



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 14 November 2012

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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Health and Wellbeing

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Question 1, from Paul Martin, has not been lodged, but I have received an explanation.

Bronchiectasis

2. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to provide care and support for people with bronchiectasis. (S4O-01460)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): All national health service boards in Scotland have local respiratory managed clinical networks that aim to deliver and improve respiratory services for people with all respiratory conditions. Patients with respiratory conditions sit on those networks to help to ensure that their voice is heard and that services are developed in a person-centred way.

In addition, our national advisory group on respiratory conditions is working to develop a co-ordinated approach to improving respiratory services throughout Scotland. It provides an opportunity for local managed clinical networks, patient representatives and other stakeholders to discuss issues, identify solutions and share best practice.

Jim Eadie: Does the minister agree that people with bronchiectasis, and especially those who have clinically significant bronchiectasis, are as entitled as anyone else to receive high-quality care? I invite him to meet me and my constituent Robert Hunter, who is in the gallery today, along with the clinical and patient members of the bronchiectasis interest group in Lothian, to hear about their plans to develop a comprehensive patient-friendly website that will support people with bronchiectasis in self-management of what can be a debilitating and—in some cases—devastating condition.

Michael Matheson: I assure Jim Eadie that we are very much committed to ensuring that patients with any condition—regardless of what it may be—receive the highest quality care in the NHS. That is set out clearly in the Scottish Government's equalities strategy, and we are focused on a person-centred, safe and effective healthcare system in Scotland.

We continue to advocate that we should improve respiratory services through the managed clinical networks. We are aware that NHS Lothian is progressing work on providing guidelines and a service pathway. Once that work has been completed, our plan is that the national advisory group will look at those guidelines and see how they can be dispersed across the rest of the NHS in Scotland so that we can continue to improve overall service delivery.

With regard to Jim Eadie's invitation to meet his constituent and other members of the group, I will be happy to arrange a meeting with them at some point in the future.

Telehealth (Promotion)

3. Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it promotes telehealth across the country. (S4O-01461)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government, working in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, is currently developing a national delivery plan for telehealth and telecare. I would be delighted to make that plan available to Gil Paterson when it is published next month.

Gil Paterson: Can the cabinet secretary clarify what is being done to ensure that national health service boards adopt e-health and telehealth systems for both cost and clinical benefits?

Alex Neil: The document "eHealth Strategy 2011-17" sets out the key e-health deliverables that NHS boards will take forward over the lifetime of the strategy. The strategy has six strategic aims, four of which are concerned with different clinical benefits and one of which deals specifically with realising efficiencies and savings. The Scottish Government currently provides funding of £17 million per annum to deliver those strategic aims. Activity on e-health is integrated with each health board's planning and delivery cycle, and all local and national e-health investment is subject to regular monitoring.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): On a related issue, what progress has been made in expanding the use of the internet to improve contact with general practitioners' surgeries in areas such as making appointments, access to repeat prescriptions, health records and test results?

The Presiding Officer: The question is related, cabinet secretary.

Alex Neil: Yes—and I am happy to answer it, Presiding Officer.

The Grampian area is probably the furthest ahead in telehealth in the national health service in

Scotland. We are very keen on—and working towards—building the type of connectivity between GPs and their patients to which Nanette Milne refers.

I do not see this as a purely rural issue. The person who lives at the top of a multistorey in Glasgow might find that tool as useful as would someone who lives on a remote croft in the Highlands. The strategy is national and it covers every aspect of the health service, including primary care, acute care and allied services.

NHS Lanarkshire (Appointment of Chair)

4. Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it expects to appoint the new chair of NHS Lanarkshire. (S4O-01462)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Interviews for the chair appointment to NHS Lanarkshire are due to take place on 19 November 2012. It is hoped that the successful applicant will take up their appointment some time in early December 2012.

Richard Lyle: First, I thank NHS Lanarkshire for providing my successful eye operation last Sunday. I can now see the clock in the chamber.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the appointment of a new chief executive of NHS Lanarkshire is urgent? Will he share with members his thoughts on making the appointment before the end of the year, as I understand that the application date has now passed?

Alex Neil: I will not say that Mr Lyle and I see eye to eye on this.

The chief executive post is a key post for every NHS board and I understand that NHS Lanarkshire intends to complete the selection process for the post during 6 and 7 December. Clearly, I want the new chairperson to be involved in that appointment before it is confirmed. The board remuneration committee will conduct the interviews, with the director general for health and social care acting as the external member. If the selection process identifies a suitable candidate for appointment, it is to be hoped that that person will be in position as soon as possible thereafter.

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): While we await the appointment of a new chair, the cabinet secretary has recently intervened in provision of mental health services by NHS Lanarkshire. Does he intend to intervene on reviews of acute services in all areas prior to those reviews being considered by the relevant health boards and, of course, before crucial appointments are made?

Alex Neil: There is an issue about the future of mental health services at Monklands hospital.

Because it lies in my constituency, that matter is being dealt with by my ministerial colleague, Michael Matheson.

Cancer Patients (Choice of Drugs)

5. Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government if it is satisfied with the choice of drugs available to cancer patients. (S4O-01463)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): As Ms Goldie will be aware, the Scottish Medicines Consortium independently appraises newly licensed medicines to treat all conditions including cancer, and provides advice to NHS boards on their clinical and cost-effectiveness.

The Scottish Medicines Consortium is globally respected. It has robust appraisal arrangements, and the fastest and most efficient medicine review process anywhere in the United Kingdom. I want to ensure that Scotland remains at the forefront of that, so I have asked Professor Philip Routledge, the professor of clinical pharmacology at Cardiff University, to review the current drug appraisal practices of the Scottish Medicines Consortium to consider whether there is scope for further improvement.

Parallel to that, I have asked Professor Bill Scott, the Scottish Government's chief pharmacist, to assess how the Scottish Medicines Consortium's decisions are implemented by NHS boards to ensure that there is a consistent and effective approach to prescribing policies across the country, including through individual patient treatment requests.

Annabel Goldie: As the cabinet secretary might be aware, earlier this month the skin cancer drugs Zelboraf and Yervoy were approved for use in England. That those drugs are not available to skin cancer patients in Scotland is distressing and incomprehensible. Will the cabinet secretary ask Professor Routledge and Professor Bill Scott to consider how greater flexibility might be introduced into the system in order to avoid such anomalies occurring? It is a question not just of their occurring across Scotland, but of their occurring across the border.

Alex Neil: We could go through a list of drugs for a range of conditions, some of which are available in England but not in Scotland and some of which are available in Scotland but not in England. The important point is that we should have a robust procedure that is independent of politicians—who are not qualified to decide either on the medical effectiveness or cost effectiveness of any drug. I believe that our system is very robust, although it is right for us to look at how we can improve it further.

I am keen to move away from having 14 sets of criteria—one for each board—for prescribing drugs that the SMC has approved and to have one protocol instead of 14 for individual patient treatment requests. Professor Routledge and Professor Scott will examine such issues on my behalf and will produce recommendations in early 2013.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will have received a letter from me about a constituent of mine who is paying privately for cetuximab. My constituent and his wife fully appreciate the SMC's role, although I am glad to hear that a review will take place. In the meantime, there is the issue of administrative charges plus VAT on the invoice that my constituent has received for his private treatment. Is there any way to deal with those charges?

Alex Neil: I do not want to discuss in the chamber the merits or demerits of an individual case. Christine Grahame has written to me and I will give due consideration to the points that she raises.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): On the Labour Party's behalf, I welcome the cabinet secretary's announcement. We have looked for such a review, particularly in relation to the 14 area drug and therapeutics committees, which I have been banging on about for some time.

Is it justifiable that the waiting-time clock for a patient who applies for medical treatment under the individual patient treatment request system is reset to zero, rather than stopped, under the target system?

Alex Neil: If Dr Simpson sends me details of where what he described has happened, I will be happy to investigate and to consider the matter.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): One option that is available to cancer patients—especially those who are in the latter stages of their illness—is homoeopathic drugs and medicine. Does the cabinet secretary share my concern about NHS Lothian's proposals to close the homoeopathic clinic at St John's hospital and to end homoeopathic services across the Lothians? If those proposals are implemented, they will certainly impact on patient choice, especially for people with cancer.

The Presiding Officer: The question was wide of the mark, but the cabinet secretary can answer it, if he wants to take it on.

Alex Neil: I have a detailed response to give, because I anticipated Mr Findlay's question. However, as the question was slightly out of order,

I am happy to write to him with a detailed explanation of the current status.

Neil Findlay: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The original question was about cancer drugs, and homoeopathic medicine can be part of cancer treatment. I fail to understand why my question was out of order.

The Presiding Officer: The question was out of order because I said that it was out of order. We are talking about drugs for cancer patients.

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for recognising the concern of patients across Scotland about equity of access to new treatments. I urge him to ensure that, as well as tackling the barriers to access through the area drug and therapeutics committees and through the individual patient treatment request process, the need to provide patients with new and innovative treatments is at the heart of the review. It is important to recognise that, although cancer medicines and medicines for orphan conditions and ultra-orphan conditions can be high cost, they are often low budget across the whole population.

Alex Neil: Mr Eadie has raised a valid point, and Michael Matheson and I have included in the review's remit the specific point that he made. When they are considered only on a narrow accountancy basis, some drugs look as though they are very expensive. However, if they result in much more substantial savings, particularly on hospitalisation, the overall saving to the national health service would make them worth prescribing. We want to ensure that, in the future, a broad view is taken of a new drug's costs and benefits, rather than a narrow view based on its cost effectiveness and on an accountancy basis.

Emergency Response Ambulance Cover (Smaller Orkney Isles)

6. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Scottish Ambulance Service regarding the adequacy of emergency response cover on the smaller Orkney isles. (S4O-01464)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): The Scottish Government is in regular contact with the Scottish Ambulance Service on a range of issues, including the emergency response cover that is provided to our island communities. As my predecessor conveyed to Liam McArthur back in May, the Government is actively supporting the development of service models to support those communities, through dedicated project management support this year.

I believe that people who live in the remotest areas of Scotland have the same right as the rest of us to high-quality health services, but the way in

which they can be delivered will differ from what happens in areas of urban Scotland or, indeed, on mainland Scotland.

I expect the Scottish Ambulance Service to continue to work with national health service boards, local authorities and other partners to develop innovative service models that best support patients. That must, of course, be within a framework that assures clinical governance and patient safety.

Liam McArthur: I thank the cabinet secretary for that comprehensive response. Notwithstanding what he said, I make him aware of the concerns that were raised with me recently by community leaders on the islands of Shapinsay and North Ronaldsay about continuing inadequacies in emergency medical cover. I have raised the concerns with the Scottish Ambulance Service and NHS Orkney and I understand that meetings are taking place.

Although the circumstances on the two islands differ, they both point to continuing problems with the overall service. Will the cabinet secretary use his influence to ensure that the concerns that have been raised are addressed so that my constituents who live on the smaller Orkney islands get the service that they deserve?

Alex Neil: I am more than happy to use what influence I have. It is extremely important that island communities—particularly remote island communities, but island communities in general—and rural communities have equal access to all aspects of the national health service. Meetings are taking place, as Liam McArthur mentioned, and I hope that they will lead to a satisfactory conclusion. If they do not, and if the member wants to raise with me any future issues on the matter, I will take them seriously and will proactively pursue a resolution.

Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation Procedures

8. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many transcatheter aortic valve implantation procedures have been performed in Scotland since the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing announced that these would be made routinely available. (S4O-01466)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Four transcatheter aortic valve implantation—or TAVI—procedures have been performed in Scotland to date. “TAVI” is a lot easier to say.

Jackie Baillie: I whole-heartedly agree with the cabinet secretary. I welcomed his announcement that TAVI would be routinely available in Scotland. At that point, almost 100 patients were, as I understand it, waiting for treatment. Can he tell me

whether direct referral from the patient’s cardiac consultant to Edinburgh royal infirmary is how the system works? Can he also tell me whether there is any delay or any barrier to patients receiving treatment, given that only four patients have received treatment so far?

Alex Neil: The treatments have only just begun, so it is early days. I anticipate that the numbers will increase fairly quickly in the immediate period ahead. However, I make it absolutely clear that I am closely monitoring the numbers, because if they rise—for example, in line with our hypothetical analysis of the numbers if the position south of the border is extrapolated into Scotland—there might well be a need fairly soon to make TAVI available elsewhere other than, and in addition to, in Edinburgh.

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): While we are on matters aortic, will the cabinet secretary confirm whether screening for abdominal aortic aneurysms in men over 65 is now being offered by all health boards, in accordance with the Government’s policy and timetable?

The Presiding Officer: That was wide of the mark.

Prescriptions (People with Long-term Conditions)

9. Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many people with long-term health conditions who formerly did not receive free prescriptions now do so. (S4O-01467)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): It is difficult to estimate the number of people with long-term health conditions who did not qualify for free prescriptions before charges were abolished in 2011 as we do not have a conclusive list of those long-term conditions.

Before we announced in 2007 our intention to phase out prescription charges, we looked at extending the list of long-term conditions that entitled people to free prescriptions. The long-term conditions that were not included in the list of statutory medical exemptions included cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis, asthma and HIV, and the list went on. Indeed, it went on so far that the Scottish Government concluded that, given the time that it would take to deal with the issue and the difficulties that arose from it, the fairest solution was to abolish prescription charges completely.

Marco Biagi: Clearly the situation that the minister has described is still the case in other jurisdictions within these islands. Does he agree that an exercise that attempts to decide which long-term conditions are worthy or unworthy is doomed to failure and that instead of insulting

people by classing those who receive medicines as being the deserving or undeserving ill, we must remain true to the national health service's founding principles and continue to offer free prescriptions to all?

Michael Matheson: I very much agree with Marco Biagi. I remember that at the time the medical profession expressed concern about the difficulty of compiling a list of long-term conditions; indeed, we could have had a situation in which an individual with three or four conditions would have received free prescriptions for only two of them. Moreover, the list would have to be continually updated.

I can also tell Marco Biagi that since we abolished prescription charges, more than 8,000 of his constituents in Edinburgh Central have directly benefited from the move.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I understand the minister's problem with extending the list of conditions, but I note that under the previous system people who had some conditions, including diabetes, were exempt from all prescription charges. Given his view on such disease-specific inclusions and exclusions, does the minister plan to abolish means testing for the minor ailments scheme, to which the previous system of inclusions and exclusions still applies? Moreover, dental and optical charges are not the subject of universal benefits. Will the Government continue with means testing in respect of illnesses for which some people are treated differently?

Michael Matheson: As I told Dr Simpson and his colleagues yesterday in the chamber, the Government remains committed to free prescriptions. I remind the member that he was elected last year on a manifesto that said that Scottish Labour remained committed to "no reintroduction" of prescription charges, and we as a Government remain committed to the promise that we made in our own manifesto last year to ensure that people get prescriptions free of charge.

Health Inequalities (Manual and Non-manual Workers)

10. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address any health inequalities between manual and non-manual workers. (S4O-01468)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Tackling inequalities in health is one of the Scottish Government's top priorities. We recognise that work is a key social determinant of health and that one of the best ways of reducing inequalities in health in Scotland is to ensure that as many people who can work get the opportunity

to do so. We support through NHS Health Scotland the Scottish centre for healthy working lives, which offers advice to employers on improving and promoting the health and wellbeing of their employees. Working in partnership with organisations such as the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland, the centre specifically targets small and medium-sized enterprises that have high levels of low-paid workers who are most vulnerable to inequalities in health.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the minister for his very comprehensive reply. He will be aware of recent figures showing that the health divide between manual and non-manual workers in Scotland is among the worst in Europe. What is the Scottish Government doing to support initiatives such as the British Heart Foundation's hearty lives programme, which targets health advice and assistance at people from less-well-off backgrounds?

Michael Matheson: Murdo Fraser has raised a very important point. The British Heart Foundation's campaign can have real value in closing down some of the health inequalities in Scotland. However, the member should also recognise that some of those health inequalities have been around for many decades and that it will probably take many decades to address them effectively. We have a range of measures to ensure that we address them as effectively as possible in partnership with the national health service and the third and independent sectors, where they can play a part. That said, I must caution the member that the changes that are set out in the United Kingdom's welfare reform programme are in danger of exacerbating some of those health inequalities and of undoing some of the good work that has been carried out in recent years to close the gaps.

Mental Health Services (Involvement of Families and Carers)

11. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that families and carers are involved in the policy development and service delivery of mental health services. (S4O-01469)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): In the recently published mental health strategy, work with families and carers was identified as one of the key themes that emerged from the consultation. The involvement of families and carers is important in the provision of safe and effective care and treatment.

It is vital that service providers involve service users, families and carers as an integrated part of the service design. We have developed that in two ways. First, NHS Education Scotland is working

with clinicians to develop clinical confidence in involving families and carers while maintaining the principle of patient confidentiality. Secondly, we are working with VOX—Voices of Experience—to engage service users in exploring how families and carers can be involved in care and treatment, while recognising that some people do not want their family to be involved.

Roderick Campbell: Does the minister agree that one way forward is to work with service users, their families and carers to develop home treatment centres, such as crisis houses, to offer support to help to resolve a severe mental health crisis in a residential rather than hospital setting—a service that is as yet unavailable in NHS Fife?

Michael Matheson: The member has raised an important point. One way in which we can make progress in how we deliver mental health services in Scotland is by being much more responsive to individuals who present themselves as being in crisis or in distress.

We are taking forward work in the NHS Tayside area to ensure that agencies are much better co-ordinated in their response to individuals who present in those circumstances and that, when those agencies do respond, they follow it up appropriately to give the individual the greatest opportunity to take benefit from the services that those agencies offer.

The use of crisis houses is an approach that could lend itself to addressing that issue. It has been highlighted in the mental health strategy as an area in which I wish further progress to be made.

NHS Lanarkshire (Meetings)

12. Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it will next meet NHS Lanarkshire and what will be discussed. (S4O-01470)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): I will meet NHS Lanarkshire in a ministerial capacity on 14 January 2013, at the next meeting of NHS chairs, when we will discuss matters of importance to the people of Lanarkshire.

Christina McKelvie: The cabinet secretary will be aware that NHS Lanarkshire recently signed a contract with Atos Healthcare to deliver the personal independence payments assessment for sick and disabled people on benefits without seeing the contract first. Given the reported actions of Atos and how it carries out its work, I find that deeply disturbing.

Will the cabinet secretary assure me that in the light of the Westminster inquiry into Atos and its

questionable assessment practices—which my Larkhall constituent Brian McArdle was subjected to and which his family believe were linked to his death—he will monitor closely any public body contracted with Atos, especially when the terms of the contract are not known at the time of signing?

Alex Neil: I will monitor that situation closely. I want to do two things in particular. First, I want to be absolutely sure that the contract does not in any way damage the reputation of the national health service in Scotland. Secondly, I want to ensure that no resources of the national health service are diverted into that activity.

In relation to the contract, I am advised by NHS Lanarkshire that it is not normal practice for full contracts to be circulated to NHS board members. However, any board member can request a copy of the full contract. What is important is that board members are in receipt of the pertinent facts so that they can come to an informed decision.

I am beginning a round of bilateral meetings with the non-executive directors of all health boards. When I meet the non-executive directors of the Lanarkshire health board, I will want to assure myself that any contractual procedures within that health board are sufficiently robust. The same applies to all the other health boards.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I would like to tease that out. Is it common or good practice for the terms of the contract for an agency directly contracted by the NHS not to be known before it is signed?

Alex Neil: It has been standard practice. Indeed, if the NHS board had seen the terms of the private finance initiative contracts that were signed in Lanarkshire, I would hope that they would have never been signed, because they are now costing NHS Lanarkshire £45 million a year.

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): In his conversations with NHS Lanarkshire, will the cabinet secretary, on behalf of men aged 65 and over, establish whether abdominal aortic aneurysm screening is now being offered routinely in accordance with the Government's policy and timetable? [*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer: That was the clever way of asking the question that Mr Carlaw should have used earlier.

Alex Neil: I think that it is only fair that Jackson Carlaw perhaps declares an interest in the question, given the age range being discussed. However, I am more than happy to double-check the situation and write to Mr Carlaw as quickly as possible to put his mind at rest.

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): With NHS Lanarkshire's performance against the accident and emergency four-hour

waiting times standard down in August of this year and continuing to worsen, and with eight-hour and 12-hour waits still a persistent problem, will the cabinet secretary ensure that he raises the issue with NHS Lanarkshire and looks again at the staffing situation for the provision of minor injuries services?

Alex Neil: We are in constant contact with NHS Lanarkshire on that point, and we are working with it to ensure that the targets are met in future. I have been reassured both by NHS Lanarkshire and by my department, which has looked at the situation, that any problem with meeting the target is not related in any way to staff shortages. However, I should point out that, had the plans of the then Scottish Executive—under Labour and the Liberal Democrats—to close the accident and emergency department in Monklands gone ahead, the situation would have been much worse than it is at the present time.

Vitamin D (Health Benefits)

13. Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what research is being conducted on the health benefits of vitamin D. (S4O-01471)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition is in the process of reviewing all relevant scientific literature on vitamin D as part of its review of the current vitamin D recommendations. The review will consider a wide range of health outcomes associated with vitamin D status, and its findings will be published in late 2014.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the minister for his answer and look forward to the outcome of that review. Taking into account the potential role for vitamin D in gaining a better understanding of multiple sclerosis and of its particularly high incidence in Scotland, will the minister undertake to explore whether European funding may be available to underpin much-needed further research?

Michael Matheson: I am aware that there is research linking vitamin D to a number of illnesses, including multiple sclerosis. My understanding is that, as part of its review, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition is examining all currently available and emerging research linking vitamin D to multiple sclerosis. A key part of the review will be to identify whether there are any gaps in the research and, if there are, what further research may be required.

I can assure the member that, once the review has been completed, we will consider both how best to take forward any recommendations that it may contain and whether there is any need for further research on the link with MS.

NHS Ayrshire and Arran (Patient Care)

14. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with NHS Ayrshire and Arran regarding patient care. (S4O-01472)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Ministers and Scottish Government officials regularly discuss matters of local importance such as patient care with all NHS boards, including NHS Ayrshire and Arran.

John Scott: I thank the cabinet secretary for his full answer. He will be aware of recent concerns about the number of cancelled appointments and the dissemination of information to staff following critical incidents during the bedding in of the patient management system in NHS Ayrshire and Arran. Can he tell Parliament whether those matters have now all been resolved to his satisfaction?

Alex Neil: One of the first meetings that I requested when I was appointed to the post of cabinet secretary was with the chief executive of NHS Ayrshire and Arran to discuss most of the issues that Mr Scott has raised in a very reasonable fashion. I have made it absolutely clear to the chief executive—and I will repeat this when I take part in the NHS Ayrshire and Arran board review in early December—that I expect a reasonable resolution to all those issues.

I have of course received additional representations, and I believe that some of those matters may feature in a forthcoming “Panorama” programme. If any new information comes forward, I will want to ensure that all the matters are properly addressed not only to my satisfaction but, more importantly, to the satisfaction of the patients and populace of Ayrshire and Arran.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Recently, ward 3F of the medical high-dependency unit at university hospital Crosshouse won the *Nursing Times* 2012 award for emergency and critical care; the orthopaedic rapid-recovery team at the same hospital won the top team award at the Scottish health awards 2012; and the radiographer-led reporting team for NHS Ayrshire and Arran won team of the year from the Scottish council of the Society of Radiographers. Does the cabinet secretary agree that Ayrshire and Arran health board continues to carry out outstanding work on behalf of patients?

Alex Neil: Absolutely. Where there are problems, we should always put them into the context of the excellent work that is going on. I presented the awards at the Scottish health awards ceremony this year. I was delighted to do so and to celebrate the tremendous work that is going on, not just throughout the Ayrshire and Arran area but throughout the national health

service in Scotland. This morning, I visited the new laboratory at the Southern general hospital in Glasgow, which will be another exemplar of excellence—not just in the national health service in Scotland, as it is one of the leading-edge laboratories in Europe.

Rural General Practitioner Surgeries (Closure)

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

To ask the Scottish Government what recent assessment it has made of the impact of the closure of rural general practitioner surgeries. (S4O-01474)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): National health service boards have a statutory obligation to provide, and are accountable for, the services that they consider necessary to meet all reasonable requirements for their areas. I am particularly aware of the issues concerning the remote and rural areas of Scotland, and my officials are in regular contact with members of the Dewar committee, among others. That is why I have recently endorsed the proposal for a specific programme of work to be taken forward by NHS Highland to develop and test a model or models for the delivery of care in the remote areas of Scotland.

Liz Smith: It is interesting to hear about the pilot in NHS Highland. Is it the Scottish Government's expectation that more needs to be done not only to ensure that there is good cover but to publicise the GP surgeries that are open and the hours that they are working?

Alex Neil: I hope that much of that is being done already in every area but, where it is not being done and if members want to draw it to my attention, I will certainly exert what influence I have to ensure that it is done. In parts of rural Scotland, there is undoubtedly a major problem with recruiting GPs and consultants in the acute sector. I am actively considering how we can do more to ensure that the vacancies are filled, and filled timeously.

In Vitro Fertilisation Treatment Waiting Times (NHS Forth Valley)

17. Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with NHS Forth Valley regarding waiting times for in vitro fertilisation treatment. (S4O-01475)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The issue of long waiting times for IVF treatment was specifically raised at NHS Forth Valley's annual review in 2011. Since then, the board has committed to funding an additional 28 cycles on an on-going basis, and waiting times have reduced from four to three years.

As the member will be aware, not only has the Scottish Government committed to a 12-month waiting time for IVF, but we have committed £12 million over three years to support that and to ensure, for the first time ever in Scotland, a maximum wait of 12 months for eligible patients by 31 March 2015, regardless of where they live. In the past 12 months, the Scottish Government has been involved in on-going dialogue with all NHS boards on the provision of IVF treatment. All NHS boards will be asked to produce robust implementation plans detailing how they will reach the 12-month waiting time.

Bruce Crawford: I have constituents in the Forth Valley health board area who have been trying to conceive their first child for three years. They were recently referred to Dundee for IVF treatment and were told that the waiting list is four years. They have also been told—perhaps erroneously, in the light of what the minister has said—that if the first cycle of IVF treatment is unsuccessful, they will return to the end of the waiting list. That means that some couples could wait up to eight years for a second treatment. In those circumstances, what advice should I give to my constituents to aid them in securing earlier IVF treatment?

Michael Matheson: The practice of NHS boards throughout Scotland is for couples with unexplained infertility to try to conceive naturally for three years before being referred for IVF, although couples will receive some investigations during that period. That practice is followed for clinical reasons, as couples with unexplained infertility are more likely to conceive naturally in the first two to three years of trying to conceive than they are with IVF. However, the national fertility group is reviewing that particular criterion.

Returning patients to the bottom of the waiting list for a second, fresh cycle of IVF treatment when waiting times are very long is not acceptable. As I have just set out, funding from the Scottish Government will, over the next two years, reduce waiting times throughout Scotland to 12 months and ensure that patients do not have unacceptably long waits for cycles of IVF. NHS Forth Valley has been making progress, and I expect it to make further progress so that, by early next year, the waiting time will be down from three years to two years.

Further Education

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-04787, in the name of Liz Smith, on education. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons now. I advise all members at the outset that time is extremely tight today, so we will hold you to your time. Regrettably, some members who wish to take part in the debate will be unable to do so. I ask for the co-operation of all members.

I call Liz Smith to speak to and move the motion. Ms Smith, you have 14 minutes.

14:41

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Last Friday, several members were privileged to attend the Scottish Council for Development and Industry awards dinner at the magnificent new Emirates arena in Glasgow, at which Dr Madeleine Albright, the former United States Secretary of State, was the guest speaker. It was a remarkable speech from a remarkable woman. Asked to set out the challenges ahead and how she thought Scottish businesses and industry should respond, she said that understanding globalisation is the key and no more so than in the sphere of education. We must, she said, question what we are training our young people for and why. Her words provide a convenient backdrop to the debate on widening access to our colleges and why we, on this side of the chamber, contend that that overall ambition is being seriously compromised by the misplaced focus of Scottish Government policy.

The debate—which I hope will soon be followed by another debate about widening access to universities—will examine the crucial role that our colleges can play in a fast-changing global economy to help Scotland to stay ahead of the game in the manner suggested by Dr Albright. Notwithstanding our acceptance of the very tight financial constraints affecting many economies, we urge the Scottish Government to refocus its budget priorities and tackle head-on the criticism that has been levelled at the Government from so many sources in education, business and industry.

I take up specifically the comment from Jeremy Peat of the David Hume Institute that

“change must not be at the cost of the crucial role the colleges play in providing opportunities to many from diverse parts of society”.

In this chamber and in several portfolio and cross-party committees, we have been reminded many times by experts in the sector that further education reaches parts of the population that other educational institutions do not and that it has an increasing reputation for inspiring those groups

towards more meaningful employment, including a greater interest in successful entrepreneurial activity.

The role of our colleges is clear. So, too, is the Scottish Conservatives' respect for all the staff and students who are involved. First, in educational terms, it is clear that our colleges want to move away from an outdated system in which institutions matter more than people. They want to move away from being the institutions that the public often labelled—simplistically—as being in between schools and universities. They want to ensure that their provision of education is responsive to the needs of their local economies as well as to the needs of the national economy, to which they have contributed to the tune of 1 per cent of gross domestic product over eight years. They want better articulation—a point that will be developed by my colleague Mary Scanlon—and they want to provide greater flexibility so that college education really is open to a wider cross-section of society. It is on that point that I want to dwell because, in my book, it is that greater flexibility that matters so much to the modern economy and which provides colleges with their important social function to widen access and reduce inequalities.

Colleges have come a long way in recent years in making themselves more responsive to the needs of a much more diverse working population; to the needs of mature, part-time and disabled students; to the needs of women students with families; to the needs of younger students from groups for whom, in days past, a college education would have been only a pipe dream; and to the needs of the ethnic minority groups who were, at one time, completely left behind.

We must not forget the fact that out of the 300,000 or so total learners at college, about 75,000 are full time, which clearly means that the majority are part time. Fifty-four per cent of college students are women; the comparable figure in secondary schools is 49 per cent. Only 38 per cent of college students are in the 16 to 24-year-old age group, which many people tend to think of as the traditional student age, and 25 per cent come from the more deprived communities.

John Henderson, chief executive of Scotland's Colleges, said:

“One of the enormous strengths of our college system is its ability to cater for a diverse range of students at different times in their lives.”

He went on to say that the policy should reflect that, and that the allocation of Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council money must ensure that no one group is disadvantaged when it comes to aspiring to a college education. He pointed out that per head spending in further education is traditionally lower than it is in higher

education and secondary education, and that the college sector, which derives a much greater percentage of its funding from the public purse is, obviously, more susceptible to budget cuts.

As members know, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has announced that he is keen on college audits. Let me assist him with that. First—notwithstanding the fact that there are many people, including many members of the Education and Culture Committee and its recent witnesses, who have found it exceedingly difficult to pick their way through the unintelligibility of some of the data that has been presented to us as we scrutinise the current budget—is the issue of the overall college budget spend.

We acknowledge that there are cuts to the overall Scottish budget and that, by definition, the Scottish Government has to make cuts—we accept that, and we acknowledge that some of those decisions are difficult. However, let us be clear: the decisions about where priority spending should be within Scottish education are entirely a matter for the Scottish Government. The college sector, many businesses across Scotland and the Opposition parties have all combined to send a strong message to the Scottish Government that it is unacceptable that our colleges have been the target of such significant cuts. As the Labour Party amendment rightly points out, those cuts mean that college funding over the next three years is set to be reduced by a quarter—that was central to the Audit Scotland report and its concerns that such cuts present major challenges to the entire sector.

Most important, there has been a disproportionate cut to teaching budgets—the very budgets that the college sector tells us make the greatest difference to the quality of coursework that is on offer in our colleges. That means, despite a £24 million transfer from the employability fund to colleges—we are waiting to hear the detail of that—there will be a 15.8 per cent cut to teaching budgets in academic year 2012-13 compared with 2010-11, which means that £73 million will be lost. We know that 2,300 jobs have been lost in the sector since 2009-10 and that some college courses have been cut and some have disappeared altogether. We are being told by many students and staff that class sizes are likely to grow in order to cope, which is not the best advert for a sector that has worked so hard to improve standards and which is striving to become more flexible, not less. It is not surprising that the sector now has a major bone of contention with the Scottish Government because it does not believe that that is any of its fault.

Secondly, on the question of participation, we know that the number of female learners has declined by more than 26 per cent since academic

year 2006-07, and, although some of that can be explained by demographic changes, that is by no means the whole story. Worse still, when we compare that with what has happened to male student numbers, we find that it is twice that rate of decline. Much of the reason for that is the fact that the Scottish Government has chosen to prioritise full-time courses for younger students because of the youth unemployment situation. Indeed, the First Minister said in the chamber last week that that was the priority because full-time places are more likely to lead to jobs. That is perhaps not the best message that the First Minister has ever sent out.

We know that women students are much more likely to want to take up evening or weekend courses, which are structured to suit the changing demands of women and their families, and which are the very kind of courses that were designed to encourage more women to take up college places so that they could enter the labour market.

At this point, I want to mention the issue of mobility. One of the huge advantages of colleges has been their local dimension and their ability to provide for those who do not have the resources to travel longer distances. That is particularly true of women who have busy lives with their families. How sad it would be if we saw a reversal of the good work in that area.

So far, the Scottish Government has not come back with many public rebuttals, except to say that it has laid on more childcare facilities. It has, but that will not be much good if the college places are not there in the first place.

What do we make of the situation for those students for whom college education was previously only a pipe dream, who clearly form a large part of the 16-to-19 initiative that the Scottish Government claims is a priority and for whom colleges such as John Wheatley College have been doing excellent work? They are the very students who need greater support, whether through one-to-one or small-group attention, or through help with their coursework, which they are often less able to do on their own.

It is my firm understanding that one of the key rationales behind regionalisation was to ensure that there was greater scope for flexibility so that diverse needs would be catered for. I have heard the cabinet secretary say several times that he wants college reform to remove what he describes as the dreadful Thatcherite structures that led to far too much autonomy and overlap of course provision. If his plans to withdraw greater autonomy mean that too many courses are shut down, it is little wonder that he is now on the receiving end of the sharpest criticism. Week by week, we are getting evidence that there are problems. At Carnegie College, for example, three

courses—one of which was at higher national diploma level—have gone and, at Inverness College, there are now not enough supervisors to cope with some technical course provision, so how on earth can the Scottish Government argue that its policies are widening access? I do not understand the Government's reason for that approach, and I suggest that the colleges—which have warned the Government time after time of the folly of its position—do not, either.

On that note, over the past 24 hours, we have seen extraordinarily heated exchanges between a college chair—who has now resigned—and the cabinet secretary. None of us in the chamber, except the cabinet secretary, is in a position to know the full facts about the management of the meeting in question and—perhaps even more important—about what communications have taken place. However, given the claims and counterclaims that now exist, which I suggest have been around for some time in the sector, about allegations of cultural bullying from the cabinet secretary, I suggest that there is now a case to answer and that the cabinet secretary should be called before the Education and Culture Committee.

I heard the committee's convener say this morning that he does not believe that there is any need for that, but I think that there are many members who beg to differ. If I may say so, I do not consider it appropriate for the convener of any parliamentary committee—who may, after all, have to act as arbiter on such a matter—to be judge and jury at the same time. Any convener's first responsibility is to his or her committee. That is even more important when there is a majority Government.

As far as I am concerned, the facts speak for themselves—

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): What facts?

Liz Smith: There are plenty of facts, and I have given members quite a lot of them.

This is a very serious matter. I suggest that all the Opposition parties and many parts of Scotland recognise that. Above all, the college sector is crying out for help because there are misplaced priorities. The Government must acknowledge that.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the significant economic and social benefits of extending further education opportunities to a wider cross-section of society; applauds the initiatives of Scotland's colleges to put in place policies that will widen access at the same time as raising academic achievement; deplores the fact that these initiatives are being heavily compromised by the Scottish Government's extensive cuts to college budgets, and calls on the Scottish

Government to refocus its budget priorities to redress this situation at a time when youth unemployment in Scotland is at a particularly high level.

14:55

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): Apart from the last minute of the speech by Liz Smith, I commend her for bringing the motion to the chamber. The measured tone in which she addressed the issue was entirely appropriate. I have profound differences with her on the issue, which I will outline, along with the strong reasons why we needed reform in the sector and the strong reasons why that reform is producing and will produce the results that we need. I regret that Liz Smith lapsed into the negativity that she did in her last minute.

I expect a great deal of negativity from Labour members—indeed, I woke up this morning to hear some extraordinary negativity on the radio and to read it in the newspapers. An astonishing accusation was made. I do not know whether members know this, but according to Claire Baker it is a Scottish Government minister who is responsible for the ash dieback disease. I have looked it up and I discover that it is actually caused by a fungus on fruited bodies, that infected trees die and that it is spread on clothing, on footwear or by vehicles from Europe. However, according to Labour it is the Scottish National Party's fault.

Let us focus on the realities of college funding and delivery and then we might make progress, because there is a debate to be had. I believe that the college sector should deliver for Scotland—the college sector that we inherited did not deliver for Scotland. The college sector failed five groups of people and it is important to recognise that. First, it failed employers because the outcomes of the courses were not focused on employment. There were, bluntly, too many hobby courses and far too few courses were focused on employment.

The sector failed those who worked in the college sector because the balkanisation of the sector, with 42 different sets of terms and conditions, allowed division. It requires a single set of terms and conditions. It failed local authorities that wanted to join up with the college sector and were not allowed to do so—indeed, in some areas they were not allowed to do so by a statute that was put in place in 1992. It failed communities because many of the college boards were self-perpetuating. There was no fresh blood in them and those boards were not reflective of the wider communities.

Finally—most important of all—the sector failed students. It was not meeting the objectives that students had; it was not providing the learner

journey that they needed; it was not producing clear progression routes; and it was not producing better links to schools, universities and employers.

We needed a reform that produced colleges of scale and efficiency, focusing on the needs of the economy. That is what I said a year ago when I introduced the reform process, that is what we are focused on now and that is what we have had overwhelming support for in the college sector.

I find it a surprising argument from a Conservative to say that we should have continued with a sector in which there was clear evidence of duplication and of inefficiency and waste. That is the argument that I have heard, and it is utterly wrong.

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

Michael Russell: No. I want to make progress, Mr Findlay, please.

The sector could perform better and it will perform better. It can have confident learners leaving college with the right qualifications. We need, and we have had already, a 9 per cent increase in full-time learners at advanced level. We have more intensive full-time courses delivering high-level skills. Completion rates are now rising—they were unacceptably low—because we have undertaken these reforms and we are in the process of creating one of the most responsive college sectors in the world. Scotland is a hotbed—

Liz Smith rose—

Michael Russell: One moment, please.

Scotland is a hotbed of potential and talent and the changes will allow that talent to thrive.

I accept that access is of key importance and I welcome scrutiny on access. Colleges are open to all, regardless of background, as indeed is the whole of Scottish education—although proposals from the Tories and indeed from Labour would stop that happening, as we know from evidence south of the border.

We have kept the student support budget at a record £95.6 million for the second year running.

Neil Findlay: The cabinet secretary talks about widening access. What is the situation for adult learners with learning difficulties who are trying to access college? How many courses have gone?

Michael Russell: I have made it clear in my discussions with the sector, as has the Scottish funding council, that we want to ensure that the widest range of students is retained, and the outcome agreements can take care of that. I will come on to that in a moment.

We have kept the student support budget at a record level. Unfortunately, access has been subjected to meaningless statements and baseless assertions. Saying that there is no room for young people in Scottish education is a false message to them, but that message is going out from some members. I will say why.

Let us start with headcount. We must understand that headcount statistics are volatile. Headcount is a very poor measure. It fluctuates, depending not on funding, but on how colleges spread teaching activity because of their local focus. The most accurate measure is and always has been full-time equivalent student numbers. Unlike in universities or schools, around three quarters of college students were, until recently, part time. If we consider full-time equivalent numbers expressed in that way, we have maintained student numbers. We have also maintained the volume of teaching.

The fixation on headcount has another problem, as it says that quality is not relevant, and job prospects and key employment skills are not the priority—rather, it is just about keeping numbers high. That is a never-mind-the-quality-feel-the-width approach. My opponents appear unconcerned about the type of head that is counted. They put together someone on an intensive full-time engineering course, which is one head, and someone on a short recreational course, which is another head. A college's value cannot be determined by the speed with which it wheels large numbers in and large numbers out. We have to end that merry-go-round. That is what employers and others have told me, and that is what we are trying to do.

Liz Smith: I do not in any way dispute the complexity of much of the analysis when it comes to college spend. However, does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that it has been seriously compromised this year, and that that has been reflected by witnesses at the Education and Culture Committee, because there is no consistency in how we measure the figures?

Michael Russell: No, I do not accept that. I said to Liz Smith in the committee when she asked me that question that the figures are quite clear on where we are. Where we are is quite clear from the baseline figures, and the additional money that we have added in every single year is quite clear. We are going through a complex process of change, but we are focused on getting the maximum value for public money. I would have thought that we would have support for that activity across the chamber.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I listened to what the cabinet secretary said in response to Neil Findlay and to the Conservatives.

The Auditor General for Scotland's report from last month said:

"The expected benefits and costs of the Scottish Government's reform plans are unclear".

The Government has not published a quantified assessment of the costs of reforms or the expected benefits. If the Auditor General does not know the costs or expected benefits and an assessment has not been published, how does the cabinet secretary expect us to know them?

Michael Russell: I am very fond of Mary Scanlon, but she really should have been at the meeting at which that matter was discussed. It was quite clear that we are taking forward the answers to those very questions, as the sector is. There are real answers to those questions in the outcome agreement. If Mary Scanlon would like to meet me to discuss the college sector, I would be delighted to discuss that with her.

We cannot focus on "facts" that are not true or misleading statistics, but we can focus on what colleges are doing. That is why the outcome agreements are so important. We are not only putting in place a reformed sector; we are putting in place a very clear understanding of what that sector does. It delivers for the whole of Scotland. The message to young people is that opportunity exists for them. Young people have many opportunities, and young people are in the opportunities for all scheme.

I want to conclude on that issue, as it is very significant. The debate is being handled as if colleges are the only thing for young people across Scotland. That is another fallacy that is being peddled. I am very proud of the fact that the Government has put in place the opportunities for all scheme, which says that every young person will have a job, a place in education or a place in training. That gives the lie to almost everything that we will hear from Opposition parties this afternoon.

There is an opportunity for every young person. That has never been guaranteed in Scotland before. We have made the offer of an opportunity for every young person during the worst economic crisis in living memory and the cuts that Labour started and Liberals and the Tories have progressed. We are delivering it in a variety of ways through Skills Development Scotland and the colleges, and through a reformed college sector, which is the sector that will deliver for the future of Scotland—that is absolutely essential.

During the process of the past year, I had hoped that people would read the documentation, look at what is taking place, see the enthusiasm in the sector for constructive change and go with that change. Regrettably and unfortunately, all that the Opposition parties can do is resist change. That is

true conservatism from the Conservatives and true conservatism, as ever, from Labour in Scotland. The reality is that we are delivering the change that is needed in Scotland. I hope that members might one day wake up and back that.

I move amendment S4M-04787.2, to leave out from "extending" to end and insert:

"the Scottish Government's proposals for the reform of a college sector that has been neglected for far too long by previous administrations; welcomes in particular the regionalisation of the sector, leading to the creation of new institutions of significant scale, reputation and efficiency that are better able to identify and address the skills needs of the regional economy, and further recognises the guarantee, unique in these islands, that the Scottish Government has given to every 16 to 19-year-old not already in education, employment or training, of an offer of a place in learning or training."

15:05

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): It is just not true that members in this chamber are opposed to change. Scottish Labour does welcome some of the changes that are being discussed for Scotland's colleges, and there is undoubtedly an argument for ensuring that Scotland's colleges are fit for the challenges of the 21st century. However, at issue is how we bring about change and whether we dictate and impose, or discuss and move forward together. What we have seen from the cabinet secretary and the Government is dictation, dictatorship, imposition and a failure to discuss and to take people with them. *[Interruption.]*

The SNP members can sit and name call and catcall, but they cannot deny—

Michael Russell: That is what you do.

Hugh Henry: Excuse me, but I said nothing during the cabinet secretary's speech, although others may have done so. However, if SNP members want to shout and bawl because they know that the cabinet secretary is on dodgy ground, that is fine.

The fact is that Scotland's colleges can and should improve—there is no doubt about that. However, it is wrong to suggest that everything that went before was, as the cabinet secretary seemed to suggest, a failure. Many thousands of people across Scotland have benefited from the excellence that is delivered by Scotland's colleges, including some people in this chamber, whose lives have been transformed by those colleges. It is therefore wrong to rubbish the past simply to try to persuade for the future.

If there was ever a time when we needed colleges, it is surely now, more than ever before, when there is rising unemployment and the number of unemployed young people is at nearly

100,000. The latest statistics show that Scottish unemployment has risen by 4,000 from the previous quarter, while United Kingdom unemployment fell. They show that employment has fallen by 27,000 from the previous quarter, while UK employment rose, and that youth unemployment rose sharply over the previous quarter, increasing by 10,000 among 16 to 24-year-olds. Now, more than ever, we need Scotland's colleges for our young people.

However, we also need them for the workers who are facing redundancy at Hall's of Broxburn and for the workers in Glasgow, East Kilbride and across Scotland who have to retrain and to rethink their future. That is why we need Scotland's colleges and why we need to build on the excellence that they deliver.

We know that Scotland's colleges have a fantastic record in reaching out and helping people who would otherwise be marginalised in Scottish education and, indeed, in Scottish life. Colleges can give people chances that they would otherwise never have. How can we expect our colleges to transform and to rise to those challenges when they face unprecedented cuts in their budgets? People talk about smoke and mirrors and about lies, dammed lies and statistics, but what we have heard from this cabinet secretary is an absolute failure to face up to the facts and to admit, for once, that he is wrong and that Audit Scotland is right. Is he trying to suggest to members that Audit Scotland—a body that has the respect of just about every section of Scottish public life—does not know what it is talking about and does not know the true facts? Audit Scotland said that there is a 24 per cent cut over the spending review period. That is the reality.

How can colleges cope when budgets are falling, they have fewer staff, courses are being cut and there are fewer places? We know that there are waiting lists. The cabinet secretary had the chance to accept that during parliamentary questions on education and lifelong learning, when he was asked three times to face up to the issue, but he said:

"the concept of waiting lists ... is utterly false."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2012; c 12504.]

Yet again, Scotland's colleges are completely wrong and he is completely right.

The fact is that there are waiting lists. If the concept is utterly false, why is there an audit of something that is utterly false? That is bizarre. We still do not know who is carrying out the audit or what the terms of reference are. We do not know what is being done or how. Yet again, the cabinet secretary is hiding the facts and the process and is trying to distort and confuse the issue. The cabinet secretary's premise is based on that philosophy.

I do not have time to go into the detail of what happened at Stow College. It is unfortunate that the incident has painted the cabinet secretary in a bad light. He used unacceptable tactics to get his way; he tried to intimidate when discussion would have been far better. The meeting in question was not private. I googled it this afternoon and was able to get the details of everything that the cabinet secretary said. I was able to get the details of everyone who spoke and the answers that they were given. I know exactly what went on during the meeting. It was no secret meeting. Whether the man was right or wrong to record it, the response from the cabinet secretary has been shameful. He has abused his position and has let himself and Parliament down by his actions.

I move amendment S4M-04787.1, to insert at end:

" , and notes the recent Audit Scotland report that states that college funding is set to be reduced by a quarter over the next three years and that there are major challenges ahead."

15:12

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in a debate on the important subject of further education.

I will start with facts about what is happening in Scotland. The Scottish Government is delivering the best student support package in the UK. Students in Scotland who are 18 or over can apply for a maintenance bursary of up to £89.07 per week, and from next year the Scottish Government is ensuring that the most vulnerable students will be helped, by providing a minimum income of £7,250 per year in student support.

The Scottish Government has retained the education maintenance allowance, which has been scrapped down south. Liam Burns, the president of the National Union of Students, said of the UK Government changes to EMA:

"Further cutting support for the poorest college students, at a time when job and study opportunities are few and far between, is a massive mistake. Many in the Government claim EMA was simply an unnecessary incentive. It was nothing of the sort. Many of the poorest students rely on small regular payments to cover costs like travel, food and books that allow them to stay in education and improve their life chances. EMA represented a lifeline for the poorest students."

I agree with Liam Burns. EMA is a valued and valuable support mechanism, but the Tory-Lib Dem coalition scrapped it.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): The member said that he agrees with Liam Burns. What did Liam Burns have to say about the college cuts that the Scottish Government is imposing?

Stewart Maxwell: I presume that because Gavin Brown is asking the question he does not know what Liam Burns said about the college cuts. The Education and Culture Committee will produce a fair, balanced and robust report on the Government's budget, which will take account of all the evidence that we received.

In 2014-15, further education spending in Scotland will be about £91 per head, compared with around £62 per head in England. There is a huge gap; Scotland will spend about a third more per head than will be spent down south.

John Henderson, the chief executive of Scotland's Colleges, indicated his support for the student support package that the Scottish Government is introducing. He said:

"This is a hugely positive step from the Scottish Government. The 40,000 students studying at higher education level in colleges across Scotland will benefit greatly from this support package, and I am sure it will encourage more students from low-income backgrounds to think about signing up to a higher education course."

I remind members of the Opposition parties in the chamber that the SNP is the only major party in Scotland never to have voted for tuition fees. The Labour Party has been all over the place on that issue, but it now has a clear position; it is telling the young people of Scotland and their families that we cannot afford free education but can afford to spend hundreds of millions of pounds on weapons of mass destruction. That is the Labour Party position, and it is appalling.

Although I applaud the fact that the Tories have a stated aim of extending further education opportunities to a wider cross-section of society, it is hard to see how the introduction of tuition fees, which have been imposed on students in England by the coalition, could foster such an aim.

University and College Admissions Service figures show that Scotland is the only part of the UK in which there has been a rise in university and college admissions. Admissions have gone up a little bit in Scotland, but they have gone down by almost 8 per cent in England in one year. While that has been going on down south, the SNP Government has been investing some £4.7 billion in colleges—40 per cent more than during the two terms of the previous Administration—in the face of swingeing cuts from Westminster. In contrast, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition is cutting the budget for further education by £1.1 billion over the spending review period. It has scrapped the education maintenance allowance, which—as I mentioned earlier—provides support to the poorest students, and students in England have to pay tuition fees.

Much has been said about the £9,000 fees at some English universities, but not much has been

said about the fees for college courses, so I will put that right. Let us look at what is happening to full-time college students in England. There are 187 further education colleges with access agreements that are funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England that have full-time undergraduate provision. The average student fee at further education colleges south of the border in 2013-14 will be an estimated £6,429.

Liz Smith: Will Stewart Maxwell take an intervention?

Stewart Maxwell: I will just finish this point, and then I will let Liz Smith in.

For further education colleges with access agreements, the average fee for a full-time student from 2013-14 is estimated to be £6,995, up from £6,836 in 2012-13. Figures from the Office for Fair Access show that, for the academic year 2013-14, 28 further education colleges south of the border have already been given permission to charge fees of more than £6,000 per year for full-time students and £4,500 per year for part-time students. How does that equate to fair access for students across the UK? In Scotland, students pay no fees, but instead concentrate on acquiring education, not debt.

Liz Smith: There are cuts, as I said in my speech. What is at issue is that the Scottish Government's priorities in Scotland, for which it is entirely responsible, are misplaced because colleges are having to bear the brunt. Does Stewart Maxwell accept that?

Stewart Maxwell: No, I do not accept that. I fail to understand what Liz Smith would cut instead. Is she making it clear that she would introduce the tuition fees that I just mentioned for both university and college students? If that is the Conservative position, I am glad that she has made it clear.

The Scottish Government recognises that people and the skills that they acquire are Scotland's most valuable resource. That is why the Government has ensured that access to education is based on the ability to learn, and not—as is increasingly the case in England and Wales—the ability to pay.

The Tories' attack on the Scottish Government is without credibility, and it is time that the Opposition parties in the chamber rallied round to help to protect Scotland's young people from the onslaught of austerity that is coming from the UK Government.

15:18

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Liz Smith for bringing the debate to the chamber. I am pleased to have the opportunity to represent the concerns of many students in Glasgow about

funding and support for access to further education.

For so many young people, a college education is both an opportunity to develop key life skills and a route into employment. With one in four young people out of work, it is important that we offer college courses that are relevant to their future working lives and access routes that enable people from all backgrounds to achieve their educational goals.

Tragically, the Scottish Government is making it harder for young people to progress into further education by cutting college budgets, and it is penalising those—such as mothers and young carers—who require more flexible part-time studies by charging them to access those courses.

The recent Audit Scotland report noted a 24 per cent cut in college budgets over the spending review period, and it is simply disingenuous of the cabinet secretary to claim that that will result in anything but fewer places for applicants from the most disadvantaged of backgrounds.

Only a few weeks ago, the cabinet secretary claimed that there were no waiting lists for college places in Scotland. He boasted that that information did not exist because there were still spaces left for applicants to further education. Only a week later, *The Herald* was able to establish that more than 21,000 individuals are on waiting lists and, subsequently, are without a place on a course of their choice.

Michael Russell: I do not recognise the allegation that I said that there was no waiting list. I said that waiting list figures could not be relied on because they do not tell us—[*Interruption.*] If I could continue, Presiding Officer—the figures do not reflect what is taking place.

The member should also note that *The Herald* said that the 21,000 figure could not be relied on, so she should be cautious about using it. That is in *The Herald* story.

Anne McTaggart: If the cabinet secretary is saying that the figure of more than 21,000 is not to be relied on, he should note that the specific figure in the article was 21,548. The cabinet secretary also said that

“the concept of waiting lists ... is utterly false.”—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2012; c 12504.]

Those are the cabinet secretary's words.

Michael Russell: It is. [*Interruption.*]

Anne McTaggart: I will continue, Presiding Officer.

This is the reality of the Scottish Government's savage cuts to the further education sector in Scotland.

Another concerning consequence of the Scottish Government's attack on colleges is the falling numbers of female students, who often rely on the availability of evening and weekend courses to balance family commitments and responsibilities. The Scottish Government is not supporting those courses and, as a result, women are disproportionately affected—and too often excluded altogether.

In a time of economic hardship when 25 per cent of young people are without employment, it is unbelievable that student numbers should have fallen by 70,000 in just two years. The cabinet secretary cannot explain why that has happened, but it is clear that his campaign of cuts against the further education sector is the source of that disastrous reality. Colleges are continuing to struggle against the challenges that they now face by implementing programmes to widen access and engage with their communities but, without proper support from the Scottish Government, the effects will be sadly limited.

Our further education sector has the potential to provide those from deprived and disadvantaged backgrounds with a high standard of education and equip them for future employment. However, as a result of poor resourcing, colleges are unable to provide the level of support and access to which they aspire. I ask the Scottish Government and the cabinet secretary seriously to consider re-evaluating their policies on the funding of further education, and to talk to the students and colleges in order to address the serious failings in the support that the Government is providing.

15:23

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): It is useful for us not to forget that the college reforms were intended to put learners at the centre. The college regionalisation model is about improving outcomes for our young people. With the implementation of outcome agreements with the regions, we will be able to monitor and take a view of progress for the first time.

The regionalisation model is also about widening access, which has already been discussed, improved articulation from further to higher education, and our guarantee to young people of a place in training, education or employment. That is why the modern apprenticeship scheme has been expanded to more than 25,000 modern apprentices, and we are also looking towards an advanced apprenticeship framework to help employers to develop staff all the way through to degree level.

Liz Smith and Anne McTaggart have mentioned the drop in female participation in colleges. It is relevant to mention that the number of females

who are undertaking modern apprenticeships has increased by 16 per cent.

The debate is all about the Government's priorities, at the heart of which is improved student support. In response to the spending review, Robin Parker of the NUS said:

"At the last election the Scottish Government committed to increase student support, protect places at college and university, and to rule out tuition fees.

This budget confirms that the Scottish Government have listened to students in Scotland, with proposals for a £7000 minimum income for the poorest students, the protection of the EMA for young students and pupils, and the confirmation of plans to keep education free of tuition fees and to increase funds for universities to match funding with ... England.

Taken together these proposals are a major step in the right direction towards making access to education in Scotland fairer."

Neil Findlay: How does the member explain why 100,000 members of Robin Parker's organisation contacted MSPs last year to complain about the Scottish Government's policy on colleges?

Clare Adamson: That figure is widely disputed, but I am happy to take the quote from Robin Parker, who fully supports the proposals.

Robin Parker mentioned the vital EMA, to which Stewart Maxwell referred. Of course, the EMA has been cut south of the border, and there has been a 32 per cent cut in college budgets there, so it is somewhat ironic that the Conservatives have chosen to bring their motion to this chamber.

If the debate is about priorities, one of the Scottish Government's priorities has been to give all Scotland-domiciled undergraduates a minimum income guarantee of £7,250 for the first time.

Hugh Henry: The minimum income guarantee includes loans. I do not know whether, like me, the member has a mortgage. My mortgage is not part of my income, so why are loans considered to be part of students' income?

Clare Adamson: The minimum income guarantee has been welcomed by the NUS and it is certainly more welcome than the back-door tuition fees that Hugh Henry's party introduced.

The Conservative motion

"calls on the Scottish Government to refocus its budget priorities",

but which budgets do the Conservatives suggest that we should "refocus" money from? It is not principled to demand spending without recognising that the Conservative-Lib Dem Government has inflicted cumulative cuts in Scotland's budget of £10.4 billion in real terms over four years—£6.7 billion in cuts to the revenue budget and £3.7 billion in cuts to the capital budget.

To maintain support for students, the SNP Government has increased baseline college support by 25 per cent since 2007, up to £84.2 million. In 2013-14, the Government is allocating an additional £11.4 million to ensure that college student bursary budgets are maintained at more than £95 million. That represents over 40 per cent more than was provided when Johann Lamont was a Scottish Executive minister.

Central Scotland has many outstanding colleges and learning environments of the highest quality, thanks to the investment that has been made in our colleges in recent years. Coatbridge College is about to open a brand-new spectacular business and conference centre and, at its summer celebration, it welcomed staff and families to its newly refurbished campus.

I will finish with a quote from the David Hume Institute's report "Further Education, the Scottish Labour Market and the Wider Economy". It said:

"The key conclusion ... is that Further Education Colleges contain a broader mix of students in terms of age, they have a higher proportion of disabled"

students

"and students from poorer backgrounds than at HE and a more flexible learning route for their students suggesting that"

our further education colleges

"play an important role in promoting social inclusion."

15:30

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): In my professional life before I came to the Parliament, I was a training consultant and also an external verifier for the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Most of my career was spent working with people to help them to train for employment and improve their skills, but I also assessed training providers and monitored how they delivered qualifications. My career took me to colleges all over Scotland, and over the past 18 months I have been working with colleges in my region, listening to them as they go through this period of transition, helping them to find valuable work experience opportunities and getting them more involved in the community.

I am every bit as aware of the sector's shortcomings as I am of its strengths and achievements. I agree that reform is needed and I welcome a sharper focus on employment. I hope that colleges in every part of Scotland will build meaningful partnerships with employers and other providers in their local communities, guiding us back towards full employment. However, the good work that our colleges do and that the Scottish Government wants them to do is being

undermined because of the spending reductions, which are entirely disproportionate.

Not only were colleges hit hard in last year's budget, but the pressures are on-going. Scotland's Colleges has warned members of a cut in the teaching grant of almost £73 million since 2010-11, and the grant is expected to fall again next year. There is a serious drive for efficiency in the sector, but cuts of almost 16 per cent in such a short period cannot be delivered through efficiencies. The structural changes that colleges are going through, which are leading to mergers in some parts of the country and a federation of colleges in Lanarkshire, are expected to deliver long-term savings, but there can be no doubt that they present an immediate challenge.

We have heard today about Audit Scotland's report, and I agree that we need to know where the savings are to be found and exactly how they are to be delivered. However, we also need to know much more about how the reforms and the Government's budget decisions will impact on those who depend the most on the opportunities that a college education can provide.

More than 30 per cent of college students come from the most deprived parts of Scotland. The majority are women, at a time when women's employment has been hit hard by the recession, and the average age of male college students is just 20 at a time when the country faces a crisis of youth employment. My fear is that the rush to reform at the same time as budgets are being slashed so severely will compromise provision for those who need it most, when they need it most.

Earlier this year, the Scottish Government announced a new employability fund, transferring £24 million from the Scottish funding council to SDS to replace the new college learning programme. In my experience, that programme has been one of the most positive and interesting initiatives to be developed in response to the youth jobs crisis in Scotland. It consists of 192 hours of college learning and 192 hours of work experience, with an employability certificate at the end of the course and, for some learners, the opportunity to progress into work.

The programme depends in many ways on the participation of employers who are willing to offer placements. Working with South Lanarkshire College, I secured the participation of First Bus and ScotRail, and right now young people in my region are going through job-focused employability courses. I am looking forward to meeting the current group of students at the end of the course, so that they can tell me about their experiences and I can take a balanced view but, with the introduction of the employability fund, it looks as if changes are being made before the programme has had a chance to bed in. I ask the Scottish

Government to explain why the programme has changed so soon, what the differences between the new college learning programme and the employability fund will be, and how those positive initiatives are affected by the wider programme of college reforms.

Scotland's colleges are under pressure as never before just when they are needed the most. Their work has never been so vital, yet their future has never been so unclear. The message that goes out from the Parliament today must be that we recognise our colleges' contribution and that we will support them and their students through these tough times.

15:34

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Despite the cuts that have been passed down from Westminster, the Scottish Government is investing in colleges and bringing about reform to strengthen the sector and its skills provision. The reality is that it is investing in our young people at a time when other Governments in the UK are not.

A number of key points have already been highlighted. On the information provided by Scottish colleges, the fact is that, as the Education and Culture Committee discovered during its evidence taking, there were some problems with their figures. In the past, they have even lost 10,000 students. They apologised for doing so, but they still got their figures wrong. As a result, I think that there should be an audit to put the issue to bed once and for all.

Just when we think the Scottish Tories cannot get any lower, they manage to do so. It is quite hypocritical of them to oppose college cuts when their UK colleagues are pursuing harsher cuts and an agenda of withdrawing public support from the further education sector. Indeed, the UK Government cut FE funding in England by 32.3 per cent in 2010-11. Despite the unprecedented cuts that the UK Government is passing down to Scotland, the Scottish Government is maintaining college student support at record levels, protecting student numbers in further education and maintaining full-time equivalent teaching activity. Those are important facts.

No one will be surprised to hear that there is a difference between the ideals of the Scottish Government and those of the Government at Westminster. As I have said, it was typically hypocritical of the Tories to discuss this matter when they are making such cuts down south. I also note that the UK Government, which is cutting FE funding, has control of its own budget while we do not have any control over our budget and the cuts being made to it.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): I apologise to Mr Adam for bringing the debate back to Scotland, but does the member think that there is any logic to a college in Greenock merging with a college in his home town of Paisley and another college across the Clyde in Clydebank? If the cabinet secretary's logic is sustainable, we might as well close all three and have a new college at the Erskine bridge.

George Adam: My response to the member is: don't ask me, ask the principals of those three colleges. Every one of them thinks that it is the best way forward. I certainly will not apologise for bringing the debate back to Scotland. I think that that is the way forward. The Scottish Government will continue to offer education to everyone, no matter their financial background; it is providing opportunities for all, not just for those who can afford them, which is what is happening down south. The UK Government's further education budget will be cut by £1.1 billion over the spending review period, but the Tories here are asking for the Scottish Government to give some more money from its own limited budget without offering any suggestions on what they would do instead.

In evidence, Robin Parker, the president of the National Union of Students Scotland, said that he believed that the amount of financial assistance being offered to students was fantastic and that it is better than anything they are receiving down south. My committee colleagues will obviously admit that he made those comments, because they were there when he said them.

We must look at what we are doing and what is happening in Scotland. We are putting in place a strategic vision for Scotland's future. With regard to training for jobs, Reid Kerr College in Paisley is training people for the new green energy boom, and Doosan Babcock in Renfrew, which produces much of the technology used in the renewables sector, will benefit from those young people when they leave college. Moreover, as part of its focused and strategic approach, Reid Kerr College recently invested £4 million in a state-of-the-art building for engineering and construction students.

In this ever-changing economic climate, there have been massive shifts from the manufacturing to the service sector, and it is important for colleges to lead the way in training people for jobs that are needed. Various representatives of the business sector made that very point in evidence to the committee.

There is a need for college reform; indeed, many people in the college sector believe that reform is the way forward. When I spoke recently to the principal of Reid Kerr College, Audrey Cumberland, she confirmed that it was the way forward for her college.

The issue of colleges' reserves has been raised in various debates. As the recent Audit Scotland report makes clear, those reserves have risen from £98.9 million in 2006-07 to a total of £206 million at the end of 2011. When we look at those figures, we see that it is not just the Scottish Government that must pay, as the cabinet secretary quite rightly says.

For me, the important issue is how we take Scotland's colleges forward, ensure that every 16 to 19-year-old gets an opportunity to enter work, education or training and build a solid foundation for the lives of Scotland's young people. I have a vested interest because I have an 18-year-old daughter who is at college.

This debate has shown that there are stark differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK on the issue of education. I will take the cabinet secretary's attitude towards education and how we deliver it any day of the week.

15:40

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, welcome today's debate, congratulate Liz Smith on securing it and confirm that the Liberal Democrats will support the motion and Hugh Henry's amendment at decision time. The Government's amendment, however, is another matter. As well as deleting any reference to the benefits of

"extending further education opportunities to a wider cross-section of society",

it has many of the hallmarks of the my way or the highway approach displayed by its author in recent days.

Before turning to the main issues in the debate, I first reflect on the astonishing events that have undermined confidence in the judgment of the education secretary and morale in Scotland's college sector.

Mr Russell takes great pleasure in reminding us of his lack of power of direction over colleges. Although he rejoices in what he sees as the delicious irony that a Labour minister removed that power during Mr Russell's sabbatical from Parliament, by summoning the chair of Stow College to a meeting last week and demanding his resignation, Mr Russell effectively assumed a power of direction by proxy. Mr Ramsay's decision to step down simply confirms that. Mr Russell's statement today claiming that it is a matter for the management board of Stow College and that he respects Mr Ramsay's decision is beyond parody.

Claims of bullying by Mr Russell and a climate of fear throughout the college sector are now a consistent theme and not just on the basis of this week's events. Ministers are quite within their

rights to make clear what they expect to be delivered, by whom and in what timeframe. However, it is increasingly obvious that Mr Russell is unable to resist the temptation to micromanage every aspect of what goes on across his portfolio.

As a final comment—for now—on this sorry saga, I believe that the treatment of Kirk Ramsay and the wider concerns that it raises are ones that the Education and Culture Committee must investigate.

I focus the remainder of my remarks on some more general thoughts relating to the challenges facing our college sector and its contribution to our economy. Over the past 24 hours, the Education and Culture Committee has met twice to hammer out an agreement on its report on the Scottish Government's budget. That does not in any way reflect disagreement among us about the importance of colleges, locally and nationally, in delivering, among other things, our shared ambition of sustainable economic growth in this country. It does, however, reflect the serious concerns that some of us have—concerns shared by colleges, the NUS and a range of other witnesses—that delivering such an ambition is potentially hamstrung by the Government's approach to funding and reorganisation and other pressures on our colleges.

In addition, the way in which ministers are driving through the reform agenda and targeting spending in a sharply reducing budget risks a disproportionate impact on some of the groups to which colleges have been particularly adept at extending access and opportunities. That is one of the key themes picked up in the David Hume Institute report referred to by other members. As well as evidencing the economic value of colleges to the Scottish economy, the report underscores the success of our colleges in reaching, as the authors put it,

"parts of society that other elements of the education system find hard to reach."

Yet, as the NUS points out, shifts in college participation away from part time to full time, from mature students to young students and from women to men have implications for participation and accessibility. That is particularly the case for older learners and women, who rely heavily on college courses to reskill and gain entry back into the labour market.

That role for colleges is vital. As the David Hume Institute report observes, by boosting skills, productivity and earnings, colleges contribute up to 1 per cent of GDP over an eight-year period. Despite that contribution, though, the Scottish Government has chosen significantly to reduce funding to the sector over the current spending review period. In evidence to the Education and

Culture Committee, each of the college unions, Scotland's Colleges and the NUS all warned of the potential impact that that could have on Scotland's economic recovery. In its briefing for today's debate, NUS Scotland draws attention to the planned £34 million cut in the colleges budget, saying:

"given the importance of colleges to the future of Scotland's economy, we would urge the Scottish Government to consider ways in which the funding settlement for colleges can be improved ... to prevent the damage the proposed cuts could cause".

In dismissing those concerns, Mr Russell points to regionalisation and the savings that he expects to be generated. However, again there is a problem, not with regionalisation per se but with the scale of any future savings and the timeframe in which they can be realised. Audit Scotland zeroes in on that concern in its recent report, which also makes clear the scale of the challenges facing the sector.

That is not to deny the need or even the desire for change, but, as Jeremy Peat has observed,

"change must not be at the cost of the crucial role the colleges play in providing opportunities to many from diverse parts of society; nor must the critical close relationships with local businesses be placed at risk."

I hope that I have not ensured that Mr Peat is the next to be invited in for a cosy fireside chat with the cabinet secretary, but I believe that Mr Peat is right when he says:

"This is a difficult time for the sector, facing the challenges of coping with constraints on funding, implementing rapid and substantial organisational change and of playing a key role in meeting the government's challenge to provide an opportunity for all".

Perhaps Mr Peat may not want to answer his phone for a wee while yet.

I have no difficulty with many of the objectives set by the Government, but I am alarmed that, as well as those missing individual college chairs, Mr Russell is determined to dismiss any and all concerns that are raised by the college sector. Last year, Mr Russell was the last man in Government left defending the initial budget settlement as "full, final and fair". I hope that he will not make the same mistake twice, but recent events prove that he is not a man who ever finds it easy to say, "I am wrong."

15:46

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): Before I go into full flow, I want to reflect on some of Liam McArthur's comments. I wonder what would happen to an MSP who made a recording of a committee session that was not being broadcast to the public and then passed that recording around. I think that such an MSP would quickly

find himself in front of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, but that is a discussion for another day.

Listening to today's opening speech from the Conservative spokesperson, I was waiting for a sentence that I knew was coming. The sentence started along the lines, "We accept that there is a cut to the budget, that of course the Scottish Government must make cuts and that there are difficult decisions," and I was waiting for the key word "but" that was coming. It is like the "but" that appears in lines such as "Wind farms are good, but", "Immigration is helpful, but we need to keep it down" and "Budgets are tight, but we still disagree with your spending and you should find more money."

Liz Smith talked about voices being raised. However, the briefing papers that I was sent by NUS Scotland and Scotland's Colleges included what I would present as being constructive engagement, or suggestions for ways to manage a difficult process of change, rather than head-on attacks on the process. I can also quote some great enthusiasts for the changes. Geoff Fenlon has said:

"These ... will present us all with a fantastic opportunity to create something new and exciting."

John Burt of Angus College has said:

"We will continue to improve lives by realising our aspirations ... We look to the future with ambition in our eyes."

However, I wonder whether for the Conservatives this is a case of "Do as we say, not as we do." The Lib Dems are frequent proponents of hiding behind the fig-leaf of federalism, but the Conservative and Unionist Party is the same party here as south of the border. South of the border, the Conservatives are reducing FE college budgets by 32.3 per cent. These are difficult times, but the Audit Scotland report shows that here, between 2007 and 2011, college reserves went up from £98.9 million to £206.4 million. In these difficult times, we must look at all the options when solutions are thin on the ground. I know what the Conservative interpretation of all the options would be. It is right there in "Spending Review 2010", which states:

"In further and higher education, the Government believes that there must be a shift away from public spending towards greater contributions from those that benefit most and who can afford to pay".

If that is what the Conservatives wish to introduce in Scotland, they should be open and say so.

I am a little surprised by the Labour approach to defending the status quo, which is set out in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

Hugh Henry: Will Marco Biagi take an intervention?

Marco Biagi: In a moment.

I delved into the history and found that, in *Scottish Affairs* in 1995, Professor Walter Humes described those reforms thus:

"Underlying the reforms were certain recurring themes" that

"had, of course, already been developed in England via NHS reforms and the privatisation of public services. Forsyth, unlike his colleagues at the Scottish Office, sought to advance swiftly and boldly along similar lines."

If Mr Findlay and Mr Henry want to defend Thatcherite reforms from Michael Forsyth, they may do so.

Hugh Henry: Marco Biagi has just said that Labour opposes the reforms. He must have been sleeping when I made my speech, because I said clearly that we welcome change and that there has to be change. I do not know what he is talking about, although I suspect that neither does he.

Marco Biagi: If this is Mr Henry's idea of supporting changes, I would hate to see his idea of opposing them.

Looking back at recent events, we find that it is not only the SNP that has considered changes. The Labour Government at UK level did so in the same way. The 2005 Foster report for the UK Government, "Realising the Potential: A review of the future role of further education colleges" pointed at a complex landscape with duplication issues and high drop-out rates. Interestingly, the author later said:

"Basically I am nobody's dinner guest in FE any longer because I have been quite critical and challenging".

Proposing changes does not tend to win people many friends. However, there is wide consensus on the value of FE. If we look at the situation, we find that the weighted student unit of measurement figure is stable and the full-time equivalent figures are stable. That is why the opponents of change have had to grapple around and use the head-count figure, which is misleading. Similarly, the critics have continually revised the statistics for the changes in funding, which leads to the suggestion that there is no stable consensus figure.

We face difficulties in all areas of the budget. Behind every decision, there is a human story. Today, all our constituents face challenges and the impacts of UK Government decisions in all walks of life, and we face the same here in Parliament. I agree with the Conservatives that there are no easy choices, but I hope that they will respect the reality of that statement; accept that the process is difficult and has been managed to

the best of our ability; and support the Government in its endeavours.

15:52

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

I am happy to accept the cabinet secretary's offer for an update meeting on further education. If we can work together on Islay's health services, I am sure that we can do the same on further education. I am pleased to speak to the motion in the name of my colleague Liz Smith. Further education colleges deserve our whole-hearted support and praise, given how much they have achieved in raising the bar on education and training opportunities since incorporation in 1992. Although I can see the benefits of some college mergers, the sector is one of Scotland's great successes and is certainly not a sector of failure.

I substituted for Liz Smith at a recent committee meeting in which there was a discussion of further and higher education. Although I had done my homework, I found a plethora of figures and a confused account of the real cuts. When Neil Findlay asked Professor Jeremy Peat, Professor Gallacher and Paul Buchanan to give the committee one figure for the cuts, they were unable to do so, despite all their efforts. If eminent economists and college principals find it difficult to interpret the Government figures, that surely has to be worrying for the rest of us.

Jeremy Peat confirmed that

"FE is a priority for the economy"

and said that the cuts are putting

"severe strains on the FE sector at a time when there is a need to work at both ends of the labour market".—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 25 September 2012; c 1443.]

That means those entering the market and preparing for work and the many who need readjustment training during their careers to participate in a difficult and complex economy.

The briefing paper for the debate from Scotland's Colleges states that the teaching grant has fallen by £73 million—nearly 16 per cent—in the past two years. The Auditor General stated that there is a reduction of 24 per cent, in real terms, in the Government's revenue grant support over the current spending review period against a background of increasing demand for college places and rising maintenance and energy costs. I add that there has also been a sixfold increase in pension costs.

We then see that £24 million has been transferred from the funding council's FE budget to

Skills Development Scotland. That transfer of funds from the colleges to SDS is now ring fenced for colleges but, as the Scotland's Colleges paper tells us, as with so many other financial transactions in this confused landscape,

"No details of the fund have yet been provided."

Why has money been taken out of the FE budget and given to SDS only to be ring fenced for FE?

Michael Russell: Will the member give way?

Mary Scanlon: Not just now. Could the funds not just have stayed in the FE budget instead of being taken out, put in another organisation and then filtered back into FE? It is hardly surprising that we are bamboozled by this.

The main concerns are the impact that the cuts will have on education and training opportunities and, more important, the widening of the inequalities gap, which many members have mentioned. More than 30 per cent of college students come from the most deprived areas, as Margaret McCulloch said. In colleges serving the most deprived areas, that figure can be more than 70 per cent. With 70,000 fewer students in the two years between 2008-09 and 2010-11, there can be no doubt that opportunities to get out of poverty are being lost. I do not believe that all those people were pursuing hobbies in flower arranging and basket weaving—to say so is insulting to 70,000 students who can no longer access further education.

My main point, which I raised at the committee meeting, is on articulation. Having lectured in economics for 20 years in further and higher education before coming to the Parliament, I am aware that many students—particularly mature students—do not want to commit to a four-year degree programme. A higher national certificate can be achieved in one year and a higher national diploma in two years. Those programmes are now more flexible, with many modules being achieved through distance learning. Over the past 20 years, students have been able to choose either to complete their degree in FE or to enter second or third year at university. Whether the cut to FE teaching is 16 or 25 per cent, how can the Government expect colleges to provide the same number of courses, teach and train the same number of students and maintain the same excellent standards as they have been doing?

Already, FE colleges are expected to—and do—achieve the same quality standards for a degree as universities, yet, as Professor Gallacher stated,

"there is clearly a major funding gap"—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 25 September 2012; c 1458.]

between the funding of university degrees and the funding of FE colleges. Why are the colleges being cut again?

I have very little time left, so I will make this my final point. At a time when further education is most needed, it is tragic if training, education and preparation for the labour market are lost. However, they are being lost, and the fault and responsibility for that lie with the Government.

15:58

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): When I read Liz Smith's motion, I found it hard to believe that it came from the same Tory party that is in the process of savaging the UK's further education budget by 32.3 per cent in real terms, as Marco Biagi told us. It is difficult to reconcile the two things.

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Mike MacKenzie: Not at the moment, thanks.

Perhaps the Tories have woken up from their long slumber and imagine that we are now in an independent Scotland where it might be credible for the Scottish Tories to say one thing and for the Tories south of the border to do another. Or perhaps, undaunted by Mr Obama's recent election victory, they are merely following Mitt Romney's maxim that, "You can fool some of the people all of the time and these are the ones we need to concentrate on." Whatever the reason, the people of Scotland will not be fooled, as they have not been fooled by the Tories for many years. In fact, they have not been fooled since the last time there was major reform of the further education sector nearly 20 years ago.

It is worth reflecting on the shortcomings of the previous system, in which each college competed against its neighbours as if they were businesses in a free market and the concerns of education were often overshadowed by those of business. The reason why that system can never work is that it laboured under the restrictions of a zero-sum game, whereas genuine business relies on growth and open economies.

Mary Scanlon: Will Mike MacKenzie tell me how much competition there is in the Highlands and Islands, which we both represent?

Mike MacKenzie: If Mary Scanlon is prepared to wait and listen to my speech, I will deal with that very point.

In the previous system, success was often measured by the success of the institution but not always by that of the students. A few colleges may have done well under that system, but others most certainly did not.

In answer to Mary Scanlon's point, I say that I have personal experience from my previous life in business, when we had to send apprentices to a college in Glasgow. That particular college—it would be unfair to name it—was not doing well in business terms. I should say that I had no choice. I see that the cabinet secretary is wondering what I am getting at here [*Interruption.*] I ask members to be patient. I should add that that was before the flourishing Argyll College was established under the stewardship of Michael Breslin, the recently retired chief executive. Members will be pleased to hear that Mr Breslin is now putting his considerable talents to good use as an SNP councillor.

I return to the answer for Mary. Our apprentices received almost nothing in the way of education or training at that struggling college in the central belt. I had first-year apprentices quite proudly tell me—they used to do this often—that they had to show the lecturers how to do things.

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Mike MacKenzie: Not at the moment; I am still answering Mary's question.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I ask Mike MacKenzie to use members' full names, please.

Mike MacKenzie: On one occasion, I refused to sign off training modules as the apprentices had agreed with me that they had not achieved competence in those areas. The following week, the head of the department telephoned me, and he explained to me that I was missing the point. The point was, from his business perspective, that he would not receive the funding unless I signed off the modules that week. He had no real concern about the training and every concern for his budget. I can only assume that that became a more general problem, because the following year the practice of employers signing off training objectives was discontinued.

Neil Findlay: I am sorry to interrupt Mike MacKenzie's very interesting story, but my experience as a tradesman and as an apprentice was completely different from that. I had fantastic training and a fantastic education at West Lothian College. He may have one isolated case, but to depict it as if it was what happened all over the sector is just rubbish.

Mike MacKenzie: I did not say that—I said that some colleges did well and that others did not.

I could go on at length and provide more examples— [*Interruption.*] Members will be glad to hear that I am not going to do that.

I must pay tribute to the cabinet secretary, because he is in the process of pulling off that

most difficult of tasks—making a virtue out of necessity. We cannot pretend that the Scottish budget has not been cut. The only way to continue to deliver high-quality educational outcomes, while protecting student numbers, is by doing away with the unnecessary duplication that resulted in much wasted effort, with neighbouring colleges sometimes struggling with half-full classrooms as they competed with each other for students.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude.

Mike MacKenzie: In winding up, I must pause to reflect on the fact that Hugh Henry's amendment seeks to add only one very small sentence to the Tory motion—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You really must stop.

Mike MacKenzie: Perhaps the Labour and Tory parties really are better together, because it is becoming increasingly difficult to tell them apart.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members must keep to their six minutes.

16:05

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the debate, because there is an absolute need for us to highlight what is going on in our colleges. I often say that I am delighted to speak in a debate, but I cannot say that I am delighted to speak in this one, because I take no delight in highlighting the effect that the SNP Government's cuts are having on jobs, student numbers and courses.

Yesterday, the SNP claimed that the Labour Party was introducing a cuts commission. What we want is an honest debate about public services, and the truth is that the cuts are happening in our colleges right now. I know the impact that those cuts are having. They are taking away opportunities from young people, from women who wish to study part time and from people with learning disabilities. I have spoken to many students and staff about the effect that the cuts are having on them.

Worryingly, Audit Scotland identified the true extent of the cuts in its recent report on the challenges that the college sector faces. It said that the Scottish Government's revenue support grant to colleges was likely to fall from £545 million in 2011-12 to £471 million in 2014-15. That represents a staggering real-terms reduction of 24 per cent. Figures that the Scottish Parliament information centre has produced show that funds for teaching have been reduced from £469 million in the academic year 2010-11 to £396 million in the academic year 2012-13, with more to come next year.

In my region, the west of Scotland, the cuts are having a serious impact. Reid Kerr College in Paisley has had its teaching grant cut from £14.4 million in 2011-12 to £13 million in 2012-13. That is a reduction of nearly 10 per cent and more than £1 million. The same can be said of Clydebank College. The SNP might try its best to keep those figures out of the public spotlight, but no amount of smoke and mirrors can disguise the impact that the cuts are having on our colleges. That is just what happened last year; more cuts are on their way.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

In the spirit of the honest debate that Mr Bibby claims to want, he will know that, in a fixed budget, if funding for colleges is to be increased, funding elsewhere must be reduced. What funding would he cut to replace the college funding? I see that Mr Henry is offering him some advice in that regard.

Neil Bibby: Are you accepting a 24 per cent cut in college funding, Mr McDonald? We need to have a debate about what our priorities are. Colleges are not the SNP's priority, because it is cutting the colleges budget by more than it is cutting practically any other budget. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Neil Bibby: The SNP Government claims that its budget is a budget for growth and jobs. What a nonsense. We have high levels of unemployment and people are not getting the chance to retrain for another job. No wonder the Educational Institute of Scotland, Unison and the NUS have all said that the Government's college cuts will put economic recovery at risk. No wonder businesses tell us that colleges cannot provide them with the services that they need. That is not because colleges are incapable of doing so; it is because of the severe cuts that they are having to deal with. It is obvious to pretty much everyone apart from the Scottish Government that college budgets and retraining opportunities should not be cut during an economic downturn, and that courses for young people should not be cut when there is a youth unemployment crisis and 100,000 young people cannot get a job.

We have heard about the disproportionate and shocking impact that the Government's cuts are having on women. The Government's decision to withdraw funding for many part-time, weekend and evening courses is also having a devastating effect on people with learning disabilities. I think that it is insulting to suggest, as Joan McAlpine has done, that the part-time courses that are being reduced are courses such as flower-arranging courses for an hour a week for people like her. We have a duty to protect and support the vulnerable.

Joan McAlpine: Is the member seriously arguing that the large numbers of part-time hobby

courses that were being provided in the past, as the cabinet secretary mentioned, are really appropriate for a time of high youth unemployment compared with a focus on young people and giving opportunities for all, which is where the focus now is?

Neil Bibby: I do not think that part-time courses for women or people with learning disabilities, which have been slashed, are hobby courses and it is insulting to refer to them in that way. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Neil Bibby: Part-time courses for people with learning disabilities have been cut by 34 per cent, from 2,155 to 1,413 in those colleges that responded to the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability survey. Some colleges have even cut all of their part-time places for such courses. The SCLD report also makes clear that many people with learning disabilities were given very little notice that their college place had been cut.

College courses form an important part of the lives of many people with learning disabilities. I want to highlight a response from students at Reid Kerr College in Paisley to the Scottish Government's cuts in the recent consultation on the success of "The same as you?" policy framework, which aims to support people with learning disabilities so that they can lead full lives in their communities. The final question asks:

"What do you think are the things we need to do in the future to make the lives of people with learning disabilities better?"

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please conclude.

Neil Bibby: The response simply says:

"Bring back more college places. More courses and more staff."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude.

Neil Bibby: It is about time that the cabinet secretary and his Government started listening.

16:11

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Neil Findlay said in his intervention on Mike MacKenzie that the picture is perhaps not the same in every college across the country. I am going to paint a rather more positive picture than the one that I just heard from Neil Bibby, because I think that that was one of the most negative pictures that I have heard. We have heard that there is perhaps a consensus—even with the Labour Party—that reform is necessary. We need to try to look at how we address that reform and how we remain positive.

Aberdeen College and Banff and Buchan College entered into a contract—not a merger. It was a contract to try to achieve the best for their students, looking at the workplace in the whole of the north-east of Scotland. They were responding to the need for skills—skills that the business sector has been crying out for. The colleges are responding positively. Banff and Buchan College probably responded the most positively and should be commended for the way in which it responded. It tackled the gender issue to do with women and science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects. It introduced specific training for young girls and targeted its courses at getting young women on to such courses. It is working with Shell, BP and TAQA and with all the industries in the north-east to try to engender the skills that are needed for the future.

Aberdeen College responded in the same way. It is going out to businesses and seeking them out. There is a federation of colleges and universities now looking at where skills are needed and providing the appropriate courses to meet those skills needs.

The cabinet secretary mentioned the opportunities for all scheme—it is about opportunities for all and, in answer to Mr Bibby, I say that not every college turns its back on people with learning disabilities. It is absolutely unacceptable for any college to turn its back on any person with a learning disability, any other disability or any equality agenda issue.

Neil Bibby: The SCLD has conducted a survey that shows that part-time courses for people with learning disabilities have been cut by 34 per cent and that, in some colleges, all the part-time places for such courses have been cut. I recommend that Mr Robertson gets a copy of the survey report and looks into the matter.

Dennis Robertson: Perhaps I should inform Mr Bibby that I cannot read such reports. I also suggest to Mr Bibby that the report only covered the respondents to the survey. Banff and Buchan College has specific courses for people with learning disabilities to get them back into the community and into work that is meaningful and which they can do within their communities.

The same applies to Aberdeen College, which again has to be commended for its equality action plan. It looks at equal opportunities across the whole spectrum—across gender, disability, ethnic minorities and so on. If Aberdeen College and Banff and Buchan College can do that, I cannot see why other colleges cannot. I think that I said that it is abhorrent for any college to turn its back on people. Mr Bibby may quote statistics to me; I am saying that it is unacceptable for any college to do that, and I hope that the cabinet secretary

would address the problem with any college that was doing that.

The examples in the north-east are responding to what the business community is asking for. Every college in the country can do the same. Reform is necessary, and the examples of Aberdeen College and Banff and Buchan College are to be commended. I give them as exemplars to other colleges in the sector.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to speak through the chair and use full names.

16:16

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

This week, we saw the latest extraordinary twist in the cabinet secretary's war on Scotland's colleges. As far as we know, the facts are as follows. In a meeting at which there were some 80 to 100 people, the chair of a college board recorded the cabinet secretary's speech for future reference. On hearing that, the cabinet secretary apparently had a tantrum. He ejected his toys from the pram, called the chair of the college to a meeting, was apparently reluctant even to shake his hand, and demanded his head. Those are not the actions of a responsible minister maintaining an arm's-length relationship with the sector; they are the actions of a school playground bully, and they are all too typical of a cabinet secretary who is used to throwing his weight around and getting his own way on slashing budgets and forcing mergers, and now in petulantly demanding resignations. That typifies the SNP's contemptuous approach to the education sector and, in particular, Mr Russell's attitude.

A few weeks ago, the cabinet secretary came to the chamber and had the grace to stand up and say in relation to another matter that he was wrong. Would that he had the same grace and self-awareness to do the same today.

We are here to discuss the important issue of widening access in further education. That agenda is under threat from unprecedented cuts to the sector. There is a £73 million cut to the teaching grant across two years.

Clare Adamson: The member mentioned "unprecedented cuts". Is the 32 per cent cut south of the border not a precedent?

Murdo Fraser: I do not know whether the member has noticed that we are in the Scottish Parliament discussing the actions of the Scottish Government in relation to Scotland's colleges. I wish that SNP members would focus on their responsibilities and those of their Government and their cabinet secretary. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Murdo Fraser: We all know about the concerns about the cuts. Concerns have been expressed by the Educational Institute of Scotland, Scotland's Colleges and the National Union of Students. We know the consequence of the cuts on the widening access agenda. The figures are absolutely clear. The participation rate in further education in Scotland of the 20 per cent most deprived cohort has fallen from 83.3 per 1,000 in 2007-08 to 72.5 per 1,000 in 2010-11. The latest trends suggest that that rate will decline still further, of course.

As we have heard throughout the debate, there has been a disproportionate impact on women and older learners. As Liz Smith pointed out, since 2006-07 there has been a 26 per cent cut in the number of female learners, as opposed to a 13 per cent drop for men. The number of female learners is therefore falling at twice the rate as that for men, and the indications are that the changes that are going through will make things still worse. We also know that, because of the focus on providing education for those in the 16 to 21-year-old age range, older learners—many of whom have been in the workforce, have been made unemployed and are trying to retrain—cannot get college places, as those places are being allocated to 16 to 21-year-olds. There are real issues for the widening access agenda.

A number of SNP members have legitimately questioned refocusing the budget and where we would find the money. We are clear where we stand on that, and I will spell it out for the benefit of SNP members: we know that the FE college budget has been cut—it was raided to fund the universities—and we make no apology for saying again that we favour a modest graduate contribution in order to put funding into the university system. All the SNP is doing is providing free university education for the better off at the expense of those from less well-off backgrounds who cannot get college places—those are the facts.

We had the SNP mantra again today that university tuition fees deter those from less well-off backgrounds. Well, I checked the figures—

Michael Russell: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: Oh, yes—I would be delighted to give way.

Michael Russell: Let me put this as gently as I can: the member knows that south of the border 25,000 university places have been lost because of the fees that have been imposed, and the evidence is also clear that the majority of the people deterred are from the lowest-income groups. His proposal would narrow access to education.

Murdo Fraser: The problem for the cabinet secretary is that he is talking absolute nonsense—

as ever, it is assertion and not fact. I know that because I checked the figures before I came to the chamber. The participation rate at universities by the poorest 20 per cent in England and Wales is 10.6 per cent; in Scotland, the comparable figure is 9.1 per cent. The participation from those from less well-off backgrounds in England and Wales is higher than it is in Scotland, notwithstanding tuition fees. Despite the continual assertion by the cabinet secretary and his colleagues that tuition fees will deter people from less well-off backgrounds, that idea is utterly false—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Campbell.

Murdo Fraser: The idea is utterly false because the graduate contribution was brought in with generous bursary schemes for those from less well-off backgrounds—that is undoubtedly the case, given the latest figures.

The other consequence that we know of—I will mention this only briefly, in view of the time—is the 18.5 per cent cut in places for the STEM subjects since 2007. To build the Scottish economy, we need people to train in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. We should be building up places in those areas, not cutting them.

It is time for the cabinet secretary to end his war on further education in Scotland and it is time, frankly, for some humility from him in this chamber.

16:22

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): The cheek of a Tory to tell us how we should go about rebuilding the Scottish economy. I know that Murdo Fraser wanted to scrap the Conservative Party. Frankly, many people in Scotland wish that he had managed to achieve his aim. Who knows? Given the way things are going, he may yet get a second bite at that particular cherry.

I was pleased that Liz Smith acknowledged that there has been a cut to the Scottish budget. That was welcome, because her leader seldom acknowledges it, and her finance spokesperson does not acknowledge the cuts that are coming to the Scottish budget. Indeed, they go out of their way to pretend that the cuts are not happening. I therefore welcome the honesty brought to this debate by Liz Smith. Would that some of her colleagues would take a leaf out of her book.

At the same time, however, Liz Smith cannot come to the Parliament and realistically expect changes to be made to the funding landscape without shifting funds from other areas. I accept the points that were made in that regard, but what are the Conservatives doing? The Government in

London ties our hands and picks our pockets. That is what is happening to the Scottish budget: our hands are tied in terms of how we can go about growing the economy, while at the same time this Parliament's budget is being reduced.

The leader of the Conservative Party in Scotland made a speech in which she called for the tax take to be cut in Scotland. She wants income tax to be cut in Scotland, but not by just the 1p that would take £0.5 billion out of the Scottish budget, as possibly more than £1 billion would be taken out. The Conservatives then have the nerve to come to this Parliament and demand that we reinstate funding in some areas, while they are out there in the communities of Scotland calling for less money to be available to the Scottish Government. That is a deeply dishonest position to take. They should at least have a little bit of humility when they come to the chamber and make those demands.

Faced with the difficult choices that we are forced to take—it is interesting that those who come to the chamber and say that they want an honest debate about difficult choices are quick to run at the first sight of a debate about difficult choices—the cabinet secretary is driving forward reform of the college sector. I think that the regional approach will bring great benefits, not just to the sector but to the learners, who of course must be the most important people in this debate. It is worth noting that, even in these difficult times and faced with these difficult decisions, record funding is still being put into student support, which will ensure that students from vulnerable backgrounds can access further education without that being to their detriment. By contrast, in the situation south of the border, fees are crippling some people's choices in higher and further education.

When Neil Bibby was having his little rant about the money that is being taken out of the college sector, I asked him, in the spirit of the honest debate that he claims that he and his party want to have, how he would reduce one budget so that he can consequentially increase another budget. Even though he phoned a friend and Mr Henry was at his ear telling him what answer to give, he could not come up with an answer.

The reason for that is simple: the answer would compromise another Labour front-bench spokesperson who comes to the Parliament to demand more money for their sector, to appease the people whom they seek to champion. All Labour is doing is deceiving people and leading them up the garden path by suggesting that if the Labour Party had its hands on the levers of power and the finances of the Parliament, there would somehow be an increase in available money and everyone could have more—

Alex Johnstone: That is what you claim about independence.

Mark McDonald: If Mr Johnstone wants to intervene he is welcome to do so. He asks about independence. We know that with independence we would be able to take decisions and use the full levers of the economy to grow our economy in Scotland. We would not be faced with the reductions in our capital budget that the Conservatives are foisting on us from Westminster, which are forcing us to take creative and welcome decisions in the Scottish budget to shift from resource to capital.

It is worth remembering the large amount of capital funding for colleges. I often hear members pooh-pooh that, as if it is somehow not relevant. I commend to members of all parties the new state-of-the-art facility at Banff and Buchan College. They should take the opportunity to visit the college and hear about the improved staff morale and student experience and, most crucial, the reduced costs of the building. In a time of revenue constraint, the capital budget should be used to reduce revenue running costs, through development of new facilities or—as in the case of Aberdeen College at Gallowgate—refurbished facilities, which will permit the reinvestment in the front line of revenue that was being used to run inefficient buildings.

Mary Scanlon: I refer the member to paragraph 39 of the Audit Scotland report, “Scotland’s colleges: Current finances, future challenges”, which was published last month. If capital funding is so wonderful, why does the Auditor General for Scotland point out that there is

“a real-terms reduction of 45.5 per cent”

in funding for capital projects?

Mark McDonald: I direct the member to my previous comments about the decision that her colleagues at Westminster took to slash the capital budget that is available to the Parliament—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Mark McDonald: The Conservative Party cannot come to the Parliament and expect us, without having control over the economy, to perform financial magic and make more money appear.

We are refocusing the college agenda. We are reforming and regionalising, while delivering new facilities, which will improve the learner experience. In the north-east, a creative approach to partnership working with the private sector, which Dennis Robertson talked about, will deliver for learners and should be welcomed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that they should not shout out from sedentary positions, and speakers that they should not respond to such interventions.

16:28

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): I am delighted to speak in the debate, because I have always been involved in higher education.

I wish Stow College well. I hope that it overcomes the issues that it currently faces, and I hope that the situation does not affect staff morale and students’ academic futures.

I have always been keen to promote the value of Scottish colleges, in Glasgow, in Scotland and internationally. Scotland’s Rural University College works in Lahore and other cities in Pakistan, and the City of Glasgow College works in Karachi and Lahore. We have a proud history of engaging with cities and countries overseas, and I thank our colleges for the wonderful job that they do and for facing up to the current challenges.

There can be no doubt that colleges provide access to education to a diverse range of people, through flexible learning models and a broad subject choice. That flexibility has an effect on social mobility. People from minority communities and people with disabilities benefit from college education, and students from diverse areas attend colleges and universities.

Several college mergers have taken place, and there will be more. In previous mergers, there has been support for our colleges to enable them to transfer to the new model, but that will not happen on this occasion. We are saying to our colleges that they will have to deal with those issues with current resources, and that is a huge challenge for colleges in a time of cuts. We are going through such a harsh economic situation just now, and saying to colleges that they must deal with the matter themselves places a huge burden on them.

As young people have to compete in an increasingly harsh labour market, there is a rising demand for college places. We have heard that there is a waiting list of people who want to go to colleges to retrain. I have heard various comments today about “hobby courses”, but I do not know what those are. To me, any learning is learning, and when people learn, they can apply themselves.

We give a lot of credit and credence to industry and businesses, but we do not seem to understand that we are a country of entrepreneurs. There are people who are self-employed, who earn a great deal of respect and money for this country. They also need education, and such education does not need to be focused,

as we need people to be able to choose subjects. Flexibility and choice of subjects are important, as the fewer subjects we have, the less we have to offer and the more we deny our young the opportunities that they need.

I do not really care what happens down south, or in Ireland, Iceland or the Netherlands. I care what happens in Scotland, and in Glasgow. I know that our young need jobs, and that they need to be professional. If we want to attract industry from overseas, we need a professional workforce, and for that we need colleges and courses. To pretend anything different is useless, and we should not go there.

It is very important for us to ensure that we represent the needs of our communities. The idea of pulling parties down and trawling through people's figures is not what this is about. We need to do a job, in the sense that we want to provide for our young and for our future, and we can do that only if we provide a service.

There are challenges with regard to how we deal with those issues. One or two members in the chamber have asked Opposition members, "What would you do to fund colleges?" The Government should not bring forward a policy, go through this charade of a debate, and then just pass it on. It should speak to people and share ideas, and come up with conclusions and solutions that are fit for purpose.

We all say that we have free education in our universities, but what about our colleges? If people cannot get into a college, they will have to pay to go somewhere else, so it is not free. Free is only free if someone can get access and can have the opportunity to study, and they will not get that if we go down the road that we are going down just now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member has one minute left.

Hanzala Malik: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

We must come up with solutions, but they have to be genuine. We must work with people with open hearts and minds. Young people deserve the best that is available. We know that we can provide that, as we have a rich history in the area. We do not need to prove to ourselves that we are in a position to do it. We can do it, we have done it before and we will do it in the future, but we must be focused. We should forget the narrowness of party-political broadcasts and actually deliver a service to the people who need it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to the one member whom I have been unable to call. We now come to closing speeches.

16:34

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Hugh Henry eloquently described the value of Scotland's colleges, and I know about that value because I have benefited greatly from a vocational and academic education in college. In light of a whole range of issues that have arisen, I and many other people involved in Scottish education have grave concerns.

It is our duty to hold the Government to account for its actions or, indeed, lack of them. Across so many areas of the skills, learning and employment agenda, the Government's policies appear—superficially—to be heading in the right direction. However, when they are exposed to even the most rudimentary scrutiny, they can be seen for the illusion that they are.

Let us look at the smoke and mirrors we have witnessed with the modern apprenticeships programme, or the manipulation of positive outcomes data to include activity agreements, or the decline of the careers service. Ministers and their spin machine tell us that everything is going just splendidly. It is all a huge success, and anyone who dares to question any of it is being negative and—the old chestnut—talking Scotland down. Well, I say that we are standing up for Scotland's young people and supporting Scottish education by advocating for those who raise their concerns with us because they fear to raise them with the Government—because, if they do, they will get the Russell treatment.

Clare Adamson: Mr Findlay talked about the modern apprenticeship figures. What message does it send to a young person who is undertaking an apprenticeship when they hear that they somehow stole a job from someone who was in the job when they undertook their apprenticeship?

Neil Findlay: I have not got a clue what the member is referring to, but I am sure that we will come to talk about modern apprenticeships over the next couple of weeks.

Some of the worst damage is occurring in the area of college provision. We need to be clear that this is an area of policy that has been drawn up, promoted, implemented and defended by the cabinet secretary for education and culture.

Michael Russell: Not culture.

Neil Findlay: The policy of regionalisation does not have improvement at its core; it has cost cutting as its driving principle. The cabinet secretary claims that his policy will result in significant financial savings, but he provides no evidence whatsoever to back his assertion. As Liz Smith said, he claims that there are no waiting lists, but Scotland's colleges tell us that 21,000 are on waiting lists. He says that there are no budget

cuts, but Audit Scotland tells us that there has been a 24 per cent cut over the spending review period. What was the cabinet secretary's response? They are all wrong.

We heard that today in his speech, but why should we be surprised?

Michael Russell: Will the member give way?

Neil Findlay: Not at the moment. Do something uncharacteristic and listen, for a change.

Why should we be surprised? The cabinet secretary has form in that area. Time and again, the Education and Culture Committee has heard witnesses give evidence, with the media providing supporting information, about 1,400 job losses across the sector in the past year; the loss of 30,000 places for women students; 70,000 fewer part-time places for adult learners and others; and, as Mr Bibby said, an overall cut of 34 per cent of places for young people who have learning difficulties.

Mike MacKenzie: Will the member take an intervention?

Neil Findlay: Not at the moment; I have a lot to say.

Of course, according to the cabinet secretary, all those figures are wrong. Perhaps I will now extend him the opportunity to apologise to the 30,000 women mentioned by Anne McTaggart and to the hundreds of students with learning difficulties who Mr Bibby mentioned. I am happy to give him the opportunity to apologise if he would like to do so.

Michael Russell: I take the opportunity to say that I have never said that there were no cuts, so the member has misrepresented me. There have been cuts, and they were necessary because of the financial pressure that was started by Labour and continued by the Tories and Lib Dems. However, despite what the member is saying, we will end up with a better sector.

Neil Findlay: I did not quite catch the apology there.

Members will recall that last year, after an extensive campaign by students, college unions and the Labour Party, some extra cash was allocated to the college budget when the finance secretary announced an additional £15 million in the college transformation fund. To be fair, that fund has enabled transformation to occur in our colleges. Most notably, 1,400 lecturers and support staff have been transformed from full-time employees to people who are on the dole. College employees could well do without such career transformations.

Mary Scanlon mentioned the 24 per cent budget cut, which means fewer lecturers, larger classes, cuts and closures in courses, and growing waiting

lists. Despite the evidence, the cabinet secretary claims that there is nothing wrong. Like the Walter Mitty figure that he is, he dismisses what is happening in the real world and continues to think in his fantasy land that everyone is going along with him.

The cabinet secretary could never be described as a modest man who is lacking in self-admiration, and I was surprised yesterday that, rather than welcome the opportunity to spread the word about all the good work that he is doing in colleges, he uncharacteristically sought to prevent others from hearing his sparkling oratory. So determined was he to keep his utterances quiet that he exploded in frustration at not having the powers to sack Mr Ramsay.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Findlay, you must come to a conclusion.

Neil Findlay: I am sorry, Presiding Officer. I was just getting to my punchline, but I will leave the cabinet secretary wounded without putting in the fatal blow.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Angela Constance, who has a tight eight minutes. *[Interruption.]* Order.

16:40

The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance): At a core level, for me the ultimate purpose of education is to prepare young people for work, to stand on their own two feet and for an adult life in which they can provide for themselves and their families, make their own way in the world and be independent.

As Mark McDonald said, it is imperative—in fact, it is crucial—that any debate that we have on education should not take place in isolation from what is happening in our economy. One reason for my appointment as the first-ever Minister for Youth Employment was to ensure a better alignment between the world of education and the world of work. We cannot look at the supply of skills in education and training in isolation from the demand for those skills.

For two years, as a junior minister over three portfolios, I have reported to Michael Russell.

Neil Findlay: Lucky you.

Angela Constance: This is where experience and facts come into things. I report to Mr Russell as a junior minister and as a woman. I do not recognise some of the language that has been bandied about in the chamber today about a colleague whom I have worked with and reported to for two years. It is scurrilous and a slur on his character that members of the Parliament have succumbed to such depths.

To be frank, I give Mr Russell far more cheek daily than I would ever dare to give Mr Swinney.

Hugh Henry: Will the minister—

Angela Constance: No, thanks.

Hugh Henry: Will the minister take an intervention?

Angela Constance: No, thanks.

Hugh Henry: Not even about the 10,000—

Angela Constance: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Henry, Ms Constance is not taking an intervention.

Angela Constance: I want to stick to the facts and the debate's purpose. I was pleased that Liz Smith recognised that we are living with the reality of Tory cuts. We are indeed making tough decisions now and we are indeed reforming public services such as colleges. However, we are maintaining our priorities, which include student numbers—the full-time equivalents, not the dodgy Labour Party figures.

We are prioritising young people in the context of maintaining student numbers. We have record levels of student support, which is second to none anywhere in these islands, and we are maintaining the volume of teaching. We have opportunities for all and we have retained benefits such as the education maintenance allowance.

There is no denying that there are budget reductions but, by the end of our second term of office, we will have invested £5 billion in the college sector, although our budget has been slashed by £3.3 billion. It is interesting that we will spend 40 per cent more on FE in cash terms than our Labour-Liberal predecessors did, even though their budget went up by £10 billion.

I raise that because the Labour Party, along with its Liberal colleagues, should have reformed the crucial college sector at a time of comparative plenty, but it chose not to do so. What did that increased investment achieve in the first decade of devolution? Do we have a first-class, world-class vocational education system that is highly regarded by young people, trade unions and employers alike?

Do we have a world-class vocational education system that is on a par with those of Germany, Austria, Norway and the Netherlands? Do we have a country that, like those northern European countries, has youth unemployment at less than 10 per cent? That is exactly what we should be aspiring to.

Important points were made during the debate about women's participation in education, but the facts are that the majority of students in further

education are women—the figure is 54 per cent, as Liz Smith conceded—and colleges continue, and will continue, to offer a vast range of flexible training opportunities. The Government has boosted childcare funds by 42 per cent since 2006-07. We can stand firm and proud, given our record. Our ambition is in recognition of the fact that those from disadvantaged backgrounds are still underrepresented in further and higher education, and that is exactly what we intend to tackle.

A group of people that are dear to my heart are adults with learning difficulties, because I started my social work career working in residential care with adults with learning difficulties nearly 20 years ago. It is such a pity that Mr Bibby and Mr Findlay are relying on a report—Mr Findlay is waving it around—that is a year old and which pre-dates the introduction of the opportunities for all initiative.

Let me reiterate what Dennis Robertson said and reiterate my commitment. Opportunities for all is for every young person in this country—

Neil Findlay: Will the minister give way?

Angela Constance: No, thank you. The member has been shouting in my ear all afternoon, but he will not get to showboat on my time.

Students with difficulties will be supported on any course that they are admitted to. Colleges are highly skilled in such support, and I, for one, do not believe in segregation.

We have a good education offering in Scotland. It is not perfect and it needs to be refined and reformed, but we are preparing our young people better than ever before for the world of work. We can look at positive destinations and at the academic achievements of our young people, but what they need now is the opportunity to work, so this debate should be about the economy and who controls it.

Over and above our £2.5 billion year-on-year investment in post-16 education and training, the Government will spend an additional £80 million on supporting young people towards and into work. That will benefit an additional 23,000 young people—and that is before we get to the 16,700 modern apprentices under the age of 25 or we count the young people who are benefiting from a college education or opportunities for all. However, the reality is that we need to help tens of thousands more young people, and the answer to that lies in our economy.

Liz Smith touched on choices.

Gavin Brown: Will the minister give way?

Angela Constance: No. I am in my last minute.

I will happily defend our choices. We should be making the choice to invest additional money in an employer recruitment incentive that will get our young people into work. I wonder whether the Opposition parties will be honest about their choices. How much more money do they want for further education and from where should we make the cuts? Perhaps Mr Brown will answer that in his closing speech.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must finish, minister.

Angela Constance: Of course, colleges themselves have choices, including about the £200 million reserves that they have.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Gavin Brown, I note what Ms Constance said about language at the start of her speech. I intend to have the record checked for unparliamentary language, and I remind all members that, in the chamber, they should be courteous and respectful. The people whom they represent expect nothing less.

16:49

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): I will begin by looking at the budget for Scotland versus the budget for colleges and further education. Many statistics have been bandied about this afternoon, but I get the clear impression that very few of those who quoted economic and budget statistics have actually read any budget document.

First, I will pick out the Scottish cash-terms departmental expenditure limit budget. In 2011-12, at the start of the spending review period, the entire DEL budget for Scotland was £28.3 billion; for the 2013-14 financial year that we are debating at the moment, the entire DEL budget is £28.4 billion. That is a very modest increase in cash terms—it is, as Liz Smith acknowledged, a real-terms cut—but it is still a real-terms increase in cash over the course of the spending review period. Let us contrast that with the position for colleges in Scotland. In 2011-12, the budget for colleges was £570 million; next year, it will be £511 million, a cut of £60 million in cash terms at a time when, in cash terms, the Scottish budget as a whole is going up. Can anyone on the SNP benches explain to me how colleges are a priority if they are getting a drastic cut, when the budget is going up in cash terms?

Another worrying statistic that the Opposition has highlighted time and again in this debate is the 70,000 drop in headcount in just two years. Every one of us in the chamber, not least the Government, needs to look deeply at that alarming figure. Angela Constance had the audacity to say at the end of her speech that we need to help tens

of thousands more. What about the 70,000 people in Scotland who no longer have access to college?

Michael Russell: A point that I made at the beginning of my speech and which a number of members raised in the debate—and which I now make again seriously—is that when we look at college numbers we have to look not at headcount but at full-time equivalents. Only when we look at full-time equivalents do we get a figure for those who are going to college. A failure to do that completely distorts the figures.

Gavin Brown: I do not know whether Mike Russell was listening to Mike Russell's speech at the start of the debate, but to suggest that the only statistic that matters is the one that completely ignores three quarters of the people in our colleges is patently absurd. The cabinet secretary nonchalantly wafted away the fact that we have had a 70,000 cut in headcount in two years, describing it as a rather "volatile" statistic and suggesting that it did not matter that the figure had gone down by 70,000. However, it does matter. The figure was 374,000 just two years ago and has gone down to 305,000. If it is, as Mike Russell seems to think, just one of those volatile things, is he suggesting that when we get next year's figure it will have gone up by 70,000—or is it more likely that the figure will have gone down again?

We had a couple more corks from the Government and SNP members over the course of the afternoon. I find it a little churlish to dismiss entirely that which went before. Yes, the college system was not perfectly run before; yes, things ought to change; and yes, we should always strive to be better. However, to dismiss the system almost in its entirety does a great disservice to many wonderful staff and students across the country. Mr Russell said that there was division among staff before he came along. Well, the great healer has united parties in this chamber and staff the length and breadth of this country—just not in the way that he thinks. To describe, as Mr Russell and Joan McAlpine did, part-time courses as hobby courses does an enormous disservice. If any SNP member wants to stand up and tell the chamber which hobby courses ought to be cut and which colleges are running hobby courses, I will agree to the request with alacrity.

It is difficult to pick the most absurd comment that was made, but I note that Angela Constance and Marco Biagi think that the solution to our college crisis is to spend the reserves. We should not worry about what might come in the future; if we spend those reserves, everything will be absolutely fine.

The budget that is given to the colleges is extremely important. At First Minister's question time last week we heard the First Minister trying to wriggle free by comparing the current college

budget with the college budget under the previous Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive—not that Executive's last budget, though, but the budget from 1999. He suggested that because the budget that the colleges are getting next year is bigger than the 1999 budget they should feel jolly lucky and fortunate about all that they have. I had a quick look at the last budget from the Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive. In 2007-08, funding for FE colleges was £526 million. In 2014-15, at the end of the spending review, the funding for FE colleges will be £470 million. That is a pretty big reduction from 2007-08.

We have heard this said time and again, but it is worth repeating the real-terms position on colleges: there is a real-terms cut to the Scottish DEL budget over the spending review period. We have said that in the chamber before and Liz Smith said it again today. There is in fact a 6 per cent real-terms cut to the Scottish DEL budget over the course of the spending review. However, the real-terms cut to colleges between 2011-12 and 2014-15 is not 6, 10 or 12 per cent, but 24 per cent. If colleges are genuinely a priority for this Government, how on earth can it have a 24 per cent real-terms cut for colleges when there is a 6 per cent real-terms cut in the budget as a whole?

It is not just Opposition parties that are worried about what is happening to colleges. We have heard a number of quotes from SNP members over the course of the afternoon, but what is interesting is that the only quotes that they could produce were those that supported in principle the idea of mergers, regionalisation and change. What they have been unable to quote is a single source that thinks that next year's college budget is a good idea. Those two things are not the same. Jeremy Peat, who gave evidence to the Finance Committee on 3 October, said:

"I like the structural changes that are going through and I believe that substantial efficiency gains can come from them but, as I said earlier, I worry about whether the resource will be available for the skills development end of FE on a lifetime learning basis. You"—

he was addressing the committee—

"should ensure that that is addressed as a priority, because it is important."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 3 October 2012; c 1678.]

The Education and Culture Committee heard from Professor Jim Gallacher that it would be difficult to maintain the quality of provision under the current circumstances. As Mary Scanlon pointed out, when Audit Scotland looked at the issue in greater depth, it said that

"the Scottish Government should provide a clear assessment of the expected benefits and costs of regionalisation including structural change, how these benefits contribute to its reform objectives and how costs are to be funded".

We had not had that from the Scottish Government and we still have not had it.

Elizabeth Smith outlined in her motion one of the consequences of the savage cuts to college budgets. If we have drastic cuts, we will narrow access instead of widening it. I have touched already on the decrease in the total headcount over the course of two years. However, as Elizabeth Smith pointed out, there has been a 26 per cent decline in female students since 2007 compared to a 13 per cent decline in male students. That is another statistic that should deeply worry us all. Again, though, it was nonchalantly dismissed by the cabinet secretary and others.

Mark McDonald: Will the member take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The member does not have time.

Gavin Brown: I am in my final minute, so I am afraid that I am unable to do so.

I close with a quote from John Henderson that Elizabeth Smith also touched on. He said:

"One of the enormous strengths of the college system is its ability to cater for a diverse range of students at different times in their lives. Any narrowing of that risks limiting the opportunities available."

The Scottish Government has to think again about its draft budget and take seriously the concerns that have been expressed today. I am very happy to conclude this debate and support Elizabeth Smith's motion.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-04797, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 20 November 2012

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Air Passenger Duty

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Public Bodies Act Orders – Standing Order Rule Changes

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Consultation on the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland

followed by Scottish Government Motion: COSLA Membership for the Committee of the Regions

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 21 November 2012

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Culture and External Affairs;
Infrastructure, Investment and Cities

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Business Tourism

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 22 November 2012

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: The

Modernisation of Scotland's Career Services

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 27 November 2012

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 28 November 2012

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Education and Lifelong Learning

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 29 November 2012

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motions S4M-04798 and S4M-04799 on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Glasgow Commonwealth Games Act 2008 (Ticket Touting Offence) (Exceptions for Use of Internet etc.) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 (Relevant Premises) Regulations 2012 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-04787.2, in the name of Michael Russell, which seeks to amend motion S4M-04787, in the name of Liz Smith, on education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-04787.1, in the name of Hugh Henry, which seeks to amend motion S4M-04787, in the name of Liz Smith, on education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 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 53, Against 65, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-04787, in the name of Liz Smith, on education, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)

Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the significant economic and social benefits of the Scottish Government's proposals for the reform of a college sector that has been neglected

for far too long by previous administrations; welcomes in particular the regionalisation of the sector, leading to the creation of new institutions of significant scale, reputation and efficiency that are better able to identify and address the skills needs of the regional economy, and further recognises the guarantee, unique in these islands, that the Scottish Government has given to every 16 to 19-year-old not already in education, employment or training, of an offer of a place in learning or training.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-04798, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Glasgow Commonwealth Games Act 2008 (Ticket Touting Offence) (Exceptions for Use of Internet etc.) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-04799, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of an SSI, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 (Relevant Premises) Regulations 2012 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Christian Aid Tax Justice Bus

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-04217, in the name of Neil Findlay, on Christian Aid's tax justice bus. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament commends the work by Christian Aid and Church Action on Poverty in taking their Tax Justice Bus around the UK and Ireland raising awareness of tax dodging; notes Christian Aid's estimate that the global culture of financial secrecy costs the developing world \$160 billion every year, which is one and a half times what is delivered in international aid; understands that, in the UK, the poorest people are also worst affected by the impact of tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance; notes that the Tax Justice Bus is in Scotland between 1 and 5 October 2012, stopping in Dumfries, Alloway, Glasgow, Edinburgh, St Andrews, Inverness and Inverurie, including a stop outside the Parliament on 3 October to allow MSPs and parliamentary staff to meet campaigners, and welcomes the opportunity for people to get on board the tax bus and find out why tackling tax dodging is so important in the fight against local and global poverty.

17:05

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I thank the Christian Aid tax justice campaign for doggedly maintaining a focus on the issue. Raymond Baker, the director of the organisation Global Financial Integrity, has called corporate tax avoidance

"the ugliest chapter in global economic affairs since slavery."

That is a fairly big claim, so it is incumbent on us to examine it and what it means for Scotland, the United Kingdom and the wider world.

The debate takes place against a background of unprecedented austerity across Europe. Today, general strikes are taking place in many countries. Tax justice simply cannot be separated from what is going on. In Britain, at the same time as our public services are being starved of funds, we have the biggest tax gap in our history, which is estimated to be £120 billion. That figure is made up of avoidance, evasion and unpaid taxation. The issue is not about small businessmen or sole traders; it is about some of the largest household names and companies such as Pfizer, Starbucks, Google, Facebook, Amazon and Vodafone, to name but a few. A conservative estimate is that those companies are dodging £35 billion every year in unpaid tax to the UK Exchequer.

In recent budgets, the top rate of income tax has been lowered to 45 per cent and corporation tax rates have halved. The use of tax havens by multinational corporations has been officially sanctioned and even encouraged by tax law, while at the same time VAT has been raised to its

highest-ever rate. Successive Governments throughout the western world have accepted the agenda or been complicit in supporting it.

What is the result of all that? About \$160 billion has been lost to developing countries through a range of increasingly dodgy practices, including the practice of transfer mispricing, which is when multinational companies export their goods from developing countries at lower than market prices, thereby reducing their book profits and therefore their tax liability. That deprives the poorest nations of desperately needed tax revenues for services. The goods are then sold on to a subsidiary that is based in a tax haven, which then sells on the goods at inflated prices and with the lower tax rate that is applied in the tax haven area.

To put that \$160 billion in context, it is three times the amount that is given globally each year in international aid. On top of that, £13 trillion—yes, trillion—has been squirreled away in tax havens beyond the reach of the authorities. That is a scandal of monumental proportions, yet we have allowed it to happen. Another scam involves companies in the industrialised world selling to developing countries at inflated prices to enable the seller to shift large amounts of capital abroad while reducing profit margins and thus tax liabilities. There are many further tricks in the companies' armoury.

Current international accountancy standards require countries to report only consolidated accounts on a global basis, which means that no one knows where taxable activities occur and/or where profits are declared. That makes it easy for companies to shift capital and pay tax—or not—wherever they choose. We need country-by-country reporting to establish exactly what is going on.

I am one of those saddoes who watch the proceedings of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee. On Monday, it took evidence from Starbucks and Amazon executives, and I urge everyone to watch the footage—it is a mixture of comedy and tragedy. Starbucks has been operating in the UK for 15 years and has a 35 per cent market share, yet it claims to have made a profit in only one of those years despite a turnover of £3 billion. How much tax has it paid? It has paid only £8 million in 15 years. Amazon—which, let us not forget, was welcomed to Scotland with open arms by the First Minister and was given a £10.8 million grant—is even worse, having paid no tax at all in the UK in the past three years. Amazon's business model is one of brazen tax avoidance, poor-quality and insecure employment and predatory pricing that squeezes suppliers and affects the whole community. Is that a business model that we should be falling over ourselves to welcome into our country?

The question is, how do we change things? There are global issues and there are local ones. We need a new global tax consensus that is based on fairness, transparency and accountability. In the meantime, there are things that we can do here in Scotland. We could follow the seven regions of France, including Paris, that have declared themselves tax haven-free zones and will not do business with companies that avoid their liabilities. We could follow Helsinki in refusing to award public contracts to corporate tax avoiders. Currently, the Scottish Government and local government engage with a range of companies that do not pay their way. We could introduce a set of legally binding procurement rules that subject companies that deliver and bid for public contracts to high ethical and environmental standards and anti-tax avoidance measures. That approach was supported by Scottish National Party members Mike Weir and Angus Robertson at Westminster, among 115 other MPs, and I commend them for it.

The procurement bill is yet to be introduced and we can take action in Scotland now. I urge all members to look closely at that. I hope to hear how the Scottish Government intends to play its part in ending this global scandal and in ensuring that Scotland does not just sit back passively while its public services are deprived of the funds that they need. I thank Christian Aid for continuing with its campaign. The debate is moving in its direction, and I urge it to keep up the good work.

17:12

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I congratulate Neil Findlay on securing the debate. I hope that it is an indication that Labour has rediscovered its soul.

Tax justice is the idea that everyone in our society should make an appropriate contribution to society, reflecting their personal circumstances. In Christian terms, it is a social obligation that is akin to loving one's neighbour. Yet, over the past few decades, there has been a widespread perception that there are fundamental problems with our tax system and that not everyone is paying their fair share. That perception has been exacerbated since the financial crisis in 2007, which has brought draconian cuts to public sector jobs and welfare spending while billions of pounds of public money has been pumped into banks to keep them afloat. Those cuts to welfare and public sector jobs have a disproportionate impact on the poorest in our society, who are least able to defend themselves. It is commendable that Christian Aid and Church Action on Poverty are trying to raise awareness of the issues with our tax system. I was delighted to visit the tax justice bus when it came to Edinburgh.

The scale of the problem is massive. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has estimated that the UK tax gap for 2011-12 was £32 billion, although Neil Findlay says that it was £120 billion once everything was aggregated. That is absolutely massive. Just imagine what we could do with all that dodged tax.

The current coalition Government has slashed public spending on welfare through its austerity programme, which is having a massive impact on public sector jobs. While the press is filling up with stories of the banks returning to large bonuses, the vast majority of families in the UK are struggling with huge increases in energy and fuel bills as the state withdraws its support.

The perception that we are not all in it together as a society is furthered by the stories of large corporations and the wealthy employing imaginative tax avoidance systems. It is striking that the poorest 10 per cent of our society contribute 39 per cent of their incomes in tax, while the wealthiest 10 per cent contribute only 35 per cent.

The Church of Scotland described paying tax as a social obligation, but our tax system distorts that by creating two different understandings of tax—the poorest tax payers must pay in full, while the wealthier have a range of options to lower their tax bill. However, that is an international problem: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates that the amount of corporation tax that is avoided in developing countries is about \$160 billion annually, which is equivalent to three times the global aid budget.

Neil Findlay: I have hardly disagreed with anything that Dave Thompson has said, and I am pleased that he has contributed to the debate. Does he agree with my point about the procurement bill and would he support clauses in that bill that ensure compliance in this country?

Dave Thompson: I will come to that.

Multinational companies employ creative methods to dodge tax, leaving Governments to pick up the pieces through aid. A fairer, more transparent international financial system in which companies must report results country by country would greatly help developing countries in collecting the corporation tax that they are due, and it would help to reduce their dependence on aid. Governments' aid budgets could then be redeployed to support disaster relief, when necessary, and used to offset the damaging welfare cuts at home.

The Scottish public has always been very generous in donating to charities, and the UK remains one of the largest aid donors in the world. However, family budgets are squeezed and public donations have fallen by as much as 20 per cent.

It is unacceptable that multinational companies whose turnovers are greater than those of many of the world's developing countries continue to funnel their wealth through tax havens and deprive countries that so desperately need greater tax income. Christian Aid and Church Action on Poverty's campaign for a more transparent financial system would help to reduce the incidence of that and the devastating impact that it has on the tens of millions of people who are living in the most desperate poverty. That includes the likes of the Scottish Government looking at procurement to help with the campaign, and both the Scottish and UK Governments must respond to the campaign and bring tax justice to all.

17:17

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): I congratulate my comrade, Neil Findlay, on securing this important debate. Unfortunately, I was unable to visit the tax justice bus, but I fully support Christian Aid and the Church Action on Poverty's aims in alerting people to the importance of tackling tax dodging and in the fight against poverty, both at home and abroad.

Neil Findlay told us that the tax gap was estimated to stand at £120 billion, and Dave Thompson pointed that out, too. However, that figure of £120 billion is worth repeating because it is seriously undermining public services and the development of a more equal society, both in the UK and globally. Of course, that is partly due to cuts in HMRC—since 2005, it has shed half of its staff and it is set to lose 10,000 more over the next few years. I contend that more, not less, tax officers are needed if we are to deliver tax justice at home.

Alongside Christian Aid and Church Action on Poverty, the Public and Commercial Services Union is campaigning against global injustices in the tax system. The economies of developing countries are being hit hard because essential public services rely on the taxes collected by their Governments. It is estimated that about £250 billion is being denied to those economies because of corporate tax dodging.

World-wide, big businesses are undoubtedly making a huge success of dodging taxes. Every year, poorer countries lose three times more money to tax havens than they receive in aid. Those funds are urgently needed to pay for things such as education and healthcare and to fight poverty. That is an absolute scandal.

At home, multinationals have been lobbying hard for some time to have the anti-tax haven rules watered down. The Treasury seems to be sympathetic to that, because—I imagine—it hopes that multinationals that have moved their

headquarters to tax havens abroad will move them back to the UK.

However, the Government does not have to offer such concessions to attract business, because tax is only one of a number of factors that determine where a company locates. In fact, the level of corporate tax is rarely the deciding factor when a company decides where to locate its real headquarters. I say "real", because that is where hundreds or thousands of high-quality jobs are. The only companies that are likely to be attracted by such reforms are small outfits that would be just big enough to qualify for UK registration, but just think how much would be lost.

It is undoubtedly the case, around the world and in this country, that ordinary people are getting poorer while the rich get richer. In this country, much time and effort is put into attacking so-called benefit cheats. I certainly do not condone benefit fraud, but if as much time and effort were put into tackling tax dodging and closing loopholes, we could go a long way towards tackling poverty and deprivation at home and abroad. At the moment, the poor are paying for tax breaks for the rich, which is completely outrageous.

I again commend Neil Findlay for bringing the debate to the chamber and for offering alternatives to the current arrangements.

17:21

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, congratulate my comrade Neil Findlay on bringing the matter to Parliament.

I must confess that I was not aware that the tax justice bus had visited the Parliament. Members might well be aware that the Conservative Party makes a point of ensuring, whenever possible, that we put up a speaker for members' business debates. I believe that someone sat quietly at their desk one night, looked through the motions and saw that tonight's one mentioned a bus so, naturally, they put up the transport spokesman to discuss it.

That said, I am delighted to be able to take part in the debate and to support the broad principle that lies behind it. There are significant differences between my perception of how tax should be dealt with and the perceptions of other members, but the situation that Dave Thompson ably described, whereby the low-paid have no choice but to pay tax while some of the highest-earning companies in the world can avoid their tax responsibilities, is one that we have a common interest in condemning.

However, there is a consistent failure at certain levels to understand the difference between tax evasion and tax avoidance. The fact that reports

on the BBC this morning that discussed many of these issues naively compared the amount of tax that some companies pay not with their profits, but with their turnovers indicates the extent of that failure in understanding. Sadly, in these difficult times, there are many honest, hard-working companies in the UK that have substantial turnovers, but which deliver no profit whatever.

Neil Findlay: I appreciate the member raising that issue. I refer him to the evidence that was given to a House of Commons committee yesterday. I think that it was Amazon that stated that out of revenues of £200-odd million that it declared for the UK—these figures might be out—it had paid £1.8 million in tax.

Alex Johnstone: I clarify that I do not question that at all. My concern was about inaccurate and inappropriate representation of the issue in the media. The explanation that the member has given is the sort of explanation that we need to hear more of in the public domain.

There are differences between my perception of tax and that of other members. I believe that, as a country, we pay too much tax. However, I also believe, as Dave Thompson said, that the wrong people are paying it. He asked us to imagine what we could do with all that dodged tax. One thing that we could do is give it back to some of the low-paid taxpayers we have in this country today. We have heard it suggested that we could use the extra money to underpin the benefits system in this country; a system that in many cases is made necessary by virtue of the fact that too many of our low-paid people pay too much tax.

Whatever angle members come from to the discussion and whatever their understanding of the need for tax and what they can do with it, we have a common understanding that many, many companies that operate in our economy today are not pulling their weight or paying the tax that they ought to and that those who suffer most by whatever means are those who are paying tax at the low end of the economy. Despite the fact that we will disagree about some things, we can come together around that principle and begin to work towards a situation in which everybody pays their way.

17:25

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): I will resist the temptation to launch into a rendition of "The Internationale" but I, too, congratulate Neil Findlay on securing this important debate. I add my support to the campaign that Christian Aid and Church Action on Poverty have organised against tax dodging.

Tax evasion and avoidance are some of the most significant challenges faced by developing

economies in the world today. I whole-heartedly support the efforts of non-governmental organisations and the grass-roots, student-led bollocks to poverty campaign, which involves a group of committed students from the University of Edinburgh, in their fight for tax justice. I pay tribute to their efforts to raise awareness of tax justice among a new generation of young people.

The tax justice bus has become an effective and highly visible campaign that raises awareness of the terrible damage that tax dodging inflicts on developing countries around the world. Tax is the most important, beneficial and sustainable source of finance for development. Tax revenue in Africa, for example, is worth 10 times the value of foreign aid. Putting a stop to tax avoidance is critical to securing long-term change and a sustainable future in the developing world.

The Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have described tax avoidance as "morally wrong" and "abhorrent". Despite that rhetoric, this year's budget contained an announcement on relaxing controlled foreign company regulations. According to evidence given by ActionAid to the International Development Committee, those changes will cost developing countries more than £4 billion a year. The CFC rules were put in place to deter UK-owned companies from moving profits to countries with a lower corporate tax rate than the UK, and they are specifically designed to curb tax dodging and the use of tax havens. After the changes, a UK-owned company will no longer have to pay a levy on any profits moved from a developing country to a tax haven.

That is likely to have a significant detrimental impact on the tax revenues of developing countries and I urge the UK Government to urgently rethink its plans. The chancellor should not make it easier for companies to use tax havens, especially when developing countries stand to lose billions in revenue.

The Tory Government denies the claims but does nothing to refute them, so the UK Government is undermining its own efforts to make provision for international aid and development. I fully endorse the call from the International Development Committee, urging the Treasury and the Department for International Development to conduct their own analyses of the figures. We need such scrutiny and we should not allow UK-based multinational companies to shirk their tax responsibilities at the expense of the poorest people in the world. Developing countries are precisely the countries that are most in need of our support and they will suffer as a direct consequence of the chancellor's actions.

The Scottish Government, with the support of the Parliament, has doubled Scotland's

international aid budget to £9 million since 2007 and it remains committed to our global responsibilities. Scotland can play an active role in alleviating poverty, which will contribute to the achievement of the millennium development goals. However, although international aid has a role to play, action on tax has the potential to deliver far greater gains.

A more sustainable way of promoting development should be considered, giving countries the freedom to pay for their own development by raising their own revenues. One way to do that is to fight against tax havens—again, I pay tribute to Christian Aid for the work that it is doing.

Tax dodging affects us all. It means less money for our roads, policing, schools and hospitals, but the impact is felt hardest by the people most in need, as essential services giving access to education, adequate medicine and clean water and sanitation are starved of much-needed funds. By putting an end to tax dodging, we can create not just a fairer, better Scotland, but a more equal and just world for everyone.

17:30

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I congratulate Neil Findlay on bringing this important issue to the chamber for debate. I have a brother. We are not that close, so I will not use the term.

Momentum has been growing among many people, including those in Christian Aid and other organisations, who campaign on the issue. I refer to the comments at the opening of the living wage debate last week. We should also recognise that poverty pay at the bottom and tax avoidance by the wealthiest have gone on for far too long, and we should recognise that a great deal of work has been done by many campaigners to raise those issues up the agenda.

Greens in this country and around the world constantly bang on about economic growth and the shortcomings of gross domestic product. Otherwise amiable fellows such as Alex Johnstone then usually wrinkle their brows and sometimes get to their feet to intervene. However, whether or not we see GDP as being an inadequate measure of economic progress, it is abundantly clear that tax avoidance, and tax havens specifically, are among the key mechanisms that have been used to ensure that the economic proceeds of growth are hoarded by the wealthiest while the social and environmental costs of economic activity are borne by those who are least able to defend themselves. Unless we can close down the opportunities that have been afforded and which are, as Neil Findlay rightly said, actively facilitated by HMRC and

Government, we will see the same crisis of inequality repeated.

My colleague at Westminster, Caroline Lucas, made a contribution to the debate by launching the Tax and Financial Transparency Bill, which, sadly, Westminster, in its wisdom, decided not to support. That bill proposed that

“the Secretary of State ... require banks, corporations and trusts to provide information on their status, income arising and tax payments made in each jurisdiction”.

That would have gone some way towards providing the transparency and information to which Neil Findlay referred.

Neil Findlay: Michael Meacher has reintroduced a private member's bill on anti-avoidance measures in the House of Commons, which I am absolutely sure Caroline Lucas will support.

Patrick Harvie: Indeed. Several attempts may well need to be made before Government is finally willing to act on the issue.

I wanted to mention the Tax and Financial Transparency Bill particularly because it mentions trusts alongside banks and corporations. We in Scotland should be aware that, in some instances, trusts are used by people who own land that, as campaigners such as Andy Wightman have shown, was basically stolen in the first place and is held in trust simply as another form of private property. Many trusts use tax havens to avoid paying their share. That is another aspect that we should bear in mind.

I am delighted that Humza Yousaf will respond to the debate. I have not heard him respond in a ministerial capacity in the chamber before, so I am looking forward to that. I want to make him aware of an exchange that I had with his colleague, Derek Mackay, during the living wage week debate. I suggested that, as well as taking a bullish approach to procurement, which will raise legal issues that the Government needs to resolve, we should look at regional selective assistance grants. We could say to the likes of Amazon that they should not expect to qualify for regional selective assistance grants unless they pay the living wage.

We could take the same approach to the use of tax havens. No company that uses tax havens should expect to be able to apply for grants or any other form of business support services, and they should certainly not expect to have friendly photo opportunities with ministers when they make announcements in Scotland. I encourage Mr Yousaf to take that suggestion to his colleagues in Government. Mr Swinney may be persuaded that we can take that approach right now, and also invite organisations such as the tax justice network to co-operate with him in the tax consultation

forum that was announced when he set up revenue Scotland.

We have the opportunity now to begin to set the tax culture that we wish to see in Scotland, whatever range of tax powers we will have in the future. That tax culture should have zero tolerance for the use of tax havens and other tax avoidance measures.

17:35

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): I congratulate Neil Findlay on bringing this debate to the chamber. The reason why Mr Harvie has not yet heard me respond to a debate is because this is my first response to a debate in a ministerial capacity. I hope that I will not disappoint him too much.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in this debate, which quite rightly commends the work by Christian Aid and Church Action on Poverty on their tax justice campaign. I am sorry that I, too, missed the opportunity to go on to the tax justice bus as it toured around Scotland. As the popular phraseology goes, if we miss one bus, another three will come by. I therefore look forward to future visits by the tax justice bus to Scotland.

During last week's debate on Scotland's relationship with Malawi, which was my first debate in the chamber in my ministerial capacity, we heard about the importance of development projects to the world's poorest countries. I am pleased that the Scottish Government has funded a number of Christian Aid projects in recent years, such as the empowerment for health and livelihoods project in Malawi and the inclusive economic development project in south Asia. However, the tax justice campaign clearly recognises that development is about more than just aid—Jim Eadie eloquently made this point in his contribution—and is about the rules of the financial system and the loopholes in them. Christian Aid and Church Action on Poverty should be commended for highlighting those issues and pursuing them over a number of years.

Colm Regan is the editor of "80:20 Development in an Unequal World", which as soon as I got my ministerial position I was told I had to read. I must say that those who read the book find it a real eye-opener. In it, Colm Regan looks beyond tax avoidance to consider financial flows between the developed and the developing world in the round, pointing out the problems in the current rules of the game.

The United Nations secretary-general produced a report in July 2010 that revealed that, in 2009, developing countries provided net financial

resources to the developed world of \$513 billion. That figure included interest payments on third world debt, the cost of trade barriers, the cost of the brain drain and the cost of corruption and capital flight, to which we can add tax avoidance. However, the figure does not include the environmental costs associated with climate change. We know that climate change is caused by the actions of the developed countries, but it is those in the developing world who suffer the most from it.

It is easy to think simply about giving aid to the developing world and to ignore the money that flows straight back to the developed world in the form of debt repayments. We should therefore try to change the way in which we think about development work and frame it not as charity but as a contribution to global economic justice. We need to make a weighty contribution in that regard, because taxation is at the heart of global economic justice.

We have heard in this debate about the \$160 billion—£120 billion—that Christian Aid calculates is lost to developing countries through tax avoidance, which is one and a half times what is delivered in international aid. That calculation has been accepted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. As Dave Thompson rightly said, imagine what developing countries could do with that \$160 billion—imagine the progress that they could make towards the millennium development goals in health, education, energy and sanitation.

Christian Aid also highlights the other negative impacts of tax avoidance. We are seeing an increasing number of transactions by multinational companies taking place across borders, which makes tax avoidance easier for such companies than it is for a small or medium-sized enterprise in Malawi, for example. That leads to a situation where a tax-avoiding multinational has an advantage over a local company.

I am pleased that a survey that Christian Aid conducted found that people support action to reduce tax avoidance. Consumers should take a look at the tax habits in developing countries of the companies from which we buy goods and services.

The Scottish Government supports the Scottish Fair Trade Forum and fair trade products, as members will be aware.

Neil Findlay: Will the minister take an intervention?

Humza Yousaf: I will come on to the points that Neil Findlay made, but of course I will take an intervention.

Neil Findlay: The minister has addressed a lot of overseas issues and I am thankful for that, but will he address some domestic issues? Does he regard it as morally or economically sensible of us to pay grants to multinational companies that come in to use our educated workforce, use our roads to transport their goods and all the rest of it but then pay no tax back to the system? Does that make sense?

Humza Yousaf: I was going to come on to the points that Neil Findlay and other members raised. Of course, in attracting jobs to this country, the Scottish Government has an incredibly difficult job in the most difficult of circumstances. That is not to say that we should wilfully turn a blind eye to the tax implications.

The obvious point is that the legal loopholes for tax avoidance are not in our power to control. We have an impact—we absolutely do—and we have a duty and a responsibility to try to influence the UK Government. I share Neil Findlay's disappointment at the UK Government's approach. In a press release that came out yesterday, Christian Aid was incredibly unimpressed that, on the day after the Public Accounts Committee grilled the multinationals—the Starbucks and the Amazons—the UK Government

“ignores vital proposals that would deter multinational tax dodging”.

The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government have a responsibility to use whatever weight we can use to put pressure on the UK Government.

Alex Johnstone: In recent years it has been suggested on a number of occasions that corporation tax be devolved to Scotland. Does the minister envisage that such a move could be the first step towards turning Scotland into a corporate tax haven?

Humza Yousaf: No, I do not accept that at all. When it comes to his proposals on corporation tax, John Swinney has made it clear that the framework would include measures to tackle tax avoidance. He said that on the public record in answers to parliamentary questions from Patrick Harvie's colleague Alison Johnstone, and he had said so previously.

Neil Findlay: Will the minister take an intervention on that point? I am sure that the Presiding Officer will be generous.

Humza Yousaf: I must make progress, because I want to respond to what members said about public procurement. There is potentially an opportunity to do something through the forthcoming procurement reform bill. A number of NGOs responded to the consultation on the bill, which closed on 2 November, and I am sure that

they made the points that members made. The Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2012 allow public bodies to exclude from bidding for a contract a company that

“has not fulfilled obligations relating to the payment of taxes under the law of any part of the United Kingdom”,

or indeed of the country in which it is based.

Elaine Smith, who has been fighting injustice for many years, spoke with typical passion when she made the point that we can consider other incentives and ways of attracting headquarters to our country. She talked about the workforce, and her point was well made.

Patrick Harvie: Will the minister take an intervention?

Humza Yousaf: I am running over time, Presiding Officer. Do I have time?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes.

Humza Yousaf: I do have time. I will take the intervention.

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful to the minister and to you, Presiding Officer.

I urge the minister to respond to something that I said in my speech. Mr Swinney has established the tax consultation forum, which I hope will set the culture that we expect in taxation policy in this country. Will the minister join me in asking Mr Swinney to invite the tax justice network and other social justice and anti-poverty organisations to be full members of the forum?

Humza Yousaf: Mr Harvie is doing nothing but trying to get me into a little bit of trouble—he knows that for me to lobby my own Government goes slightly against the notion of collective responsibility. However, he has every right to make that call. In the answer that John Swinney gave to Patrick Harvie's colleague Alison Johnstone, he was very open about exactly what the tax consultation forum will be doing and when it will next meet, and I encourage him in that work.

Patrick Harvie made a very good contribution—he slightly insulted Alex Johnstone's wrinkly brow, but other than that he made some good points about the need to consider other incentives and to redefine economic growth and the question of what we are trying to achieve as a society.

We are committed to establishing a fair and transparent corporate tax system in Scotland, and transparency should be at its heart. Neil Findlay correctly pointed out in his opening speech that we have allowed the situation to go on for far too long. However, I add the caveat that, in the past couple of years, there has most definitely been a groundswell on these issues. Part of that groundswell includes Neil Findlay bringing the

debate to the chamber, and it also includes UK Uncut, Christian Aid and the various NGOs and other organisations that have clubbed together.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister might want to consider winding up now.

Humza Yousaf: All those issues will be examined as we develop our proposals for international development and our economic framework for inclusion in next year's independence white paper. It is vital that an independent Scotland's policies do no harm either to the developing world or domestically.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to speak on this important subject, and I wish the campaign every success. Once again, I congratulate Neil Findlay on bringing the debate to the chamber.

Meeting closed at 17:46.

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