the prospect of debt really mean to people from our poorest communities. That is why, during the UK general election in 2010, there was a campaign to ask politicians to sign a pledge not to introduce tuition fees and that is why many of us signed it. We did so again for the 2011 Scottish election. The Scottish National Party signed that pledge, and so did Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Unfortunately, despite the clear signs, I think Johann Lamont plans to break that pledge. Labour’s own website—I have a copy of the web page here—still promises

“no price tag on education”.

The challenge is whether Labour will stick with that promise today.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** Will the minister stick to his previous commitment to introduce a voucher system in education, about which he was

so gushingly enthusiastic in “Grasping the Thistle”?

**Michael Russell:** Oh, Mr Findlay, Mr Findlay. I knew that, at some stage today, we would hear that, so I thought that it would be best to quote Robert Frost to him:

“Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence.”

Mr Findlay, as ever, tries to mislead because he tries not to address the issue, but to get off the hook that he is now on. I will not let him off that hook.

**Neil Findlay:** You’re losing your temper.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Michael Russell:** Not many politicians receive a level of adoration that results in having their portrait installed in the public area of a lobbying organisation, but that honour has been accorded to Nick Clegg. Today, he smiles down from the wall of the NUS Scotland office in Forth Street, proudly holding his signed pledge card. I understand that NUS Scotland is moving. There are many new walls to be decorated in its new premises; there is room for Johann Lamont, Ruth Davidson, Willie Rennie and Mr Findlay. They can be there, too.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the minister give way?

**Michael Russell:** No. I want to make some progress.

Today, Johann Lamont, Ruth Davidson, Willie Rennie and Mr Findlay face a simple choice. Are they for or against tuition fees? Are they for or against fairness? Today, they face their own Nick Clegg moment.

This is about more than personalities and promise breaking. Nick Clegg may be sorry, but so are the universities in England that now struggle to fill their lecture theatres, as they did at the start of 2012-13, with acceptances down 13 per cent. That represents nearly 50,000 fewer students making the most of what the university system has to offer them. In the meantime, over the same period, acceptances in Scotland went in the opposite direction: they were up 1 per cent.

The difference is very simple. In England, one needs to find up to £9,000 per year to go to university; in Scotland, one does not. Education is based on the ability to learn, not on the ability to pay. That is the principle.

No doubt we will hear from the Tories—both types of Tory in the chamber—that the need to fund our universities means that those who benefit from them must contribute more. They are right, but that is precisely what happens now. It is



estimated that graduates earn around £100,000 more over the course of their working lives than those who do not go to university, and it is all taxable, so it is axiomatic that graduates will pay more over their entire working lives. They often contribute more in other ways, too. What price would members put on the contribution to society that is made by engineers, doctors and teachers, to name but three of the many professions that are made up of university graduates?

As health is, education is a public good that should be paid for out of public taxation. The Government understands that, so in the previous spending review and in spite of Westminster cuts, it pledged to increase the funding that is provided to our universities, starting with an additional £75 million in 2012-13 and rising to a total of more than £1 billion in 2014-15. That was strongly welcomed by Universities Scotland, which described it as

“a very significant investment in Scotland’s universities and one which will put the sector on a competitive footing for the future.”

It is plain to see that we do not need up-front or backdoor tuition fees to fund our universities. We have set our priorities to ensure the future of our universities and the opportunities that they offer.

While we are at it, let us give the lie to another calumny. It lies alongside “We’re too poor, too wee or too stupid to do any of this”, and is spread by the same people who say that. It is the calumny that we have, for some elitist reason, preferred universities over colleges. We have not; we have reformed colleges because they needed to be reformed. We have shown that substantial sums could be saved while focusing the work of colleges on employability at the further and higher education levels. I note that almost 25 per cent of our HE is delivered by colleges.

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Michael Russell:** No. I want to make some progress.

We have done that in a way that will create complementary sectors.

The real elitists in the matter are over there on the Labour benches—the ones who believe that an elite will always exist and that there is no point in encouraging, working for and helping every person to be all that they can be. Robin Parker, the president of NUS Scotland, put it well yesterday, in responding to a speech by Anas Sarwar, Labour’s deputy leader. He said:

“It’s extremely disappointing to see the Scottish Labour Party, yet again, seeming to threaten to introduce tuition fees into Scotland ... Their assumption seems to be that many of our poorest people don’t currently have the talent or potential to make it to university. That’s not just

offensive, it’s wrong, and it plays to the worst of many right-wing commentators.”

Let me repeat that line. It is Robin Parker’s line, not mine.

“That’s not just offensive, it’s wrong, and it plays to the worst of many right-wing commentators.”

The real elitists in the chamber are those who want the status quo to continue forever because it keeps them in power—the “better together” elitists who are, in the truest sense, the conservatives, for they want to conserve Scottish society as it is, rather than change it to what it should be. Thank goodness that that is going to change. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Excuse me, cabinet secretary. Will members on the front benches stop speaking to each other across the well of the chamber, please?

**Michael Russell:** Of course, in further and higher education, fees represent only part of the picture. Free tuition in Scotland gives our students 9,000 fewer things to worry about each year, but it does not help them with living costs, so—in addition to free tuition—this Government, working with the NUS, also made a promise to introduce for students a minimum income of £7,000 a year. I am pleased to say that, from the start of the academic year 2013-14, that promise will become a reality and will deliver a support package of £7,250—which is above our target—for the poorest students. That has been recognised by students themselves as

“the best support package in the whole of the UK”.

Taken with tuition that is paid for by the state, the package is a big incentive to study in Scotland and should encourage wider participation.

We would be failing to do our best if we were to accept—and to go on accepting—that only 11 per cent of those in our universities will come from the 20 per cent poorest neighbourhoods. “Poverty is not destiny,” says the Ontario educator Avis Glaze. There is talent and potential aplenty in every postcode in Scotland. Widening access in the context of higher education is about more than money, although money is important. It is also about changing our education system to ensure that it can encourage, support and lift every individual.

Wider access is achieved by looking at potential students in context; it is not just about looking at what they have achieved so far in their young lives against some national benchmark, but about what they have achieved compared with their peers who have been educated in a similar environment. Those who excel, wherever they are, should be given the opportunity to be all that they can be.

That is not a threat to other students; it is a promise to all students.

In conclusion, that is what education is. It is a promise from one generation to another—a promise that contains the opportunity for constant improvement, the gift of growing wisdom and the blessing of deeper understanding. GK Chesterton called it

“the soul of a society”.

We cannot buy or sell the soul of a society. Indeed, it should never be put up for sale. Scotland has known that for generations. All that I ask Parliament to do today is to confirm the obvious truth in clear and simple terms. No fees—not now, not ever.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that access to higher education should be based on ability to learn, not ability to pay and will not introduce upfront or backdoor tuition fees.

15:09

**Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):** I can agree with much that Michael Russell said. He is right that we must have

“access ... based on the ability to learn, and not on the ability to pay.”

No one on the Labour benches would disagree with that. We recognise the benefits of free education. The problem is that, for many people, significant parts of education are not actually free. Any education, no matter how it is described, comes at a cost. The question is who pays for it and how is it paid for.

I suspect that, this side of the referendum, it will be impossible to have a sensible debate about confronting the wider challenges that face Scotland. Instead, the SNP Government will present us with a list of promises and unverifiable assertions about how we can live in a land of milk and honey, if only we listen to Alex Salmond.

The Administration has form when it comes to promising popular and superficially attractive policies. The SNP promised to dump student debt. Scotland voted for that, only for the promise—rather than the debt—to be dumped.

We were solemnly promised that, as part of a free education package, class sizes in primaries 1 to 3 would be reduced to 18, but that, too, was abandoned.

We were told that free school meals would be provided in primaries 1 to 3, but the SNP Government refused to provide the money for that, so that, too, has withered on the vine.

We were told that free university education is part of a package of free universal benefits, only to

find that not everything is universally free. We do not have free universal entitlement for NHS dental treatment, housing benefit is not a universal entitlement and neither is council tax benefit. Because of the huge costs that are being forced on councils, we find that care services for the vulnerable have been cut, and charges have been pushed up. So much for free universal entitlement.

So, I turn to free university tuition.

“The rocks will melt with the sun”

before that is abandoned, apparently. However, part-time students, often from lower-income backgrounds, have to pay their own tuition fees. Did the rocks melt? Postgraduate students also have to pay their own fees, even though postgraduate study can be an essential part of the academic process. Why the difference for them?

We see the reality of the SNP's priorities when it comes to colleges. A couple of weeks ago, we had the shameful spectacle of SNP members cheering a cut in college budgets.

**Michael Russell:** In a league table of shameful spectacles, where would voting against £61 million for colleges come? Surely that is more shameful. That is what Labour did.

**Hugh Henry:** If the cabinet secretary examines the record, he will see that he voted to cut the college budgets, compared to previous expenditure. We have seen college courses cut, thousands of Scots denied places and staff being made redundant. We see the sneering attitude of the SNP in the comments from Alex Salmond's adviser, Joan McAlpine, about part-time courses, which are valuable to low-income students and students with disabilities. She said:

“Many of these will be leisure classes, such as flower arranging.”

Scotland's colleges have had to shoulder the burden in order to make the SNP look good when it comes to universities, but even in our universities, there are problems. Universities are still exclusion zones for many young people from low-income families. We have failed to widen access, and have made universities the destination of choice for those from better-off families, while the few from lower-income backgrounds struggle to gain access. Of course, even if they are accepted for a place, they will find that the SNP Government has cut the bursaries for lower-income students by £890 a year.

The SNP boasts about a minimum income guarantee that is largely based on loans. My mortgage has never been part of my income, so why is a loan regarded as income for those who are starting out in life with nothing?

What has been done to address the higher drop-out rate for students from lower-income families? There is no point boasting about free education at all levels if it is at some levels increasingly available only to the better off.

What about the free tuition for non-Scottish students? We are paying more than £75 million a year to provide free university tuition for European Union students from outwith the UK. In January 2011, Mike Russell said that European students were becoming

“an increasingly significant drain on the university sector”.

He promised to fix that, but he has not.

What will happen, then, if Scotland decides to separate from the rest of the United Kingdom? Students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland would also qualify for that free tuition, which would push the bill to more than £225 million a year. On top of that, the universities would automatically lose the money that they currently bring in from those students. Worse still, those students would have to compete with Scottish students for the capped places that are currently available. The only way to guarantee the same number of Scottish students would be to increase the cap on student numbers, which would mean finding even more money for universities and cutting college budgets, school budgets or home-care services for the vulnerable. Is that the socially just Scotland that we want?

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** Is Hugh Henry saying that one of the reasons why we should vote no next year is so that we can continue to milk English and Welsh students?

**Hugh Henry:** It is the Scottish Government that has allowed that to happen. All that is taking place at a time when budgets are being cut. Universities have a stable financial settlement for the next couple of years, but what then? There will be severe constraint on public expenditure thereafter, so to protect universities within current policy will mean harsh cuts elsewhere.

Professor David Bell from the University of Stirling has highlighted the challenges that face the Scottish Government and Scottish politicians. Crawford Beveridge, the Scottish National Party's expert adviser, was last week held up by the SNP as an internationally renowned economist. He was previously asked to carry out work for the SNP Government on the pressures on public services. His report said:

“A debate needs to be had on whether those who can afford to pay might be invited to do so, thus allowing better targeting of those most in need.”

John Swinney agreed, saying:

“Our task now is to encourage the widest possible debate about the range of options that are contained in this Review.”

Just to be safe, the SNP asked the Christie commission to come up with ideas. That commission said:

“Contentious issues ... must be considered openly and transparently rather than in the current polarised terms.”

The SNP's own experts are saying that we need a debate. We do need a debate on how we allocate scarce resources; we need to decide on our priorities and whether we are prepared to spend in order to protect the vulnerable, the weak and the disadvantaged. We need to discuss how we protect and develop Scottish education and we need to consider how we pay for that.

The English system is not an attractive or effective one and we can, and should, do better than that. Many people believe that that should be done through direct taxation, with those who are better off making a greater contribution. However, increased taxation has been ruled out by John Swinney, so how will we shape further and higher education in Scotland? How do we pay for education that is essential for the wellbeing of our country? How do we do that without making the most disadvantaged people in our country shoulder the greatest burden? How do we resolve the complexities and contradictions that exist in so many areas of Scottish education?

Scottish Labour believes that it is time for an open and thorough debate. We need to put aside the political posturing. We cannot keep postponing the difficult decisions. The future of Scottish education is too important to be left to any one group of politicians, who are often driven by short-term expediency and opportunism. That is why we are backing an independent commission on further and higher education in Scotland.

I move amendment S4M-05652.2, to leave out from “and will” to end and insert:

“; recognises the continuing underrepresentation and higher dropout rates at universities of students from lower income backgrounds; notes that part-time and postgraduate university students have to pay fees; further notes with concern that the financial settlement for universities in this spending round has coincided with cuts to college budgets; believes that the long-term sustainability of university funding beyond 2014-15 needs to be addressed; recognises that maintaining the funding of Scotland's universities could lead to cuts elsewhere; rejects the funding model prevailing in England; notes that the report of the Scottish Government-commissioned Independent Budget Review Panel stated that ‘a debate needs to be had on whether those who can afford to pay might be invited to do so, thus allowing better targeting of those in most need’; supports the view of the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services that ‘contentious issues must be considered openly and transparently, rather than in the current polarised terms’, and supports the establishment of an independent commission on further

and higher education in Scotland.”

15:14

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I very much welcome the debate and hope that it is set against the backdrop of what is best for the future of Scottish universities, the Scottish economy and Scottish society in general. What is best for the universities is to ensure that they maintain and enhance their extraordinary standing in the world, continue to attract cutting-edge research and become fully competitive in the knowledge exchange economy. Although the debate has many diverse aspects to it, funding policy is a key component.

I welcome this opportunity to set out why in autumn 2010 we made our commitment to a graduate contribution and why—two and a half years on—we remain more convinced than ever that it is the right way forward. We made that commitment after carefully analysing the facts, after examining comparative HE sectors abroad and after listening to senior figures in the HE sector and to those who, at the request of the Government, have produced significant studies in the field—people including Sir Stewart Sutherland, Professor Gavin McCrone and Sir Andrew Cubie. I notice that when Andrew Cubie produced his report jointly with the Goodison Group in Scotland three weeks ago, he talked even more forcefully about the challenges that HE in Scotland faces.

Each of those individuals set out compelling evidence that Scotland's universities will in the future require additional sources of income if they are to maintain their competitive advantage at the same time as they improve academic standards and widen access. Scotland is spending only 1 per cent of gross domestic product on higher education, which is less than many other countries, including England, so I hope that the need for that additional income is not doubted by any of the political parties in this chamber.

As Hugh Henry rightly said, the key question is this: who pays for it? Clearly that is a matter of political choice. The Scottish Government has made its choice plain. It believes that the state should pay for tuition of students as long as they are Scotland domiciled or are non-UK EU students. It argues that on the basis that it believes that free higher education is someone's right—I think the cabinet secretary used the phrase, “someone's promise”—and that the taxpayer therefore has an obligation to pay for it. That is a rational argument and one that is, no doubt, very attractive in an ideal world.

However, the reality is that there is no bottomless state pot for higher education without significant costs—especially if the Scottish

Government, along with the rest of us, wants to continue to increase the proportion of students going into higher education, which is in the region of 50 per cent, and to widen access for students from more disadvantaged backgrounds. For very understandable reasons, those students cost more to support at university than do other students—31 per cent more on average, according to the paper that Universities Scotland recently submitted to Holyrood's Finance Committee.

Given what has happened to the funding of our colleges, we already know that the commitment to maintain free higher education comes at a very significant cost. Other spending gets hit or, of course, taxes could rise, although, as Hugh Henry said, we know that John Swinney has ruled that out. That is a political choice for the SNP, but it is one with which we profoundly disagree.

Why? First, the international evidence that has been provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and various international governments routinely supports the view that the only way to secure long-term sustainable funding for higher education, at a time when there is an overwhelming commitment to increase numbers and widen access, is further injection of private funds.

Secondly, there is a marginal social and marginal private benefit to university education, so it is not unreasonable to expect some sharing of that cost—even more so if it removes the current regressive situation.

Thirdly, evidence that has been produced by the Russell group of universities in its submission to the Browne review showed that the additional income brought into those universities has had significant benefits, which it highlights, such as the ability to attract and retain high-quality staff and, crucially, the ability to adapt to the changing needs of the student population. I want to dwell on that point for a moment, given that it is the ability to add more resources to HE that is important. David Willetts said that he thought that the figure would be 10 per cent additional resources by 2014-15. We know from the latest Scottish Parliament information centre briefing to the Education and Culture Committee that that has facilitated more money for bursary support.

The other point about the international evidence is that the countries that are performing best in HE are those whose Government is taking slightly less responsibility for the sector. Inevitably, that will be reflected in funding trends.

What of the SNP's case for higher education in practice? As I said when I intervened on the cabinet secretary, Gavin McCrone, who was critical of aspects of the balance in the

Westminster Government's analysis of higher education, said that the funding situation in Scotland is a mess and is

"impossible to defend on the basis of equity".

That, cabinet secretary, is why I have used the word "discriminatory" in my amendment. The Government position is discriminatory.

This morning we heard the University and College Union Scotland and the NUS say exactly the same thing. They said—I think the quotation is correct, although I have not checked the *Official Report* because I do not have it to hand—that the policy is

"more damaging than the worst excesses of the Westminster Government's policy".

Knowing what UCU and NUS think of the Westminster Government's policy, I say that they are pretty damning about what the Scottish Government is doing.

The great mantra of the SNP is that university entrance should be

"based on the ability to learn, and not the ability to pay."

Try telling that to the people who have to pay. That mantra does not stand up. It is on that basis—

**Michael Russell:** Will Liz Smith give way?

**Liz Smith:** I am about to close.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you a bit of extra time.

**Michael Russell:** There is a simple solution to the problem, and I am sure that the universities would welcome it. If the UK Government were willing to pay the fees for their students to come here, the problem would be solved. The problem is that it is not willing to do so. It is the Tory-controlled UK Government's problem—no one else's—and it was started by Labour.

**Liz Smith:** The cabinet secretary must admit that there is a problem with EU funding. He told us 18 months to two years ago that he would solve the anomaly, but he has not been able to do that.

The reason why we have gone for a graduate contribution—which we will stick by—is that we fundamentally believe that there must be more money in HE. It must not come at the expense of excessive costs elsewhere or by increasing taxes.

I move amendment S4M-05652.1, to leave out from access and insert at end:

"the current Scottish Government policy on tuition fees is discriminatory and threatens to undermine the admissions policies of Scotland's universities and further believes that, instead, a modest contribution by graduates toward the cost of higher education should be introduced in Scotland to provide the additional flow of income that is consistent with the future ability of Scotland's universities to maintain and enhance their academic excellence and international

standing and the need for a level playing field for all students in order to provide significant additional funds for bursary support for those from less well-off backgrounds."

15:22

**Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP):** Scotland's biggest asset is her people. Scots have been renowned worldwide down the years as a nation of engineers, doctors, lawyers and writers, and that reputation has not happened by accident. The reason is that education in Scotland has been about ability, not income. Education in Scotland has been seen as the great opportunity for people, irrespective of their background or parentage, to get on and succeed in life.

The lad o' pairts, the clever pupil from a humble background who could rise despite his poverty, was a reality. By the 17th century, every parish in Scotland was required by law to have a school. However, the attitude in England has often been somewhat different. For example, in 1830, it cost a staggering £250 per annum to go to Oxford or Cambridge.

Scotland has always been meritocratic in its outlook: education has been valued highly in Scottish society and has been regarded as something for all Scots who had the ability to seize the opportunities that it brings. It was not for just the rich elite. If anything, it is more important to us in Scotland today than it was in the past.

Scotland has more universities in the global premier league per head of population than any other nation in the world. During the 2011 election campaign, a BBC poll found that the public listed free education as one of their top political priorities. Therefore, it is somewhat incredible that Johann Lamont, the leader of the Labour Party in Scotland—a party that was set up more than 100 years ago with the aim of bettering lives and increasing opportunities for working people—should be, seemingly, hell-bent on making young people pay for their education, particularly as we know that such a move would discourage poorer students from going on to further or higher education.

**Hugh Henry:** Stewart Maxwell said that Johann Lamont is

"hell-bent on making young people pay for their education".

I do not recognise those words. Could he quote what Johann Lamont said?

**Stewart Maxwell:** I am delighted that Hugh Henry made that intervention because, in a couple of hours, Johann Lamont and the rest of the Labour members will have the opportunity to prove to one and all either that they are opposed to free education or that they support it. We will see what their views are when they vote at 5 o'clock.

The Tory-Lib Dem coalition announced that, in 2012, English universities could charge up to £9,000 for tuition fees—fees that were first introduced by the Labour Party when Gordon Brown was chancellor. The result is that between 2011 and 2012 there was a reduction of 6.3 per cent in the number of people who took up places at English universities. At the same time, Scotland experienced a rise in university admissions and was the only part of the UK to do so.

Robin Parker, president of NUS Scotland, said:

“The idea that introducing charging for university is somehow progressive, when it puts off the poorest students in Scotland, just simply makes no sense ... tuition fees are not the way to help, and in fact would make things worse.”

**Neil Findlay:** Will the member give way?

**Stewart Maxwell:** I am sorry. I must make progress.

Johann Lamont’s sudden announcement that she would consider reintroducing tuition fees took me by surprise, and it must have come as a terrible shock to Scottish students, given that in the run-up to the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections she had signed up to the NUS Scotland reclaim your voice campaign, which focused on prioritising free education.

Another person who must have been taken aback is Iain Gray. In a press release in 2011 entitled, “No price tag on education”, which is still on the Labour Party’s website, he said:

“Education is the single most important lever in transforming people’s lives. From our youngest children learning to read, to research scientists on the cutting edge of new discoveries, education drives our futures and also Scotland’s ability to create wealth and opportunity ... if I am first minister, a Labour government will not introduce any up-front fees or graduate contribution for access to higher education in the lifetime of the next Parliament. There will be no price tag on education.”

I am sorry to have to tell Iain Gray that Johann Lamont and Hugh Henry disagree with him. They think that there is a price to be put on education. I am sorry that the Labour Party in Scotland has descended so far.

It is no coincidence that admissions to higher education institutions in Scotland are up at a time when the Scottish National Party is delivering the best student support package in the UK. We have no tuition fees for Scotland-domiciled students, thanks to the SNP, and figures from the Student Loans Company show that Scottish students have the lowest level of student debt in the UK. The average Scottish student loan is £6,480, compared with £17,140 in England. From this year, students will be eligible for a minimum income of £7,250 if the family income is less than £17,000.

That is an excellent record, but we are not content with the improvements that we have made. Through the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill, the Scottish Government will introduce measures to widen access to funded higher education for people from the most deprived backgrounds. Higher education makes a profound difference to the life of an individual and his or her children. As Iain Gray helpfully pointed out, over only a few generations it also makes a profound difference to society as a whole. Education is a way to improve individuals’ lives and society as a whole. I agree with what Iain Gray said, when he believed that.

Scotland is doing well in education. We have three universities in the top 100—Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews—and we are ranked fourth in the world in research impact. We produce 1.8 per cent of the world’s published research, despite having less than 0.1 per cent of the world’s population. We do not do that by having policies that mean that only the richest Scots can go on to higher education; we do it by encouraging the most able among us to continue their education.

The Labour Party is deciding whether to abandon its pledge of no tuition fees, so that only people who have the wealth to do so can carry on with their education. However, the wealth of a country is in its people. If people are educated, wealth is created. It is not the case that education should be provided only if money is available, as the Labour Party seems to believe.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I advise members that there is a little time in hand to compensate members who take interventions.

15:28

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** The debate has been narrowly drafted to be about only tuition fees, in a crude attempt to gain party-political advantage in an area that the public expect us to debate seriously. The debate should be about our education system in the round and whether we are prepared to invest in the potential of all our citizens, especially those who have been left out or left behind. I hoped that we would hear how the Government intends to support the education system as whole and end its current practice of supporting one part of the system while deliberately downgrading another, but I have been disappointed so far.

The Government motion contains much with which I agree. Education should be about learning and should not be determined by someone’s ability to pay. It is vital to our society’s social, economic and environmental wellbeing and a vital element of not only our individual but our collective progress. Without skilled doctors, we collectively

become sicker; without teachers, we collectively become less well educated; and without skilled craftsmen, our housing standards become poorer. I trust that the principle of each individual contributing to society's collective wellbeing is generally accepted and is not seen as too controversial.

That said, people should be able to progress their talents through education at whatever level they want and anyone with a talent for engineering, woodwork or music should be allowed to pursue it no matter their socioeconomic circumstances. However, that is not the situation at present. There might be no tuition fees for full-time university students but those who study part time have to pay, as do Open University students, postgraduate students, Scots studying elsewhere in the UK and part-time college students. The fact is that we have free tuition for some, but not for all. Of course, the some includes French, German and Greek nationals but not those from Wales, Northern Ireland or England. Although we were promised that the situation would be resolved, it has not been—I thank Mr Dornan for at least accepting the fact that we are milking students from the rest of the UK.

**The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance):** Is Mr Findlay aware that the Government supports 26,000 college students by protecting them from higher education tuition fees; that, from 2013-14, part-time undergraduates will not pay fees; and that this Government is supporting around 5,000 postgraduates with fees, which is twice the number under his Government?

**Neil Findlay:** Ms Constance should be very careful about promoting some sort of positive record by her Government on colleges when its record is nothing short of disgraceful.

The Scottish Government is being less than honest about how we pay for education and public services more generally. We hear ministers saying that they want to live in a land of world-class public services with free this and free that, with the repeated mantra that if only we had the full powers of an independent state all of this would be not only possible but reality. Of course, last week, John Swinney said that there would be no rises in personal taxation in an independent Scotland, which only confirmed that an SNP-led Scottish Government would maintain George Osborne's cut to the highest rate of taxation. In an independent Scotland, millionaires will keep their massive tax cut and their sons and daughters will have no problem going to university. However, working-class families at the bottom of the income scale will continue to struggle—and that struggle will intensify if, on top of that, hundreds of millions of pounds are ripped out of the economy with a 10 per cent corporation tax rate.

We are faced, then, with a Government promoting a Scotland of flawed and discredited trickle-down economics and the redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich as a central plank not just of economic policy but of social policy. How do those policies square with not introducing tuition fees? The answer is that they do not and the cabinet secretary knows it.

I admit that I chuckled when the cabinet secretary mentioned Nick Clegg's portrait hanging in the hall of some lobbying organisation. It was a good comment. Of course, we cannot lay the same charge at the cabinet secretary himself, given that his own portrait is on display in his room for everyone who visits him to see. That should not be a surprise.

At present, educational attainment in our schools and access to our universities are largely determined not by ability or potential but by social class, which results in education being effectively the preserve of the better-off. Let there be no room for confusion: this is not because young people in deprived communities are less able—it is because they are born poor. How are we to tackle that? Figures released yesterday by the campaign to end child poverty highlighted the shameful levels of child poverty in this country but although the main social policy areas that could change the lives of poor families—health, housing and education—are all within the Parliament's remit, little progress has been made. What are the Government's plans for transforming the lives of our poorest people?

Our amendment seeks to put the issues of university funding and access beyond the normal party-political dogfight by calling for an independent commission into higher education funding. [*Interruption.*] I hear people chuckling, but why does that not surprise me?

**Michael Russell:** Will the member give way?

**Neil Findlay:** No, thanks.

Such a move would be mature politics and in the interest of all our people. However, I see from the reaction of the SNP back benchers that they do not go in for maturity.

15:34

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** The University and College Union Scotland said in written evidence to the Education and Culture Committee:

"We are concerned that the increase of fees in England gives a perception that Scotland is out of kilter but according to the European Commission, nine other countries do not charge fees including all our Scandinavian neighbours. Further, English fees are the highest in Europe with very few countries charging more than €1000."

So, Scotland and the SNP are in the European mainstream in that area. The SNP's determination to scrap university fees was well and truly vindicated—

**Hugh Henry:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Joan McAlpine:** I would like to make progress. I might take an intervention later.

In August 2012, figures revealed a 3 per cent rise in Scottish students getting places in Scottish universities. By contrast, admissions to English universities fell by 3 per cent.

Ahead of the 2011 Scottish election, the First Minister said that

“the rocks would melt with the sun”

before he allowed charges for higher education. The SNP went on to win a historic majority after that promise. We have kept that promise, and the First Minister has been as good as his word.

Labour made the same promise in the 2011 election, to scrap tuition fees. Given the result of the vote, perhaps the electorate did not have confidence in that promise. As time passes, we see that the electorate were no fools. They did not believe Labour, and they were right not to believe it. Labour has incrementally moved towards a position in which it is once again planning to turn the screw on young people. This week, Anas Sarwar accused—

**Hugh Henry:** The member mentioned Scandinavian countries not charging tuition fees. Does she advocate Scandinavian levels of taxation? [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Joan McAlpine:** I advocate a fair system, as they have in Scandinavian countries. We have tried to have that in Scotland. I think that most people understand that we have tried to do as much as we can in Scotland with the powers that we have to put money into the pockets of working people. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Joan McAlpine:** I note that the intervention came just as I was about to bring up Mr Sarwar's intervention in the debate. Perhaps that is why Mr Henry was anxious to interrupt me. This week, Mr Sarwar accused the SNP of “relentlessly” focusing on free tuition. Let us hope that the SNP remains relentless in its determination not to follow the Tories in England in charging young people up to £9,000 a year for their education. As has been said, that includes many young people in further education colleges in England who are paying an average of £6,200 a year. Therefore, we will not

have any crocodile tears from either Labour or the Tories on that issue.

The Liberal Democrats famously ditched their election pledge not to raise fees and, as a result, the voters ditched them. If Labour thought that things could not get any worse than they were in 2011, it should remember the fate of the Liberal Democrats that year, and Labour members should look across the chamber at the diminished and bedraggled remnant of what was once a party of Government. Poor, lonely Liam McArthur. Labour should remember that that remnant could be it.

We had plenty of evidence of the collusion between Labour and the Tories a long time ago. By September 2011, just months after Labour's Scottish defeat, Ed Miliband told the Labour Party conference that his party would allow fees in English universities to rise to £6,000 a year. That is less than the Tory and Lib Dems' £9,000, but is it really doing young people a favour to charge them £6,000 a year for their education?

**Neil Findlay:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Joan McAlpine:** No. I have already taken an intervention.

We are told, of course, that Ed Miliband was talking about England, but we now know from Anas Sarwar that Scottish Labour's direction of travel is very much to fall into line with England. Gordon Brown tried to soften us up with a speech in August last year—I believe that it was at the Edinburgh book festival—in which he attacked the SNP for scrapping Labour's fees.

Then there was Johann Lamont's announcement of a cuts commission in which all the advances of devolution are up for grabs, but we will know the result only after 2014. She talked about a something-for-nothing society. She should ask the students who are working extremely hard to gain qualifications, many of whom work part time to pay their living expenses, whether they are getting something for nothing. Where does it stop? Does Labour think that the national health service is an example of something for nothing, too?

**Neil Findlay:** Tell us about flower arranging.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Joan McAlpine:** In the same month that Johann Lamont gave her something-for-nothing speech, Ed Balls said that Labour would be ruthless with public spending. How ruthless does Labour intend to be with the young people of Scotland? How much does it plan to charge young people for tuition fees in the future? Will it be the £6,000 that Ed Miliband promised, or will Labour go for the £9,000 that its Tory allies in the better together campaign favour? For as long as the SNP is in power, the Scottish students who make up 80 per



cent of our university population will have their places guaranteed, and that will be free.

That is not cheap. The SNP has invested more than £1 billion this year to protect places for Scottish students, but it is a price worth paying.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members to be courteous to each other in the chamber and not to use first names.

15:41

**Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP):** Two years ago, like members from across the chamber, I signed the NUS pledge to rule out tuition fees. I was not alone. My Labour opponent—who was elected to Parliament but who is not in the chamber to defend herself, so I will make no further comment about her—also signed it, as did my Liberal Democrat opponent. That was welcomed by the student body at the University of Edinburgh, because there was seen to be a consensus and a security, and a feeling that the future in Scotland was much brighter than the future that students were being offered by the UK Government. My signing comment was, “We must not put a price tag on opportunity.” I did not realise that I was echoing a Labour Party website or a Labour Party press release, but I have no problem with that because, at the time, we were agreed. We were agreed that fees were important and that fees should not exist.

I come to the debate with the message that fees matter. Members could just ask any one of the 31,000 students who marched in London back in October 2003—I was one of them—against top-up fees, which were being introduced down south despite a UK Government manifesto commitment that it would never do that. Alternatively, members could ask the students who protested outside this Parliament, not against but in favour of a Government, when the SNP minority Administration proposed to abolish the graduate endowment. I remember that there was one Labour MSP who voted with the SNP on that, but as she is in the Presiding Officer’s chair, I believe that I should not comment further.

Another group who could be asked whether fees matter are the kids who came to the Sutton Trust summer school back when I was a student representative. They were from families with no experience of university. We divided them up into groups and asked them to come up with a message that could be taken back to everyone else at their schools. The message that we got from every group was the same: people should be able to go, even if they are poor. That sticks with me because it is an extremely simple message.

We should think about how it would feel to be a young person on a course who attends the same

lectures, goes to the same labs or sits the same exams as a better-off student next to them who is considered, somehow, to be paying their way, while it is thought that that young person is there because of a concession or that they are getting something for nothing. Would that feel like the entitlement to state education that we cherish as a value, or would it feel a bit more like the private alternative, which involves scholarship kids sitting next to those who pay fees and which, for whatever reason, we have not chosen as the model to deliver the bulk of education in this country?

**Jenny Marra:** Does the member know how many young people in our 10 most deprived postcode areas in Scotland benefit from free tuition in higher education?

**Marco Biagi:** The Scottish index of multiple deprivation 20 figure rather than the SIMD 10 figure has been disturbingly low for many years, which is why I think that we should come together to deal with the problem of widening access. However, I despair of a party that thinks that the solution to widening access is to increase fees.

I warn universities to be careful, because sometimes their reactions to the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill have suggested that they have turned to their public affairs teams rather than to their admissions departments. I do not think that any institution should ever give the impression that it is trying to wriggle out of the obligation that comes with taxpayer funding to offer opportunities to the many and not the few. Higher education must be a democratising, levelling force and not one that entrenches the existing divisions that Jenny Marra just referred to. However, too often the fees debate is used precisely for that.

Margaret Hodge said in 2002:

“Should the dustman continue to subsidise the doctor or should the doctor contribute towards the cost of their own education?”

There were echoes of that in Liz Smith’s speech. However, asking that question opens us up to other questions. Why should the doctor contribute to the cost of sending the dustman’s child to state school if their own attends a private school? Why should the doctor pay for the dustman’s pension when they have a private one? Why should they pay towards the national health service when they have their own health insurance? That kind of individualisation of costs and services is a very dark and dangerous road and not one that I would expect the Labour Party to point to.

If the Labour Party was interested in dealing with the shared aspiration to widen access, we could work together rather than have all this nodding and winking, and the obsession about

reintroducing tuition fees. The word “obsession” in that regard is not mine; it is what Robin Parker called it after the latest instalment of the something-for-nothing franchise. It seems that the matter is being treated as a wedge issue from a Karl Rove-style playbook, but it is driving a wedge only between Labour and its natural supporters.

I ask all the members who, like me, signed the NUS pledge in good faith to think very carefully about where they put their name at decision time; I ask them to think of the students who put their faith in them and cast their vote for them in the belief that they would not desert them, as so many politicians of so many parties had done before. All those members should reject tuition fees by backing the Government motion, because the SNP Government has shown that the unstoppable march to ever-higher fees is no such thing: fees are a choice, not a necessity. There is already a graduate contribution, which is called income tax. The necessity is free education. It is a necessity if we are ever to ensure that our great universities are open to all those with the ability to pass through their gates.

15:47

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** First, I am grateful to follow the more thoughtful and measured remarks of Marco Biagi rather than those of his colleague Joan McAlpine.

I certainly do not doubt the importance of the debate. Over the years, the Scottish Liberal Democrats have played their part in the abolition of tuition fees in the first Scottish Parliament and in the vote in the previous session of Parliament to remove the graduate endowment, and we successfully argued for the reversal of the cuts to college student support in last year's budget. I am therefore more than happy to confirm that we will support the motion.

I am genuinely intrigued, however, by the timing of the debate. The choice of debate looked strange a fortnight ago, but the unfolding scandal of what has been happening in our food processing and supply chain makes the decision to spend half an hour this afternoon on the horsemeat crisis, with no debate, but over two hours on the tuition fees issue seem somewhat bizarre. That will not have gone unnoticed, particularly within Scotland's vital agriculture and food and drink sectors.

To listen to Mr Russell speak, one would be forgiven for thinking that higher education was going to hell in a handcart everywhere in the UK, while in Scotland everything that he does is above reproach. However, I am sure that it is not his intention to scaremonger and that he would recoil at the notion that his dire warnings might risk

detering young Scots from choosing the university course that best suits their needs, wherever that might be in the UK or beyond.

I am sure that Mr Russell will curse the fact that time constraints prevented him from acknowledging that the most recent figures released by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service showed total applicant numbers for English universities rising by 3.5 per cent. Indeed, the latest figures show that the number of Scots applying to study at English universities has increased by 2.7 per cent, compared with an equivalent figure of 2.1 per cent for those choosing to remain in Scotland to study. Doubtless, he will take comfort from knowing that his apocalyptic warnings appear to be falling on deaf ears.

Mr Russell will be further relieved to hear that application rates from 18-year-olds from more disadvantaged backgrounds are increasing, albeit from an unacceptably low base. I will return shortly to the issue of widening access. However, there is also food for thought for the NUS, which is presumably still awaiting delivery of its twin portraits of Fiona Hyslop and Mike Russell for the dumped pledges outlined by Hugh Henry earlier.

Few organisations can lay greater claim to campaigning success over the years than the NUS and I value highly its input to debates such as this and to the wider policy agenda. However, in arguing its case for tuition fees in Scotland it needs to be careful about what it claims with respect to rest of the UK. In its briefing for today's debate, it refers to comments by the Institute for Fiscal Studies about the impact of tuition fees south of the border. Unfortunately it ignored the IFS's conclusion that

“the average student will be better off while at university, enjoying an increase in cash support of some 12 percent.”

That is something that Mr Russell and the NUS appear happy to endorse in Scotland with the move away from grants to loans.

Nor did the NUS make space for the IFS's view that

“the poorest 27 percent of graduates will actually be better off under the new system”,

which is felt to be

“substantially more progressive than its predecessor”.

For the sake of balance, it is helpful to bear in mind those conclusions, which perhaps go some way to explaining the trends that we are seeing in applications across the UK.

NUS Scotland is absolutely correct, however, in highlighting the effect of the Scottish Government's cap on fees for rest-of-UK students. By setting the cap per academic year rather than

on the overall cost, Mr Russell ignores the impact that the four-year degree structure in Scotland could have. As NUS Scotland said:

“we now have potentially the most expensive higher education system of all the UK countries; up to £36k as opposed to £27k elsewhere.”

The NUS also makes the point that there should be

“minimum standards to ensure protection for the poorest RUK students, as seen in England, combined with responsibility placed somewhere within the system for oversight of this aspect of the system”,

which would be akin to the Office for Fair Access in England. The education secretary has so far rejected that idea.

Mr Russell has shown a willingness to act—which I freely acknowledge—in relation to part-time students, and the extended fee grant is a welcome step in the right direction. Unfortunately, anomalies appear likely to arise from changes to the individual learning account 200 criteria that could see a group of higher education students on low incomes lose out. To avoid that happening, I urge the minister to agree to consider lowering the part-time funding grant threshold to 10 credits. The case for that is set out very clearly by the Open University in its submission to the Education and Culture Committee on the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill.

Of course, the OU has a good story to tell on widening access, which is core to its mission. It has doubled the number of students from poorer backgrounds over the past 10 years to 5,000. However, only 2,000 of those students are classed as living in SIMD 20 areas, which illustrates one of the central problems with the Government's approach in its bill. Not only will the focus on SIMD 20 areas exclude poorer students from more affluent areas, but it will do nothing for those who are affected by disability or even rurality, who find access to university difficult.

Given its track record in the area, the OU could play an important role in taking on students from non-traditional backgrounds in first year and supporting their articulation to degree courses in more selective universities in second or third year. The idea seems worthy of further consideration by ministers.

As I said at the outset, notwithstanding the importance of universities and the issue of widening access, I find this subject an odd choice for debate today, given the urgency of competing issues such as the horsemeat scandal, hospital waiting lists and paediatric services, and even the implications of the EU budget agreement.

Scottish Liberal Democrats will support Mr Russell's motion, which comes with the now-customary three ministerial signatures, and reject

the amendments that were lodged by Hugh Henry and Liz Smith. However, there are serious questions to be answered by the education secretary. In his winding up speech, he might wish to focus on the implications of his tuition fees policy in the unlikely event of independence, at which point students from the rest of the UK would become eligible for the same fee support as their Scots-domiciled counterparts. If he can shed any light on how that £220 million black hole might be filled, the debate might yet serve a useful purpose.

15:54

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** I will start by repeating what my Labour colleagues said earlier. Labour wants to see a well-funded, quality education system in Scotland; an education system that helps young people from all backgrounds to succeed and gain the skills that they need to fulfil their potential; and an education system that can meet the demands placed on it by young people and lifelong learners.

Those are our aims and our objectives, and it is our job as an Opposition to look at the best way in which that education system can be delivered and to scrutinise whether those objectives are being met by the Government.

I believe that the Government is failing all of those tests. The education system is being significantly underfunded, with quality being compromised; the SNP is failing to widen access to higher education to people from the poorest backgrounds; and the Government cannot even provide enough college courses for potential students. The reality of the SNP policy is not free education but people being excluded from education. However, the Government has not chosen to debate those issues today because it is easier to forget about them and say, “It is all okay because we did away with the graduate endowment.”

One of the benefits of devolution has been that we can take different decisions here in Scotland from those that are taken elsewhere in the UK. As we know, Scottish Labour did that when we removed up front tuition fees in the early days of this Parliament and yes, when it was elected, the SNP scrapped the graduate endowment. Those decisions have been taken since devolution.

The SNP is asking what Labour's policy will be post the next Scottish Parliament elections. However, I think that students have big questions—particularly with the referendum a little over 18 months away—about what independence would mean for tuition fees and university funding, such as how will the SNP pay for free tuition when independence means that it cannot charge English students for their degrees? That would mean £150

million of additional expenditure; £150 million that the Government does not need to spend if Scotland remains part of the UK. That is £150 million down the drain—not to mention the UK research funding that could be lost to universities if Scotland leaves the UK. How will all of this be paid for? The SNP does not want to increase personal taxes and it wants to cut corporation tax for big businesses.

**Joan McAlpine:** Will the member give way?

**Neil Bibby:** I will give way to Joan McAlpine, who refers to part-time courses as hobby courses.

**Joan McAlpine:** The member talks about opportunities and how things are going to be paid for. Would the member like to take this opportunity to join the SNP in scrapping the heinous Trident weapons system as a means of funding education in a future independent Scotland?

**Neil Bibby:** I will decline the opportunity to join the SNP. It says Trident all the time, but it cannot say Trident any more because it has already hypothetically spent that money hundreds of times over on a whole range of other things.

Students will ask questions because the SNP has failed to keep promises to them in the past. Students will ask questions because the cabinet secretary has misled Parliament on college funding and on college waiting lists.

The SNP may say that free education will be in a written constitution, but let us not forget that dumping student debt was written in the SNP manifesto—a crystal-clear promise that was not worth the paper it was written on, so SNP members should think twice before claiming the moral high ground. They should also think twice before claiming to be whiter than white when it comes to student funding, because, as Hugh Henry said, the only thing dumped by SNP members who were elected in 2007 was the policy of dumping £2 billion of student debt. When the policy was dumped, the reason that the Government gave was, “We can’t do it because we don’t have a majority.” The SNP has a majority now and student debt is still not being dumped; student debt is going to increase.

If SNP members believe that increasing tuition fee debt will put people off seeking to study at university, presumably they believe that increasing student loan debt will do the same. The amount of debt facing students when they leave university will increase under the SNP. The SNP minimum income policy is a maximum debt policy. The SNP has cut bursaries for the poorest students by £890. The £17,000 household income threshold is so low that it means that if someone has two parents, both working full time on the minimum wage, they do not even qualify for this

Government’s minimum income of £7,250. What does that say about this SNP Government?

If you do not believe me, figures from the Student Awards Agency for Scotland show that £570 million was issued in loans and grants for 2011-12. The amount given out in non-repayable grants in 2011-12 is down 19 per cent on the previous year.

The SNP also promised to replace the “expensive and discredited” student loans system and said that it planned to replace loans with grants. That has not happened either.

**Michael Russell:** Is the member proposing that there should be grants rather than loans? Will he clarify whether he is proposing that there should be student loans? Then we would get a clear picture. At the moment, we are getting a lot of condemnation but no picture of what is being proposed.

**Neil Bibby:** We are holding Mr Russell to the promises that the SNP made. Had he listened earlier, he would have heard the position that I set out. He may disagree with that position, but we want to look at how we maintain quality in our education system.

Finally, I want to concentrate on the issue of widening access, on which the SNP is also completely failing. It is not acceptable that only 14 people from the most deprived backgrounds got to study at the University of St Andrews last year. The Government says that it will legislate on that through the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill, but Government officials confirmed to the Education and Culture Committee that no additional money is being made available alongside the bill to provide places to those from deprived backgrounds. If that is the case, how are people from deprived backgrounds to get to university? How will they get into higher education when schools are being underfunded—we now have 3,000 fewer teachers in Scotland—and when those who want to go to college cannot do so because the cabinet secretary has slashed 85,000 part-time courses and cut the college budget by £25 million?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** You should be drawing to a close now, please.

**Neil Bibby:** SNP members can talk about free education all they want, but the reality is that they are failing on education.

16:01

**Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I want to revisit some of what has been said about the place that education holds in the psyche of the Scottish people. Scotland was the first country in the world to introduce universal education. The National Archives of Scotland website states:

"Education has always been considered very important by Scots: indeed, Scotland's first Education Act was passed as far back as 1496, when James IV ordered that the eldest sons of barons and free-holders should study Latin, arts and law, in order to ensure that local government lay in knowledgeable hands. Two hundred years later a further education act ordered that a school be established in every parish, to be provided by the local ... landowners ... Such schools were established slowly, but by the end of the 18th century most parishes in Scotland had at least one school."

Not one to miss an opportunity to talk about Lanarkshire, I suggest that we should also remember that New Lanark was well known not only for its decent homes, fair wages, free healthcare and new education system but for being the place that introduced the world's first workplace nursery school.

**Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab):** Given the importance that the member sets on education in Lanarkshire, can she explain why the SNP group on North Lanarkshire Council proposed an alternative budget last week that would have cut £250,000—that is, one quarter—from the funds available for residential schools for disabled people?

**Clare Adamson:** As the Labour administration on North Lanarkshire Council has just decided to close two schools in the area, I think that the member would be wise not to go over what happened during that budget.

Since the member has mentioned North Lanarkshire, let us look at the educational attainment league tables for North Lanarkshire that were published in December last year. At the top—as has consistently been the case—appears Dalziel high school, where less than 10 per cent of the pupils claim free school meals. That success should be welcomed. However, the third-top school in the league table is Taylor high school, where 14 per cent of pupils achieved five or more highers and 26 per cent achieved three or more highers—those are potential higher education students—but 17.9 per cent of the pupils receive free school meals. The member is saying to the pupils of Taylor high school, "You're too poor for free education." That is a disgusting position.

**Michael McMahon:** I never said that. What a ridiculous argument.

**Clare Adamson:** That is what you are saying. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Clare Adamson:** The member is saying that free higher education should not be available to school pupils from poor areas but with high achievement. That is what those on the Labour benches are saying.

Education has always been key to the Scottish psyche, and the level of education and literacy in our country is what brought about the Scottish renaissance. We have all been brought up on stories about our great scientists and inventors, such as James Clerk Maxwell, and great thinkers, such as Adam Smith and James Hutton, who came from that renaissance.

That has led to the great education system that we still have in Scotland today. We have the highest concentration of universities in Europe, the newest being the University of the Highlands and Islands, which was granted full university status in 2011. We have 16 universities, three specialist institutions and more than 40 colleges welcoming more than 40,000 international students every year from more than 180 countries. We have always had pioneering institutes in the fields of medicine, energy research and scientific breakthroughs. It is a great testament to Scotland that we continue to excel in those areas. Scotland's education institutes produce more citations per head of population than do those in any other country in the world and Scotland produces 1 per cent of the world's published research with only 0.1 per cent of the world's population.

That leads me on to universality, which I have spoken about recently in the chamber but to which I want to return. Free education should be a universal benefit, and universal benefits are important because they reduce social and economic inequality and enhance rather than diminish the status of the poor. Selectivity and means testing require processes, procedures and administration that make them simply not worth while and they lead to stigmatisation and an inequality of service. We should welcome a move towards a more equal society.

I, too, will quote from a blog by a Robin responding to Anas Sarwar's speech yesterday, but this is from Robin McAlpine rather than Robin Parker. Mr McAlpine says:

"And this is where the biggest problem for Labour lies; it has not yet accepted the real legacy of its years in power. The outcomes of Labour rule were much like the outcomes of Tory rule—increasing economic inequality, the whole-sale privatisation and commercialisation of government, a blind eye to corporate corruption and tax avoidance and cheap populism that got us into wars and legitimised the anti-immigration movement."

It is an irony that those on the Labour benches are standing with the Tories in the debate and saying that free education should not be available for Scotland's population.

I will finish with a quote from Anne Glover, the chief scientific adviser to the European Commission, who has said:

"Science isn't bothered about your sex, your accent, your social position; all science is interested in is do you have an inquiring mind".

An inquiring mind should not come with a price tag.

16:07

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** I went to the University of Strathclyde in the 1970s and graduated with honours in computer science in 1980. I left there with not a penny in debt, other than the debt of gratitude to my parents for the financial sacrifice that they made in encouraging me to go to university. I got a job right away and worked continuously for 27 years in software-related employment until 2007, when I became a member of the Parliament. Of course, none of that would have happened if my family would have had to pay tuition fees or graduate endowments or if I would have been saddled with student loans. I would never have made it to university at all, because being saddled with a mountain of debt before even starting off in life would have made me think twice.

One of the best days that I can recall in this Parliament—there have been many good days under the SNP in this Parliament—was 28 February 2008, when the Parliament abolished Labour's graduate endowment fee or back-door tuition fee of more than £2,000. At that point, the ability to learn and not the ability to pay was once again established as a basic principle of Scots education. Scottish Labour was determined to hang on to its endowment charge and so opposed its abolition, hook, line and sinker, with the honourable exception of our Deputy Presiding Officer, Elaine Smith, who has left the chair for the moment. That measure immediately benefited 50,000 students in Scotland, who would not be burdened with a back-door tuition fee, adding to their debts when they left university.

Because of that move by the Scottish Government, student debt levels in Scotland are the lowest in the UK. As my colleague Stewart Maxwell mentioned, the average is about £6,000 compared with £17,000 in England. On top of that, from this year, students from the poorest backgrounds will benefit from a minimum income guarantee of more than £7,000, which is the best in the UK. Labour opposed all those measures, but Scotland's students are much better off as a result of what the SNP has done in government.

The graduate endowment was a disaster. Of the £26 million that had been added to existing student loans at the time the fee was abolished, only £57,000 had been paid back to the taxpayer. Students in Scotland rightly supported the SNP Government's position on that and still do.

The mid-1970s, when I went to university, was probably the last time that a Labour Government kept its word about free education and tuition fees. As we all know, Tony Blair hijacked the Labour Party and Labour values by promising no tuition fees in 1997 and then introducing them a year later. David Blunkett followed up and promised no top-up fees in 2001 but, by 2004, the fees had shot up to £3,000 and Margaret Hodge lectured students that there was

"no such thing as a free lunch."

**Neil Findlay:** I ask Willie Coffey to reflect on his party's position. It was going to dump the debt and pay a student grant. Will he be fair minded in his assessment of the failings of not only other Governments but his own?

**Willie Coffey:** As usual, what we get from Labour members is a giant smokescreen to hide the fact that they all signed up to avoid paying tuition fees and are now in favour of them. They want to present a complete smokescreen to the people of Scotland.

Not to be outdone, Labour in Scotland introduced tuition fees by the back door in 2001 with its £2,000 graduate endowment fee, which was thankfully abolished by the SNP in 2008.

History is repeating itself. Labour candidates at the previous election lined up to get their pictures taken promising no tuition fees but now Labour members are turning their backs on Scotland's students. Labour's "something for nothing" cuts commission has chilling echoes of the party's own past, when it said one thing and did another. If ever an episode will haunt a party that has totally lost its way, that must surely be it.

The Labour amendment reads like a recipe for hashmagandy, a well-known Australian recipe for a stew made from anything that is lying around. Everything is in there, from funding models in England to budget review panels. That old favourite Labour ingredient, the independent commission, has made a comeback from 2008, when the Labour Party voted against abolishing the endowment fee. It is all there apart from one thing: tuition fees will be back if Labour ever wins again. Who knows, maybe the Labour Party will even want to bring the poll tax back.

I will say a few words on investment in higher education and the arrangements for widening access.

The allocation of more than £1 billion to our universities in 2012-13 is a real-terms increase of nearly 6 per cent on the previous year, with a further increase of nearly 4 per cent to come. That means that, in Scotland, we will be increasing teaching funding by almost 15 per cent over our

spending review period, in contrast with a 40 per cent reduction in England over the same period.

In December, we announced 2,000 extra university places for students from poorer backgrounds. Next year, an additional £10 million will be allocated to that, which will mean an additional 700 places under the widening access scheme, 1,000 for students moving from college to university and 300 via the skills for growth scheme. That is a fantastic commitment from the Scottish Government at a time when budgets are really tight.

The message from the SNP is simple: there will be no tuition fees for Scotland's young students when they go to university. Tuition fees are wrong and there will not be any in Scotland—not by the front door, the back door or any door. Our youngsters should get the chance to go to university in the way that many of us did because they have the ability to learn, not because their parents can buy them an education.

I am delighted to support the Government motion.

16:14

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Earlier in the debate, my colleague Liz Smith set out why the Scottish Conservatives came to the conclusion some years ago that we supported a graduate contribution towards the cost of higher education. At that time, we did not envisage the contribution being on the scale that was applied south of the border, but we accepted that there was a need for additional funding in the sector and that that was one way of providing it.

Scottish universities have a strong international reputation, but they will need additional funding if they are to maintain that.

Given the pressure on the public finances, it is simply not realistic to expect the taxpayer to put in more and more money, unless we take the advice of Joan McAlpine, who revealed earlier that she supports Scandinavian levels of taxation. I dare say that she will be getting an urgent summons to John Swinney's office later today. The danger is that, if we cannot find the additional cash, our institutions will be left behind in a global competition for excellence. Already, Scottish universities face pressure from their high-flying staff being attracted away to better funded institutions and better salaries south of the border. We have to ensure that we are on a level playing field across the UK.

I would like to concentrate on the social justice aspect of tuition fees. Proponents of free education argue that it is essential to provide access for all, but not only is that claim not

supported by the available evidence, but in fact the evidence is that maintaining free education in universities actually hurts those from less well-off backgrounds who are seeking to better themselves.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Murdo Fraser:** I would like to develop my point. I will give way later if I have time.

We know that one way in which the SNP protected the higher education budget was to raise funding for FE colleges. Even though John Swinney found additional money in the budget two weeks ago to reduce the level of cuts, our colleges are seeing their overall budgets slashed by £50 million in the next financial year and the one after that. Members on the SNP benches who cheered that destruction of the college budget should be ashamed of themselves.

**Michael Russell:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Murdo Fraser:** I will let the cabinet secretary justify that destruction.

**Michael Russell:** I just want to point out a conundrum. South of the border, the party that the member represents, which is in government, is reducing funding on universities and it is also reducing funding on colleges in a far greater way than the Scottish Government has done. If there is an equation between the two, it does not appear to apply south of the border for the member's party, but it apparently applies north of the border. There is no such equation, and I would have hoped that the Tories would support reform in the college sector rather than oppose progress.

**Murdo Fraser:** Presiding Officer, I hope that you will allow me some extra time for giving the cabinet secretary a third speech in the debate. I wish that he would focus on what is happening in Scotland because, whether we like it or not, there are more students in our universities from middle-class backgrounds than from working-class families. Conversely, many of those from less well-off backgrounds will go to college to get the training and skills that they need. Transferring money from the college budget to the universities sector is therefore a redistribution of wealth in reverse. It involves taking from those who are less well off and providing a subsidy to the middle classes. SNP members who claim to be interested in social justice will have to work hard to justify their support for such an approach.

The other mantra that we hear continually from the SNP benches—we heard it from the cabinet secretary today, and we heard it from other SNP members—is that tuition fees or a graduate contribution will deter those from less well-off

backgrounds from accessing university education. As I have pointed out in the chamber before, that claim is simply untrue. It is without foundation and the evidence is to the contrary.

NUS Scotland is clear about where matters stand. In its publication "Unlocking Scotland's Potential: Promoting Fairer Access to Higher Education", it states:

"Scotland continues to have the poorest rate of access to university in the whole of the UK for students from poorer backgrounds."

That was after the introduction of tuition fees south of the border. The latest UCAS figures show that applications from students from poorer backgrounds are at their highest level in England, Wales and Northern Ireland despite fees of up to £9,000 per year. The sad fact is that Scotland has the lowest proportion of students from the poorest backgrounds attending university compared with the other parts of the UK, despite the provision of so-called free education. The proportion of Scotland-domiciled students from socioeconomic classes 4 to 7 who are participating in higher education is 29.6 per cent. The equivalent figure for England is 30.7 per cent.

Let us look at individual participation rates for the most deprived areas. The University of Oxford attracts 2.5 per cent. That is nowhere near high enough, but it still beats the University of Aberdeen, whose figure is 2.2 per cent. The University of Cambridge attracts 3.1 per cent. That is nowhere near enough, but it still beats the University of St Andrews, whose figure is 2.6 per cent. The London School of Economics attracts 3.7 per cent. Again, that is nowhere near enough, but it is better than the University of Edinburgh, whose figure is 3.4 per cent. Also, the drop-out rates are higher in Scotland.

The evidence on this is absolutely clear and uncontested: tuition fees in England and Wales are not putting off people from poorer backgrounds. The reason for that is simple: the quid pro quo for the introduction of tuition fees and top-up fees was the implementation of generous bursary schemes for those from poorer families—schemes that are denied to people in Scotland, so that those from poorer families are not getting access to education on the cabinet secretary's watch. If we had a graduate contribution in Scotland, that is what we could be doing.

SNP members need to stop distorting the truth. They need to stop making false claims about the impact of fees on graduate contributions and they should recognise that the track record in England and Wales in this area—and in many others—is better than it is in Scotland. There is no point in the cabinet secretary shaking his head—facts are chieftains that winna ding.

**Michael Russell:** One rarely hears a speech in this chamber that is so mired in right-wing ideology. [*Laughter.*] Sorry—they are occasionally heard from members of the Labour Party, who are now specialists in right-wing ideology.

Murdo Fraser has made a right-wing speech, based entirely on a market view of education that the Scots have rejected.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is enough for a brief intervention.

**Murdo Fraser:** What a dismal and pathetic intervention from a man who is driven by ideology and so blinded by it that he cannot see among the haze of figures the facts that make it clear that students from poorer backgrounds in England and Wales get better access than do those in Scotland—on his watch. What a dismal record.

On the issue of stigma—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Finally, Mr Fraser, please.

**Murdo Fraser:** Well, I have taken two very long interventions from the cabinet secretary, as you know, Presiding Officer.

In closing I wish to address the nonsense about stigma attaching to those who get their fees paid. In 1983, I went to the University of Aberdeen, as the son of a car mechanic, on a full grant. I did not feel stigmatised. The full grant, in those days, was a badge of pride, not a sign of stigma. I do not think that it held me back in my career. We should stop the nonsense and listen to the facts.

16:21

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** Unlike the previous speaker, I will try to retain my mood and not lose control halfway through my speech.

On the issue of distorting the truth, Murdo Fraser should take a look at some of the things that he himself has been saying. The SNP members cheered when the investment in Scottish colleges of £61 million over two years was announced. They cheered because that will make a difference to people's lives and to the colleges. Let us talk about the truth.

It is extremely sanctimonious of the Tories to come to this place and tell us that they could make things much better when they are the ones who are imposing the cuts down at Westminster. They are causing the problems. Robin Parker, from NUS Scotland, said in the Education and Culture Committee and on television earlier today that the current market situation that faces universities has been caused by the fees imposed by Westminster. That is what has caused the problem. The sanctimonious words of the Opposition parties are complete nonsense.



**Murdo Fraser:** Will the member give way?

**George Adam:** I will, now that Mr Fraser has calmed down.

**Murdo Fraser:** Does the member blame the Westminster Government for the fact that the participation rates in Scottish universities for people from less well-off backgrounds are poorer than they are in England and Wales? Whose fault is that?

**George Adam:** We are legislating presently to deal with that issue. I would point to a lot of things from Westminster that have caused problems for Scotland—Thatcherism being one of them. In fact, we have a college sector that was modelled on Thatcherite ideals in the 1990s, and we are trying to move things forward on that side.

The Opposition parties complain a lot but offer absolutely no solutions. The Labour Party talks about a mature debate, but then it continues to say that Scotland is far too wee, too poor and too stupid to do anything on its own. What does the Labour Party have to offer? It has its cuts commission, but the minute that the cuts commission is mentioned in the chamber, Labour members deny it and say that there is no cuts commission. However, when they leave this place, they go to the highest point that they can and go on about their cuts commission to every media outlet that they can find. Do they know what they believe in any more?

**Members:** No.

**George Adam:** Do we know what they believe in any more?

**Members:** No.

**George Adam:** It is starting to sound like a 1950s soap opera with the Labour Party now.

I listened carefully to the cabinet secretary's opening speech—I always do—and I agreed with him when he said that education is a means to satisfy our ambition. This debate is about ambition—our ambition for ourselves, our children and every man, woman and child in Scotland; our ambition for our country and for every young person who goes to university and who aspires to go to university.

It is our ambition to make Scotland the kind of country in which all young people are everything that they can be. The Opposition parties appear to have lost ambition. They no longer have ambition for themselves or the country in which we live. That is why we hear so much negativity from them. They have given up on some of their core values. The Labour Party used to have core values, but it appears to have nothing now. It seems to have lost its moral compass for some reason.

**Jenny Marra** *rose—*

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** Here is the moral compass.

**George Adam:** The moral compass has risen.

**Jenny Marra:** I understood that the debate was about tuition fees and not about the Labour Party.

**Members:** Oh!

**Jenny Marra:** I have asked other members the same question. What effect are free tuition fees having on the poorest communities in Scotland?

**George Adam:** It is quite funny: Labour members constantly attack the Government, but the minute we bring them up on their faults and the things that they have done, all of a sudden the debate is not going the way they want. I am happy to continue to show up the failures of the Labour Party in Scotland.

Scottish higher education should be free. As a candidate in Paisley in 2011, I was proud to sign the pledge. It was signed by other SNP candidates and all the Renfrewshire Labour Party members, including Mr Henry. They believed that higher education should be free. What has changed in the Labour Party between 2011 and 2013? Is it pursuing its idea of a cuts commission? What are we going to get from the Labour Party?

Alex Salmond said:

"The rocks will melt with the sun before I allow tuition fees to be imposed on Scottish students".

Those are important words because this debate is about ideals and what we believe in. The Tory party believes in what it believes in and the rest of Scotland does not. The Labour Party has lost its way and now no longer wants to stand up for what it believes in.

**James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab):** Will the member take an intervention?

**George Adam:** I have taken one already and I am moving on now.

Robin Parker, president of NUS Scotland, said:

"With tuition fees"—

if that is Labour's policy now—

"we will have no hope of ever making university open to people from all backgrounds".

In the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill, we are trying to work towards the ideal of making university open to everyone. Some universities, such as the University of the West of Scotland in Paisley, take 20 per cent of people from the most deprived areas. In others, that is quite difficult. However, it is the intention of the bill to address

that. It will be challenging and it will be difficult for the colleges involved.

This issue is about having ideals and the belief that Scotland can be an ambitious, better country. It is about doing everything that we can for our young people to ensure that they have the future that they deserve. That is the difference between us. I ask every one of the Labour Party members who signed that pledge in 2011, when they vote tonight, to remember why they signed it and to support the Scottish Government.

16:28

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I agree with the sentiment of the Government's motion; it is just a shame that the Government does not. The motion says:

"the Parliament believes that access to higher education should be based on ability to learn, not ability to pay".

If that is the Government's position, why is it pulling up the ladder to access higher education by cutting college funding year on year?

While the aim might be for access to higher education to be based on the ability to learn, we know that it is actually based on two things: the ability to gain the qualifications needed to get into university and the ability to support oneself financially through education. Many people in my region do not have the qualifications required to go to university but they certainly have the ability to learn. I invite the cabinet secretary to Cumbernauld College to witness that ability to learn for himself.

Figures released this month by the University and College Union have shown an east-west divide in educational attainment, identifying Airdrie and Shotts in my region as one of the three least qualified constituencies in Scotland. While we should aspire to a society in which attainment levels at school are not predetermined by postcode, the simple fact remains that colleges are the only safety net for those who leave school with few or no qualifications and want to go on to higher education.

By reducing that college safety net, the Government is restricting opportunities for people in Central Scotland to gain the qualifications that they need to go on to higher education. How is access to higher education based on the ability to learn when young bright people from disadvantaged backgrounds cannot get into university? Those people have more than enough ability to learn but, for whatever reason—whether their childhood was affected by alcohol or drug abuse in the family, they are a carer for a parent, brother or sister, or they have been affected by imprisonment—they have not quite managed to fulfil their potential.

Sometimes people simply lack the motivation at a young age to aim high and work hard. Those people do not have middle-class pushy parents with sharp elbows to drive them on and get them all the help and support they need. What they face in the first instance is a barrier to qualifications, not a lack of educational ability.

**Marco Biagi:** I have the greatest sympathy for a lot of what the member says. Does he think that by introducing the additional obstacle of a tuition fee—up-front or otherwise—we will help or hinder that group of people?

**Mark Griffin:** Those people are not being helped at the moment by the no-tuition-fees policy because they do not have the qualifications to reach university and benefit from it. At the same time, college funding is being reduced, which is taking away their opportunity to get those qualifications.

For all the young people who, for whatever reason, did not achieve their full potential at school, access to higher education is based not on the ability to learn but on how well they coped with the circumstances in which they were born. For them, opportunity is based on birth and not ability.

I do not believe that anyone in the chamber thinks that that should be the case, so I am genuinely confused by this Government's cuts to the college sector and the SNP back benchers who cheered them. Colleges provide the opportunity for our young people and adult learners—particularly at a time of high unemployment and underemployment—to pick up the qualifications that they did not get first time round at school. As soon as this Government started reducing funding for the college sector, it started to reduce the opportunities for people from our working-class communities to access higher education.

I said earlier that I felt that the ability to access higher education is based on two things: the ability to achieve the appropriate level of qualification; and the ability to support oneself through education. It is clear that this Government is failing working-class and disadvantaged communities on the first count. On the second count, the Government's record of support for students from the poorest backgrounds is hardly one to be proud of.

Previously, students could access a maximum bursary of £2,640 if their family had an income of less than £19,130. Now, students will be entitled to a maximum bursary of £1,750 if their family income is less than £17,000. That is a cut of £890 in the grant support to our poorest students and a tightening of the criteria, with a reduction of more than £2,000 in the amount of family income that qualifies students for the maximum bursary. How

does that fit with the stated aim in the motion that access to higher education be based on the ability to learn?

How does that approach fit with the previous SNP rhetoric about dumping student debt? As someone who was a student under the SNP Government—ever so briefly—I can confirm that my student debt certainly was not dumped. Anyone from a low-income family who happens to have the misfortune of being a student under this Government will have a debt burden that is sky high in comparison with that of previous generations.

This Government withdrew the graduate endowment fee. One of the reasons given for doing so was that the fee had burdened students with an additional debt and had acted as a disincentive to accessing higher education. Surely by this Government's own logic, the additional debt caused by a move from bursaries to loans and the restricting of the eligibility criteria will act as a disincentive to students from poorer backgrounds.

I wish that access to higher education in Scotland was based on the ability to learn, but it is actually based on the ability to gain qualifications and a student's ability to support themselves financially through their studies. The Government is failing students from working-class and deprived backgrounds.

16:35

**Liz Smith:** When the cabinet secretary set up the technical working group, he asked it to set out the possible ways of funding higher education. That was absolutely the right thing to do. If memory serves correctly, there were six different balances between Government and private funds. Obviously, the two extremes were complete Government funding and injecting far more from the private sector.

The group worked out some arithmetic on the future funding. At that time, it worked out that the funding gap was £97 million if the average English fees were set at £7,000 and not indexed to inflation, and it gave the figure of £324 million if the average English fees were £8,500 and were indexed to inflation.

The cabinet secretary accepted the lower estimate and set out his view that that particular funding gap would be closed by the Scottish Government finding more money and by universities' philanthropy, greater efficiency and business. That was an interesting mix. However, what he did not do—I would be interested if the cabinet secretary could give us more information in his summing up—was spell out how the savings could be identified. Perhaps he may want to do so

in the context of the fact that the average fees in England are a little different from the ones that he accepted at that time.

**Michael Russell:** I am happy to do so briefly because it is my colleague who is summing up.

The universities had already established a number of mechanisms to look at greater efficiency. Those mechanisms included a Universities Scotland committee, which has reported and continues to look at the savings. The technical working group was supported by all the parties, but its conclusions were accepted by Labour, the SNP and the Liberals. It is important to put that on the record.

**Liz Smith:** I thank the cabinet secretary for putting that on the record. However, the extent of the efficiency savings, particularly in comparison with those that are being made down south, is still an issue. The question of whether we envisage the same number of universities and the same number of four-year degree courses must be answered, too. The Scottish Government needs to come clean. If its choice is to be public funding built up by additional private funding and from efficiency savings, we must know what the balance will be.

I must apologise to Joan McAlpine for knocking water all over her papers in this morning's Education and Culture Committee. I hope that I did not spoil too much of the text that she was hoping to use this afternoon. She has raised an interesting issue for the cabinet secretary, too: should we expect the Scottish Government to introduce significant increases—of the Scandinavian level—when it comes to funding higher education?

**Michael Russell:** Joan McAlpine did not say that.

**Liz Smith:** Joan McAlpine hinted at that. Let me give the cabinet secretary the chance to put on record that that is not what he supports.

**Michael Russell:** I will always support the level of taxation set by the Parliament. I am sure that all members would agree that that is the right thing to do.

**Murdo Fraser:** Who controls the Parliament?

**Liz Smith:** Indeed—who controls the Parliament?

Obviously, the trend—[*Interruption.*] John Swinney said on record just last week that he did not envisage any increase in taxation.

There is a fundamental issue. If it is to be the SNP's choice for public funds to finance higher education—I do not agree with that, but the argument is perfectly rational and I respect that choice—it needs to explain to the Parliament, the

public and people in universities how that will be paid for. That is a fair assumption.

**Michael Russell:** If it is Liz Smith's contention that we need to explain the figures, it is important that she tells us what the level of tuition fee would be in Scotland and who would pay it. If that is her solution, she needs to tell us where the level lies.

**Liz Smith:** We did so in our manifesto. We said clearly that the income-contingent loan would start to be repaid at a threshold of £21,000 and that the fees would be in the range of £3,500 to £4,000. That is in the paper that we produced. We had to make an adjustment on the fees, based on what happened in England and on inflationary pressure, just as the Scottish Government and Universities Scotland had to do.

I stand by our record on the issue. We are clear about why we think that such fees are required. We based the figure on exactly what Universities Scotland said and on all the information that was given to us by the eminent people who wrote reports on the whole question of higher education.

I think that members of all parties stand by bursary support as an important asset to higher education. As Murdo Fraser made exceptionally clear, despite challenges from elsewhere, in the context of statistical analysis of where additional funding is coming from, it is incumbent on the Scottish Government to consider how much additional bursary support can be provided in the system that it is promoting. It has been pointed out several times that the Office for Fair Access in England takes a different approach. Does the Scottish Government intend to legislate in that regard, or will we have to debate the issue in future?

The debate must be considered in the context of what is in the best interests of our universities, the economy and Scotland at large. We have made different choices about how to fund higher education and it is incumbent on all parties to set out their stalls on exactly where the funding will come from. We have made our position clear and I hope that in summing up the debate the Scottish Government will do so too.

16:41

**Hugh Henry:** The issue is not so much tuition fees as how we pay for university education and all decent public services. A number of options are open to the Scottish Government and the Parliament and all members can form an opinion. Joan McAlpine takes the view that we should have fair taxes, as is the case in Scandinavia.

**Joan McAlpine:** Will the member give way?

**Hugh Henry:** If the member lets me finish my point, I will do so.

Mike Russell demurred from such a view. He probably takes a similar view to John Swinney. Indeed, we know what he thinks the first four years will be like if Scotland votes to separate from the United Kingdom, because he has said that the Scottish Government intends to reduce personal taxation by £2 billion—a drop of 25 per cent. Mike Russell is quite clear that there is a tax-cutting agenda, so how do we pay for services?

**Michael Russell rose—**

**Hugh Henry:** I will take an intervention from Joan McAlpine.

**Joan McAlpine:** Sorry, cabinet secretary.

The first thing that must be said is that we are delivering free education, and the Parliament does not have tax-raising powers, so Hugh Henry has come up with a bit of a red herring. What I said in the debate was that I support a Nordic model of fairness. *[Interruption.]*

I ask Hugh Henry the question that I asked his colleague Mr Neil Bibby. If he is talking about setting priorities, perhaps he will take the opportunity to tell us whether he would put education ahead of spending £100 billion on the renewal of Trident—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Will you come to a close, please?

**Joan McAlpine:** Nordic countries are not doing that—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is a long-enough intervention, thank you.

**Hugh Henry rose—**

**Joan McAlpine:** Nordic countries did not spend billions on an illegal war, as the Labour Government did—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Henry.

**Hugh Henry:** I take it from that intervention that Joan McAlpine cannot answer my question.

A number of accusations were made in the debate. George Adam and others talked about Labour's cuts commission. I know of no cuts commission. Johann Lamont rightly said that we should have a sensible debate about how we provide and pay for services. Stewart Maxwell claimed that Johann Lamont wants young people to pay, and Clare Adamson said that Labour thinks that free education should not be available for Scotland's population. That is the first I have heard of that—I have seen no such evidence. In any case, what is wrong with Johann Lamont trying to form a debate? Can any member of the SNP tell me why it would be wrong for Johann Lamont to say:

"universality, as presently practised, robs the poor of resources which would be best in their hands ... takes away from those who most need help and who most deserve support and rewards those who need neither ... is unjust and indefensible"?

**John Mason:** Will the member give way?

**Hugh Henry:** Can John Mason answer that question?

**John Mason:** Would the member, by his logic, also charge kids for being at school?

**Hugh Henry:** Actually, it was not Johann Lamont but Mike Russell who said that. Those are the words of Mike Russell as he was trying to form the debate. Before John Mason and others rush in and condemn Johann Lamont for saying the same thing, they should ask Mike Russell whether he has resiled from that position. Labour has said nothing about making the poorest students pay. We are not suggesting for a moment that we should adopt its system, but even in England the poorest students do not pay. Nothing that we did when we were in power in Scotland saw the poorest students pay—

**Marco Biagi:** Will the member give way?

**Hugh Henry:** No, thanks. Nothing that Johann Lamont has said has been about making the poorest students pay. It is a complete figment of the SNP's imagination that coincides with what it wants to spin and tweet.

However, we are facing a problem. The budget for the next few years is being squeezed and going down and we need to ask ourselves how we will continue to pay for those services and what services will be prioritised. If we value education, we need to ask not how we maintain the university budget at its present level—after all, universities are now silent because they are fine up to the end of this spending round—

**Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Hugh Henry:** No, thanks—I have already taken two interventions.

The question of how more will be found for our universities will have to be answered, because that is what they are asking for. We have heard from George Adam and others a justification for why they cheered the cuts to college budgets, but the reality is that they clapped like seals when they heard that the budgets for our colleges were being cut year on year. There will be two years of cuts, one after the other. They did not like it; they tried to fiddle and use smoke and mirrors; but the reality is that the budgets are being cut.

What we have, then, is a fictional debate from the SNP in which it is the protector of everything in Scotland that is free, which we know is not true

because they are loading debt on to the poorest students and cutting bursaries; a fictional debate about Labour having a cuts commission, when there is no such thing; and a fictional debate about tuition fees when what we need is a mature debate about how Scotland will defend its vital public services and education and solutions about how we find the money to pay for that. We know what Mike Russell would do if he was left to his own devices. Alex Salmond will not give him his head at the moment, but God knows what might happen if we were ever to separate from the rest of the UK. The crazy ideas of Mike Russell might just see the light of day.

The only person in this chamber who has ever advocated the swingeing cuts that the SNP members have referred to and huge reductions in taxation for the rich is, in fact, Mike Russell and the only people who have consistently defended the vulnerable and the weak in our society have been those in Scottish Labour. That is what we are founded on. No matter what Mr Russell might say, he has a right-wing tax-cutting agenda that would make even George Osborne blush and will impoverish Scottish public services. We need a mature debate but, unfortunately, until we get the referendum on separation out of the way, it is unlikely that we will get it.

16:50

**The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance):** The debate has been very feisty, and I hope that the fun is not over yet.

Like many members, I am just out of the recess, and I have had the opportunity to do some more leisurely reading. I confess that, unlike Neil Findlay or Hugh Henry, I have not been reading "Grasping the Thistle"; instead, I have had the pleasure of dipping into the "Holyrood Scottish Political Guide", which has biographies of all current members and some fascinating information. It says things about colleagues that I did not know. For example, I did not know the ages of some colleagues or how many children some of them have—the numbers for the likes of Ken Macintosh and Jamie McGrigor are impressive. It also says that more than 90 current MSPs have benefited from free higher education. The question for not only those MSPs, but others is whether they will vote to pull up the ladder of opportunity for the generations that will come behind us.

**Liz Smith:** I benefited from that situation. I went through university at a time when there were far fewer students, as a percentage of the population, in the system. As the minister knows, we now have considerable ambitions to expand that number and ensure that, on a widening-access basis, far more people are attracted from difficult backgrounds. How can that be paid for?

**Angela Constance:** As Ms Smith well knows—she would know this if she had looked at the evidence from Universities Scotland—there is no funding gap in Scotland. What bemuses me about the Conservatives' position is that they seem to believe that the choice is between equality and excellence. The Government entirely refutes that. Even if anyone believed that—it appears that the Conservatives do—what on earth ever happened to making the world a better place for our children?

Murdo Fraser fails to understand the role of Scotland's colleges in delivering higher education in Scotland. Comparisons must take account of the contribution that is made by our colleges in widening access and participation. That is not currently done by FE colleges in England. I cannot imagine what it must be like for a student in England starting their university course this year to be faced with the prospect of £59,000 of debt. I do not imagine that that will do much for participation rates south of the border.

**Hugh Henry:** The minister mentioned degrees offered by colleges. Can she confirm that colleges are given less money to deliver those degrees than universities are given for theirs?

**Angela Constance:** That colleges can deliver higher education with, in some regards, a more efficient and effective use of resources than can their colleagues in higher education should be welcomed. The fact that an increasing number of young people are benefiting from higher education in Scotland is also to be welcomed.

The Labour Party's amendment is, of course, on a par with some of the contributions that we have heard: somewhat rambling and contradictory. The Labour Party appears to be rolling back from its manifesto commitment, which all its MSPs signed up to not only collectively, but individually. It is rolling back from a previous commitment never to introduce back-door or front-door tuition fees, and that is highly lamentable.

We have heard no solution from the Labour Party today. It wants a debate, but I thought that we had the debate during the 2011 general election in Scotland. The BBC established that free education was the third most important policy to the people of Scotland. Mr Findlay said that he wanted to have a debate that was beyond politics. The last time that happened, we had the Browne commission, which saw the introduction of fees across the UK.

I want to try, at least, to make a consensual point. This week, Anas Sarwar said that we cannot talk about social justice without also talking about redistribution. That is not an incorrect statement, but it is, of course, an incomplete statement, because it is not possible to redistribute wealth

without having taxation powers, control of welfare and the major powers over the economy. Neil Bibby said that the advantage of devolution is that it allows us to make different decisions. That is the case only up to a point; we are allowed to make only some different decisions, and we are not masters of our destiny.

I have a real difficulty with the apparent acceptance by Anas Sarwar and others of the fact that too few young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are accessing university, and that that is okay. In effect, his comments wrote young people off. My issue with that is to do with whom Mr Sarwar was referring to. Twenty-five years ago, he would have been talking about me.

**Neil Findlay:** Will the minister give way?

**Angela Constance:** No.

Widening access is at the heart of this Government's agenda. We do not accept that it is right and proper that only 11 per cent of university students come from the poorest 20 per cent of areas. We will see a level playing field, which will involve redistribution of opportunity.

The University of Glasgow published significant research that shows that students with lower grades from poorer backgrounds do as well as more affluent students with better grades, so we need to ensure that all of Scotland's young people get access to the £1 billion investment that we make every year in our universities. Like Marco Biagi, I agree that there should be no wriggle room for any of our institutions. That is why we are putting widening access on a statutory footing.

**Liz Smith:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Angela Constance:** No, thanks, because I am summing up.

The fundamental difference between the Scottish Government and our Labour and Tory colleagues is their underlying acceptance that poor kids go to college and more affluent kids go to university. What a poverty of aspiration exists in the better together ranks. What happened to conviction politics? What happened to political will? What happened to the politics of priority? We will make this world and this country a better place, because we will continue to challenge and to change.

The choices of our young people should be based on their talents, their aspirations and their interests, not on their financial means. Cost should not influence choice. I want to see parity of esteem between vocational education and academic education. Post-16 reform is about access to education and between the college, vocational and academic sectors. The commission for developing Scotland's young workforce is about building on

our platforms of reform—whether curriculum for excellence, careers guidance or post-16 reform—to ensure that this country will one day benefit from world-class vocational education and training. The case has been made for universal services. Education is a public good and we should pay for it through general taxation. Education is the passport from poverty.

I started by saying that at least 90 MSPs in the chamber have benefited from free higher education, but the task before all 128 of us is to take part in a very simple vote. Are you for or against tuition fees? Are you for or against up-front or back-door tuition fees? Are you for or against fairness in our education system? Are you for or against an education system that is based on the ability to learn and not the ability to pay?

## **Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill**

16:59

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-05660, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the United Kingdom Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 23 May 2012, relating to midata, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Fergus Ewing.*]

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

## Business Motion

16:59

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-05664, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme for Thursday, 21 February.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 21 February 2013—

delete

2.30 pm      Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee  
Debate: Report on the achievability of the  
Scottish Government's renewable energy  
targets

and insert

2.30 pm      Ministerial Statement: Audit Scotland Report  
– Management of Patients on NHS Waiting  
Lists

*followed by*   Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee  
Debate: Report on the achievability of the  
Scottish Government's renewable energy  
targets

*followed by*   Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body  
motion: Nomination of a Pension Fund  
trustee for the Scottish Parliamentary  
Contributory Pension Fund (SPCPF)—[Joe  
FitzPatrick].

*Motion agreed to.*

## Decision Time

17:00

**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-05652.2, in the name of Hugh Henry, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05652, in the name of Michael Russell, on tuition fees, 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)  
Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-



shire) (SNP)  
Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 35, Against 80, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S4M-05652.1, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05652, in the name of Michael Russell, on tuition fees, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 13, Against 102, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-05652, in the name of Michael Russell, on tuition fees, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members: No.**

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 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)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (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)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

#### **Against**

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

#### **Abstentions**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 67, Against 13, Abstentions 35.

**Members:** Oh!

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament believes that access to higher education should be based on ability to learn, not ability to pay and will not introduce upfront or backdoor tuition fees.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-05660, in the name of Fergus

Ewing, on the UK Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 23 May 2012, relating to midata, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

## Lothiansound

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-04877, in the name of Jim Eadie, on Lothiansound talking newspaper celebrating its 25th anniversary. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament congratulates Lothiansound on its 25th anniversary on 18 February 2013; applauds the dedicated work of all the volunteers at Lothiansound who bring talking newspapers to people who are blind or partially sighted; understands that it serves over 600 listeners, providing them with news and current affairs taken from the *Edinburgh Evening News*; commends Lothiansound on its work to provide high quality recordings from its recording studio in Newington; recognises that recordings are provided in different formats to suit the needs of individual people, and wishes Lothiansound well as it continues what it considers its valuable work, providing a lifeline service directly to people in the community.

17:05

### **Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP):**

I begin by saying how delighted I am to have secured the debate and by thanking members from across the chamber who have supported the motion that congratulates Lothiansound on its 25th anniversary. It is a fantastic achievement and a significant milestone that we will celebrate later this evening at a reception in Parliament.

Twenty-five years ago—almost to the day—a group of like-minded people came together to hold the inaugural meeting of what is now a much-valued service to hundreds of blind and partially sighted people across Lothian and beyond. I know from my mum, Helen Eadie, who was registered blind in her later years through age-related macular degeneration, just how much she appreciated her talking newspaper and I know that the service, which has been pioneered by Lothiansound, is cherished by people across Scotland.

Of course, none of it would be possible without the volunteers who give up their time for the benefit of others, so I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the volunteers, and to thank them for the work that they carry out. I am pleased that so many have joined us in the gallery to listen to the debate. I also pay tribute to one special lady—Susan Wallace—who is with us in the gallery and deserves particular recognition. Susan was a founder member of Lothiansound 25 years ago and is still an active volunteer today.

Lothiansound has delivered much in the time since 1988. The charity has produced more than 12,000 editions and has distributed them to hundreds of listeners. The service is delivered free

of charge and is distributed through Royal Mail's Articles for the Blind, and I know that it brings much enjoyment to many people in my constituency and across Lothian.

Lothiansound has worked hard to ensure that its service reaches as many people as possible. Back in 1988 it sent tapes to 40 visually impaired people; now its listenership is in excess of 500 and is composed of people who live in Lothian and people who live further afield who still keep an interest in what happens in Edinburgh and Lothian. I understand that one of the original listeners—Jennifer Meiklejohn—is with us today and that she still receives her recording with great anticipation.

Recordings are taken mostly from the *Edinburgh Evening News* and aim to keep blind and partially sighted people up to date with what goes on in their city and around Lothian. As an MSP for an Edinburgh constituency, I am happy to report that it is not just the *Edinburgh Evening News* that listeners enjoy; Lothiansound also records a popular Scottish quiz and it is keen to ensure that blind and partially sighted people do not miss out on the rich variety of cultural experiences that Edinburgh provides during the festival and throughout the year. For example, through the Federation of Scottish Theatres it advertises audio-transcribed descriptions of productions that take place in Edinburgh and in theatres further afield, including the Brunton theatre in Musselburgh.

The value of the service should not be underestimated. In the words of the Royal National Institute of Blind People:

"Listening to a Talking Newspaper is one of the things that people can enjoy without having to rely on anyone else. That feeling of independence is so important."

The service plays an important part in fostering that feeling of independence, because it allows people the chance to feel connected to the place in which they live, does much to lessen the isolation that they can feel, and allows them to connect to the world around them.

The service is not just about keeping up to date with news or current events.

Stephen Fry is a well-known supporter of the medium of talking books and is patron of the Listening Books charity. What he says about the value of such a service could apply equally to talking newspapers. He has said, with his characteristic eloquence:

"The companionship and delight of a voice telling stories is incomparable. It distributes pure, undiluted pleasure and friendship. Not many schemes can make such a claim."

Or, as one listener to Lothiansound put it simply:

"The readers are just like friends to me, visiting my home every week."

There are five different reading teams made up of seven people. They are all volunteers who work together to achieve the professional standard that Lothiansound listeners enjoy. Reading takes great skill, especially as the readers do not see the articles until they are about to read them. Of course there can be moments when readers are caught off guard, but their professionalism always shines through.

Lothiansound has always moved with the times, and in 2008 it made the change from analogue to digital recording. I understand that that has increased the quality of the recordings as well as allowing use of compact discs. However, as ever, the charity is alive to the needs of its listeners and still offers cassette-tape recordings to those who prefer them.

During April 2012, Lothiansound moved to a property in Newington that is owned by the Royal Blind Asylum and School, where it has the use of a quiet and tranquil environment for each week's recording.

As a charity, Lothiansound is funded by donations and through fundraising. Directing the organisation is a committee of trustees that is headed up by a very able chair in Janelle Scotland. The role of a trustee is important, so I take this opportunity to thank them, too, for the work that they undertake on behalf of Lothiansound.

My parliamentary colleagues from other parts of the country will be aware that there are other talking newspapers across Scotland. In fact, colleagues have been keen to let me know about organisations in their constituencies, so it is right that our national Parliament gives recognition to this vital lifeline service.

The Association of Talking Newspapers offers help and guidance to all 65 talking newspapers across Scotland. It provides training opportunities and hosts an annual conference at which volunteers pick up tips from colleagues and learn about recent developments in recording. We can all be proud that our own Dennis Robertson MSP will be one of the guest speakers at this year's conference in October.

On this, the 25th anniversary of Lothiansound, it is entirely appropriate that we recognise the invaluable contribution that this remarkable organisation—and others like it—has made to enriching the lives of thousands of blind and partially sighted people across Lothian and throughout Scotland.

We all have the right to enjoy the acquisition of knowledge and to participate in the world around

us. That is a right that Lothiansound has made—and continues to make—a reality for many people, so we thank it for that tonight.

17:12

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** I join Jim Eadie in congratulating Lothiansound on its valuable and remarkable work. It is a newspaper, as Jim Eadie has told us, for the blind and partially sighted, and it was established in 1988. At present, the paper, which is run by a group of more than 60 dedicated volunteers, is distributed, at no cost to the listener, to 550 people throughout the region. Even the postage is free, thanks to the Post Office's Articles for the Blind, although there are of course running costs that require funding from generous donors.

Tapes giving news updates and features are distributed 50 weeks of the year, helping listeners to keep on top of current affairs. As politicians, we like to keep in the loop. We value the ability to remain connected with what is going on in the world around us, so none of us would underestimate the good that such a resource can do in keeping blind and partially sighted people in touch with the issues of their localities and further afield.

I am sure that most of the population who have full sight would be quick to complain were their newspapers, magazines, periodicals and other sources of information that are so important for ordinary day-to-day living to be suddenly withdrawn. There cannot be any just reason why those who are partially sighted or blind should have to make do without material that is available to others in the era of digital communication and enhanced connectivity.

What is so wonderful about the resource that is supplied by Lothiansound is that it is delivered direct to the individual. Many people live in properties that do not as yet have access to the internet, and although some listening papers and blind resources have rolled out online at United Kingdom level—for example, the National Talking Newspapers and Magazines charity—services are still required that bring the news on tape direct to people's front doors. The benefit that such a vital link brings to individuals who would otherwise be cut off is immeasurable. After 25 years of building and strengthening its exceptional service, Lothiansound indeed has much to celebrate.

In addition, Lothiansound regularly runs social events that bring together listeners, volunteers and professionals from the blind community who give informative talks. That is all part of the process of keeping blind and visually impaired citizens informed and linked in with others who have direct experience of issues that are of mutual concern.

Above all, the inclusive process is not only enjoyable and sociable, but contributes to a greater sense of belonging and wellbeing. Being in the loop not only benefits the intellect; the added social element of what Lothiansound does increases mental wellbeing for those 550 listeners. Direct contact between the senders of the tapes and the listeners strengthens the relationship between both groups and reminds them why the work is so valuable.

Anyone who wonders about the psychological benefits that speaking newspapers bring and the positive impact on individual wellbeing that results from regular listening need only glance at the feedback that has been given to the RNIB to understand how valuable such services are. When asked what they had gained through being included in mailing lists, people gave the following responses:

"I love talking newspapers ... Now I can no longer read, they are my lifeline."

"Your service brings in to my living room, a local newsagent."

"It's so accessible and totally portable; you sit on the bus and plug in your headphones and you're reading your magazine like anybody else."

"A lot of those magazines I took in print form, I had to gradually give up. To have them back again is great! It re-opens a world I thought was closing."

Those quotations go to the heart of why we are celebrating Lothiansound today. For 25 years, Lothiansound has provided a lifeline to hundreds of residents in the region. Driven by the work of dedicated and inspirational volunteers, Lothiansound's success over the years is reflected in its accolades: it has won the Scottish tape competition newspaper section in 1994, 1996, 2000, 2002 and 2006. Surely that is something that we all applaud. The charity and its volunteers should feel rightly proud of their accomplishments.

In conclusion, blind and partially sighted people have the same rights and needs as fully sighted people as far as their ability to communicate with the wider world is concerned. We now know that 550 individuals have that ability, thanks to the work of this wonderful group. I am delighted to congratulate Lothiansound and I congratulate Jim Eadie on lodging the motion.

17:17

**Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I thank Jim Eadie for bringing this incredibly important issue before Parliament today and for his eloquent and informative speech, which I am sure everyone enjoyed and got a lot of added information from. I congratulate Lothiansound on its 25th anniversary, but I hope that it will not mind my using this opportunity to

highlight talking news provision within my constituency.

Members will not be surprised to learn that the ability to provide access to information and recreational reading for those who are finding it difficult to read print is incredibly important to me as a librarian. I first came to know about talking news in a personal rather than professional capacity. When I was an MSP way back in 2000, Strathkelvin Talking Newspaper Association, which covers Kirkintilloch and Bishopbriggs, invited me along to read. As Jim Eadie said, reading for the talking news requires a very professional ability—I was not invited back, so I do not think that I was that professional.

However, I was invited back in 2011 to celebrate the Strathkelvin Talking Newspaper Association's 30th anniversary—I promise that I am not trying to do a one-up on Lothiansound. I thought that I was going along to present certificates for long service and to thank the volunteers for what they did. However, as well as doing that, I had to spend the next two hours serving tea at the coffee morning to make up the money so that the association had funds to continue. Of course, I did not mind doing that.

We have a fantastic team at Strathkelvin Talking Newspaper Association. Our new chair, Sandra Ketteringham, is doing a fantastic job in taking over from the past chair, Alistair Aitchison. More than 100 recipients in Kirkintilloch and Bishopbriggs now receive the *Kirkintilloch Herald* since we went digital in 2011, so the association provides a much-valued and well-received service to my local community.

Although the Strathkelvin Talking Newspaper Association is the group that I know best, in my constituency we also have BEAM, or Bearsden and Milngavie Talking Newspaper Association, which since 1990 has been recording the *Milngavie and Bearsden Herald* for more than 40 recipients in the area. Of course, I have spoken before in the chamber about Cue and Review Recording Service, which is based in Bishopbriggs in my constituency and which was established in 1982 by a young man when he was still at school. In 1991, it became a company and now more than 5,000 people across the United Kingdom receive audio tapes or digitised media for boom boxes, or whatever they are called. More than 5,000 visually impaired people across the UK benefit from that company in my constituency.

I thank Jim Eadie and congratulate Lothiansound. I add my voice to those saying that it is an important resource and that we must all do as much as we can to support it.

17:21

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** Like other members, I congratulate Jim Eadie on securing time for this important members' business debate. I add my congratulations to Lothiansound talking newspaper on reaching its 25th anniversary. I am sure that members will recognise that services such as Lothiansound are only as strong and successful as their volunteers and those who work for them. I congratulate all the workers, volunteers and those who have supported Lothiansound over the past 25 years, some of whom have joined us in the public gallery.

The world has moved on rapidly since Lothiansound was started in 1988, as can be seen from the way in which people listen to newspapers today. In 1988, tapes were sent to users of the services in the way that Jim Eadie mentioned but, some 20 years later, compact discs were being sent out. However, any good organisation listens closely to its service users, and Lothiansound has continued to provide a taped version of news, but in better quality through a digital recording.

In the world of eyecare and vision loss, technology has also advanced rapidly since 1988. New eyecare technology and techniques mean that people who in 1988 would have experienced sight loss can now keep their sight longer. Throughout that period of advancement in technology and techniques, Lothiansound has continued to thrive and has increased its listeners by more than 10 times.

At times, people with sight loss can feel isolated and withdrawn. Although they can listen to the national and international news on television or radio, they cannot always get the same level of detail about local news. Lothiansound exists to allow people with sight loss to keep up to date with their local news and about the things that happen in their communities, outside their doors and in their local streets.

Over the past few years, the Government has been working closely with organisations that represent people with sensory impairment to improve those people's lives. Since 2009, the Government has provided funding to pilot a number of sensory impairment one-stop shops across the country from the Western Isles to the Borders and from Moray to Dumfries and Galloway.

I have visited some of those one-stop shops and seen the work that is done there. Like services such as Lothiansound, those one-stop shops provide local services that are appropriate to the needs of the local population. The services might be started from nothing, as I saw in Stornoway. They might involve reaching out to black and

ethnic minority communities, as was explained to me in Glasgow. Alternatively, they might allow people who previously felt isolated and lonely to meet and discuss what is important to them, as I experienced in Galashiels. Like Lothiansound, those one-stop shops are about providing local people with services and support that mean something to them and continue to involve them in their communities.

However, that is not where Government investment ends. The Government has also provided funding for the development of the first lip-reading tutors course to be held in Scotland for more than seven years. That course was oversubscribed, and we have already identified students to begin the second course later this year, which will, again, be funded by the Government.

I have also recently approved funding to provide training to front-line staff in local authorities to allow them to improve their skills in providing rehabilitation services to people with hearing, vision and dual sensory loss. Along with that, I have provided funding to third sector partners to work with, and deliver training to, staff in care homes to allow them better to identify and address hidden sensory loss, such as a loss of visual function. That will allow them to make contact with organisations such as Lothiansound and make use of their services.

The Government will shortly issue for consultation the Scottish sensory impairment strategy. The strategy will look to improve, and make more appropriate use of, sensory services and how they are delivered in Scotland. It will take individuals right through from childhood into adult services. It is important that we use that opportunity not only to build on the progress that has been made but to continue to deliver the best possible services for those who have a sensory loss.

I again congratulate Lothiansound. Passing on 25 years' worth of news, information and a sense of community is a great achievement. Lothiansound is a great example of a small, local organisation that represents and supports its local community. I am delighted to hear about the benefit that many individuals have received from the service over years and the way in which MSPs recognise the value of Lothiansound as a key part of the Lothian community.

*Meeting closed at 17:27.*





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