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Official Report

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Thursday 6 December 2012

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Scottish Parliament

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General Question Time

11:40

Food and Drink (Protected Geographical Indication Status)

1. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many Scottish food and drink products have protected geographical indication status. (S4O-01576)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead): Currently, there are five Scottish food and drink products that have protected geographical indication status. That number goes up to six if Scotch whisky, which is protected under a separate regulation, is included. A number of products—Scottish wild salmon, Stornoway black pudding and Orkney Scottish island cheddar—are nearing the end of consideration for the award of PGI status. The PGI for Scottish wild salmon is imminent, and we are hopeful that we will hear good news about the other applications in the very near future.

Rhoda Grant: Indeed, and I am very hopeful that Stornoway black pudding will receive protected status. Given that the award of PGI status would provide a marketing benefit for the producers of Stornoway black pudding and of the other products on the list, what steps is the Scottish Government taking to help them to market their products at home and abroad following that boost?

Richard Lochhead: As the member will be aware—because, like other members, she has taken a close interest in Stornoway black pudding—that is something that we have devoted extra resources to over the past year or two. For instance, we have funded the Scottish Agricultural College to work with producers to work up their applications. I am pleased that new applications are coming through. Scotland has many iconic, world-famous food and drink products, which should be protected from fakes and should, as Rhoda Grant quite rightly outlined, enjoy the marketing benefits that such status brings. I encourage all members who have iconic, well-known food and drink producers in their areas to bring to their attention the benefits of European protected status. We will certainly give all the support that we can to get them through the process as quickly as possible.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Scotch beef and Scotch lamb share protected food name status, but it appears that Quality Meat Scotland spends much more money advertising Scotland's wonderful beef than it does advertising Scotland's equally wonderful lamb. Will the minister increase the funds that are spent on the promotion of lamb, while not decreasing the funds that are spent on the promotion of beef, to give a much-needed boost to Scottish sheep farmers?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I am not sure that that question is entirely relevant, but the cabinet secretary can answer it if he wants to.

Richard Lochhead: I am happy to do so.

I am sure that the member might wish to take up his concerns directly with Quality Meat Scotland. However, I should say that I was at Tesco in Elgin just a week or so ago to promote Scotch lamb as part of a joint venture between QMS and Tesco. Therefore, QMS is promoting Scotch lamb, and the Scottish Government is keen to support that.

It would make sheep farmers' lives easier if Jamie McGrigor's colleagues in the United Kingdom Government would listen to the Scottish industry, the Scottish Government and QMS and, as we have requested, repatriate some of the meat levy that results from lamb that is produced in Scotland, which goes to English abattoirs and supports English lamb. That would enable millions of pounds of extra funding to be used to promote Scotch lamb over the coming years.

Sewage Treatment Plants

2. Margaret McDougall (West Scotland)

(Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what new responsibilities are outlined in the Water Resources (Scotland) Bill for Scottish Water relating to sewage treatment plants. (S4O-01577)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon): The Water Resources (Scotland) Bill is about making best use of Scotland's water resources. There are provisions on Scottish Water's control and management of substances that enter sewage treatment works. The bill also tasks Scottish Water with developing its non-core activities, which might include using assets such as treatment works for commercial enterprises such as the generation of renewable energy.

Existing legislation that has arisen from European directives including the urban waste water treatment and water framework directives already provides a comprehensive set of requirements on the operation of sewage treatment plants. Those requirements apply to all plants, regardless of their owner.

Margaret McDougall: How will the new legislation address issues with private sewage treatment plants, such as the plant at Burnhouse near Beith, which serves around six houses and a caravan park of 40 caravans? That sewage plant was the responsibility of a private company—the North Ayrshire Water Company Ltd—which has now gone into liquidation. I have previously written to the cabinet secretary, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Water, and no one seems to have responsibility for the plant, but if it breaks down, the residents will have to bear the huge repair and legal action costs. Does the cabinet secretary think that it is right that residents, many of whom are elderly, have to take responsibility for the plant? What advice can she offer the residents? Would she be willing to meet them to discuss their concerns?

Nicola Sturgeon: I have sympathy for people in the scenario that Margaret McDougall describes. As she is aware, Scottish Water has no enforcement powers over the owners of private sewage treatment plants—such powers reside with SEPA through the licences that it issues to permit the discharge of waste water to the environment. Local authorities have enforcement powers in relation to public health matters, including emissions of malodour from such works.

The member and I have corresponded about the issues at Burnhouse. I have asked my officials to investigate further and I would be happy to meet her to discuss the position once those investigations are complete, in the hope that we can suggest a way forward for the constituents whom she represents.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware that there have been difficulties for some years with the sewage pumping station at Largs and that promises that Scottish Water has made to local residents have been frequently broken. Given the problems of sight, noise and smell that local residents have had to put up with over the years, will she please say whether she would be prepared to speak to Scottish Water about the issue, so that a final resolution can be found?

Nicola Sturgeon: I know that Scottish Water has had an independent review and provided a report of that review to all affected residents. I understand that the report contained 14 recommendations, which were discussed with residents and are being taken forward. I am advised that residents are being kept informed of the project as it progresses. I will ask Scottish Water to provide Kenny Gibson with an update on progress, so that he can discuss the matter with his constituents. I would be happy to discuss it with him further if concerns remain after that.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Will the new responsibilities that are outlined in the Water Resources (Scotland) Bill extend to putting in place a different funding mechanism to address sewerage infrastructure problems such as those in Prestwick, in my constituency? Scottish Water has cited a lack of funding for many years as the reason for not addressing problems of inadequate sewerage infrastructure there.

Nicola Sturgeon: I am not entirely familiar with the circumstances and the details of the case in Prestwick that John Scott cites, so the best way forward is for him to write to me about the specific circumstances. I will then take up the issue with Scottish Water and get its response, and I will be able to offer him thoughts on how the new legislation will have an impact—if at all—on the situation. I am happy to take that forward in written correspondence and, if necessary, in a meeting with him.

Crime (Lanarkshire)

3. Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in Lanarkshire to reduce crime. (S4O-01578)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The Scottish Government is committed to doing all that we can to support a continued reduction in crime across the whole of Scotland. It is extremely positive that recorded crime fell by 24 per cent in South Lanarkshire and by 21 per cent in North Lanarkshire between 2006-07 and 2011-12. We are succeeding in our efforts to cut knife crime—the number of crimes involving an offensive weapon decreased by 47 per cent in South Lanarkshire and 54 per cent in North Lanarkshire in the same period. That has contributed to an overall 25 per cent reduction in recorded crime across the whole of Scotland in the same period.

Christina McKelvie: The cabinet secretary is aware of the work of the street project in Hamilton, following his visit there earlier this year. Will he welcome and commend the project's new venture, which it has undertaken with Crimestoppers UK? The project has produced a video about the dangers of carrying a knife called "Open your Eyes".

Will the cabinet secretary commend South Lanarkshire Council and its partners on the progress that they have made with the no knives, better lives initiative? Under that initiative, 7,384 young people have participated in diversionary activities and seven young people have been trained as no knives, better lives peer educators. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, along with the sentencing changes that he recently

announced, that partnership approach is reaping rewards in the lowest crime rates in decades?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. I pay tribute to those who are involved in the street project, which Christina McKelvie is right to say that I have visited. I saw the theatre work, but I have not yet seen the video, which I look forward to seeing.

I am delighted about the on-going work in North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire, which are two of our 10 local authority areas where the no knives, better lives initiative is in place. The initiative has been supported by Government investment of £1.5 million since 2009. We are also working through the cashback for communities scheme, under which more than £1.6 million has been invested in this area since 2007.

We must have tough laws, which are getting tougher, and we must have a visible police presence and enforcement, which we have, but we recognise that we must also educate and change a culture. Sometimes I think that matters are better dealt with by young people who are involved. Rather than being lectured to by politicians or police officers, they should have the opportunity to express themselves to their peers and friends. In that way, we will change the culture. Indeed, that is borne out by the statistics, which are showing great improvement. However, we are not complacent.

Norovirus

4. John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many wards were closed and patients were affected by norovirus outbreaks in hospitals in November 2012. (S4O-01579)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Health Protection Scotland monitors and publishes snapshot information on affected hospitals and wards that have been closed by weekly point prevalence surveillance. That information is published on its website. As at the week beginning 26 November 2012, there were 16 hospitals and 20 wards affected. Substantial preparations for winter are carried out every year across NHS Scotland, including work to minimise the frequency and size of norovirus outbreaks, and the Scottish Government has supported national health service boards throughout the year to develop and refine their winter plans for 2012-13.

John Pentland: As *The Herald* reports today, the problem is growing. There have been an estimated 180,000 Scottish cases so far this year. Patients remain infectious after the symptoms disappear and, although advice has been issued that people should wait 48 hours before they visit hospitals or go back to work or school, many people are unaware of that. What is the Scottish

Government doing to ensure that that message gets across to the public?

Michael Matheson: The member highlights the important fact that norovirus is currently very active. The norovirus season appears to have started earlier than it has in previous years. That is not peculiar to Scotland; it is the situation internationally and the experience in other countries around the world.

We and local boards have taken forward a number of initiatives in order to inform relatives of patients that, should they have such symptoms, they should not enter the hospital until 48 hours after their symptoms have receded. It is important that people take that message forward and act on it, and it is extremely important that everyone has a part to play, including those who visit hospitals, in ensuring that we do everything that we can to reduce the possibility of norovirus being taken into clinical settings.

The Presiding Officer: Question 5, in the name of Rob Gibson, has not been lodged, but I have been given an explanation for that.

Question 6, in the name of John Park, has not been lodged either. I do not have an explanation for that but, today of all days, I will not give him a row.

Police Officers (Lothian and Borders Police)

7. Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the number of Lothian and Borders Police officers compares with the number in quarter 1 of 2007. (S4O-01582)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The latest police officer quarterly statistics, which were published on 4 December, show that there are 3,002 full-time-equivalent police officers in Lothian and Borders Police. That is an increase of 209 officers, or 7.5 per cent, since quarter 1 of 2007.

Marco Biagi: I welcome the news of the substantial increase in the number of officers since 2007, which goes alongside very positive crime reports. Can the cabinet secretary assure me that regional and local figures will still be available that can be compared against the 2007 baseline, so that my constituents can continue to see just how many extra police officers the Scottish Government has delivered?

Kenny MacAskill: Yes, I can give that assurance. The member makes a fair point. That has always been a concern as we move towards a single police service in Scotland. The Scottish Government will continue to report on national police officer levels, and our legislation requires the police service of Scotland to make local authority-level information available.

The Scottish Government is working closely with the national police reform team on future plans for data collection, analysis and the reporting of statistical information relating to the delivery of policing. Indeed, I know that discussions are ongoing in Edinburgh between the council and the police to ensure that there is local engagement. I assure the member that the figures will be available at the local level. Indeed, work is ongoing to ensure that, as we move to divisional commands and matters being dealt with at the local authority level, there is the engagement that he and many others want.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):

In that answer, the cabinet secretary did not own up to the fact that, in the same period, Lothian and Borders Police lost 409 civilian staff. How many of the extra officers that the cabinet secretary mentioned are doing duties that were previously carried out by civilian staff, and at what cost?

Kenny MacAskill: As I said yesterday in Labour's debate on police reform, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary for Scotland has recently commented on that issue. Its understanding is that the only backfilling that is taking place anywhere in Scotland—the inspectorate covers the whole of Scotland—involves female officers who are approaching maternity leave and who cannot be expected, because of their condition, to provide front-line services, and male and female officers who are currently injured and incapacitated and are unable to carry out front-line duties.

If Ms McInnes is aware of any other instances, she should feel free to bring them directly to me or to take them to the inspectorate of constabulary. She should remember the confirmation that Chief Constable Stephen House gave that he saw backfilling as providing no great saving at all and that it was not his intention. All the information so far is that backfilling is not happening.

Waiting Times (Accident and Emergency)

6. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the recent Information Services Division "Emergency Department Activity and Waiting Times" report, which states that seven NHS boards did not meet the four-hour accident and emergency waiting times standard in any month between June and September 2012. (S4O-01583)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): The Government remains committed to the important but challenging four-hour accident and emergency waiting times standard and to maintaining local access to accident and emergency services. We will continue to provide additional advice and support to the boards that are most challenged. We have drawn together an

unscheduled care action plan, which is being reviewed by an expert group of doctors, nurses and senior managers. This winter, we have provided an additional £3.19 million to help NHS boards and their partners to manage winter pressures and to make the most effective use of capacity and resources.

Iain Gray: The Government might have thought about how challenging it was when it made the promise, to my constituents and others, of 98 per cent compliance with the four-hour standard for accident and emergency waits. When was the last time that the standard was actually met?

Michael Matheson: A number of boards in Scotland have met the standard. Presently, we are at a level of some 95 per cent across the country, and we are continuing to work with the boards that are not presently meeting the standard. I should point out to the member that, back in 2006, when a survey of performance in A and E departments was carried out, the figure was 88 per cent. Therefore, there has been significant improvement in recent years. We recognise that some boards have specific challenges, and we are working with them to continue to make improvements in the area to ensure that patients get the care that they require as early as possible.

Pharmacies (Applications and Appeals)

9. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action is being taken to monitor the fairness and transparency of pharmacy applications and appeals. (S4O-01584)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Under provisions that are set out in the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical Services) (Scotland) Regulations 2009, the responsibility for considering applications to open a community pharmacy is given to national health service boards, and the responsibility for considering appeals relating to those applications is given to the national appeal panel. The Scottish Government has no role in monitoring applications or appeals, as securing the adequate provision of NHS pharmaceutical services is a matter for local service planning and delivery.

James Kelly: I have serious concerns about the way in which an application for a pharmacy in Whitlawburn in my constituency was treated, particularly given that it was rejected even though it had substantial support in the local community. There is a lack of transparency and accountability on the original hearings and on appeals. Specifically, the public want to know how the process can be handled fairly and objectively, how the public's views can be taken into account and how misrepresentations at hearings can be corrected prior to a decision being reached. I note what the minister says—

The Presiding Officer: We need to get to the question.

James Kelly: These are matters that affect communities. Will the minister begin discussions to ensure that a review is carried out of the hearing and appeal processes for pharmacy applications?

The Presiding Officer: Be as brief as you can be, minister.

Michael Matheson: I should inform the member that there was a review of the process two years ago, when there was an extensive consultation exercise, so that people could express their views on the process. I am content that the current system is operating well, but I note the member's concerns. If he wants to bring to my attention specific experience in his constituency, I am more than happy for him to write to me and I will give him a full and detailed response.

First Minister's Question Time

Engagements

1. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-01050)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Later today I will speak with Steve Frisch, regional president of the global electronics manufacturer Plexus, which I am delighted to announce is creating 130 jobs as part of a £9 million investment in Bathgate, West Lothian. After the disappointment of Vion deciding to close its operations, today's announcement will be very welcome news for the people of West Lothian and is an early result for the West Lothian recovery strategy.

It is appropriate to pay tribute to John Park, who I understand is shortly to stand down as a member of the Scottish Parliament. He has made a considerable contribution to our proceedings over the years.

In light of everything, we should also congratulate Celtic on qualifying for the European championship. I think that Neil Lennon is on his way to becoming a legend.

Johann Lamont: The only word that I would dispute there is "becoming"—maybe we can discuss that later.

I welcome the First Minister's comments about jobs and about John Park's decision to stand down. I am sure that we all wish John Park well. Labour members will miss him very much, but we know that in his new job he will continue to engage with the struggle, the battles and the values in which he believes as well as he has done in the past.

This week, doctors called for honesty from politicians on cancer treatment. Alex Neil has announced a review of access to new medicines, which I welcome. Of course, under Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland went from being the top nation in the United Kingdom for using innovative drugs to being the worst. Will the First Minister explain why Scots do not get access to the latest cancer drugs on the national health service?

The First Minister: The process by which the Scottish Medicines Consortium looks at such matters is robust and has been supported by all parties, and it would be very unwise to change it.

The recent controversy concerns the introduction in the English health service of a special cancer drugs fund. That introduction has been opposed in Scotland, by not just the Scottish National Party but the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, and it has been opposed by

the Welsh Assembly Government, basically because the fund does not fulfil many of the things that are claimed for it. In particular, it introduces in England a postcode lottery. There is criticism from the range of charities that submitted evidence to the Parliament, which cannot see the reason for having a specific cancer drugs fund when other, equally serious, conditions do not have such a fund.

We should be confident that the SMC process in Scotland is a robust one and we should continue our all-party support for the integrity of the process.

Johann Lamont: I did not ask the First Minister for a critique of what is happening elsewhere; I asked him about his responsibility. He said that a cancer drugs fund might create a postcode lottery. Is he not aware that there is currently a postcode lottery in Scotland?

There is no test of cost-benefit for my free hay fever tablets, but such a test is applied to cancer drugs. Let us look at the reality. This morning, we spoke to Iain Morrison. He is 56 and suffers from bowel cancer. He has to pay £1,700 a fortnight for the drugs that he hopes will prolong his life. What is astonishing is that part of that cost is an administration charge from the NHS, so that he can get the drugs that the NHS will not give him for free.

As patients suffer, doctors despair. Dr Tim Crook told the Parliament this week:

"As an Englishman looking after patients in Scotland, I think that there is an inequality that, to my mind as a simple doctor, is unacceptable, in that I cannot offer my Scottish patients the same medication with which I could treat my English patients. As a human being and a doctor, I do not see how that can be right."—[*Official Report, Health and Sport Committee*, 4 December 2012; c 2988.]

Does the First Minister think that that is right?

The First Minister: That refers specifically—I saw the quote and, indeed, the evidence to the committee—to the introduction in England of the special cancer drugs fund. The committee also heard from the Scottish cancer research network lead, Dr David Dunlop, who referred to

"the cancer drugs fund, which clinicians south of the border say is far from perfect. In fact, that fund brings more postcode prescribing than existed previously, because each of the different strategic health authorities has a different shopping list that is influenced by its clinicians."—[*Official Report, Health and Sport Committee*, 4 December 2012; c 2986.]

Incidentally, that position has previously been supported by the Labour Party in this chamber.

We should always look for ways to improve the position and we should always look for ways in which the Scottish Medicines Consortium can be even better in progressing its work, but I point out

that that is exactly why the health secretary Alex Neil has set up the investigation by Professor Routledge, who is looking specifically at how we can improve the situation in Scotland.

In this extraordinarily difficult area, I do not think that it is particularly helpful to give quotations that refer to the existence of a special cancer drugs fund, which we have thus far decided is not appropriate in Scotland for the reasons that I have given. We should also hear the evidence from the cancer charities and others who support the work of the SMC and who point out the advantages of the SMC process.

This is a matter that we must consider, as a Government and as a Parliament, with the utmost care and sensitivity, because it obviously touches on life-limiting conditions and people in conditions of great extremity. I think that Johann Lamont should accept that, thus far at least, the SMC process has enjoyed cross-party, robust support in Scotland, and I think that we should be very careful about departing from that established process of integrity.

Johann Lamont: The First Minister ought to stop accusing me of doing things that I am not doing, and he ought to stop arguing about something that I am not arguing for. I do not need anyone to tell me how serious an issue this is—nobody in here does. What I am saying to him is that there is a postcode lottery in Scotland, and I have described a particular case. This is a very serious issue, but the First Minister's response seems to be that what we have is very good. I am not promoting a particular model to solve this; I am asking the First Minister to confront the fact that there is a major problem.

The issue affects not just those people whom I have already described. The inequality is not just between Scotland and England; there is an even greater inequality within Scotland. Dr Noelle O'Rourke of the Beatson cancer centre told the Parliament's Health and Sport Committee this week that middle-class, articulate patients are more likely to get the cancer drugs that they need than vulnerable patients from deprived backgrounds. She said that patients in less need receive treatments that are denied others in greater clinical need because they are more articulate. Dr O'Rourke described that as "inequitable". Does the First Minister agree?

The First Minister: The reason that I made those points to Johann Lamont is that the quote that she gave was an illustration of the impact of the introduction of the special cancer drugs fund in England. I am looking at the evidence and the argument is that there are drugs available in England because of the special cancer drugs fund, but those are not available in every part of England. The committee has heard evidence—

and I suspect will hear more evidence—of the drawbacks of that particular system.

The reason that I point to the robustness of the SMC process is not to argue that the position that we have in Scotland is perfect. If we thought that the position was perfect, we would not have set up the Routledge review in order to see how we can improve the situation. However, in Scotland the time that the SMC takes to produce guidance, following authorisation for drugs, is just over seven months; the equivalent time in England is 21 months. There is much evidence from the charities and people affected on why they appreciate the speed with which the SMC goes about its work.

There are important improvements that we have made to the process of individual patient treatment requests. The purpose, among other things, of Professor Routledge's review is to see how we can improve that further.

Johann Lamont says that she is not proposing a particular solution. It would be helpful as we contribute to the debate—I hope that this is what the Health and Sport Committee will do—if people would contribute positive suggestions as to how we can improve the situation. However, that should be done with a recognition that what we are dealing with, whether it is in Scotland, England, Wales or wherever, is an extremely serious issue; that we are doing our best to deal with it; that the SMC's process is robust; and that the Routledge review is there to make further improvements on behalf of the people of Scotland.

Johann Lamont: Of course, the doctor referred to was talking not about the SMC but about the individual patient treatment request, into which a review was conducted.

My point is that the review needs to be broader than the remit that has been given to it because of the huge challenges.

The First Minister says that we should have an open and honest debate about this. When I questioned his priorities in health spending, I was accused of wanting to tax the sick and that debate was quickly closed down. This is all part of the same serious process because it is not just about patients getting the latest drugs. The NHS in Scotland spends only just over half the European average on cancer drugs. Cancer specialists do not want to work here. Dr Richard Casasola told this Parliament—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Order.

Johann Lamont: Dr Richard Casasola told this Parliament this week that every Scottish cancer centre is at least one specialist short and that the most gifted doctors do not want to work here because they cannot prescribe the latest drugs.

We are not able to be at the cutting edge because of the choices that the First Minister has made about the way in which drugs are accessed. Will the First Minister please be honest with cancer patients and specialists and confront the reality that this is the result of choices that he has made and it is about his priorities for spending in the NHS? [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: Johann Lamont should accept the substantial efforts and spending on cancer research in Scotland and cancer centres, the substantial increase in the successful outcomes for cancer that we are seeing, and the abidance—for the first time, I think—of the target to have 95 per cent of cancer patients seen in a specified period. The figure when Labour was in office was 85 per cent. Those are all substantial improvements in the service that we are able to offer.

When I argue that the SMC has a robust process that we should reflect on, be proud of and be careful about overturning, I am not just saying that as the First Minister. Myeloma UK, for example, says:

“The modifiers that the SMC use in their decision-making are applied more pragmatically than the comparable but not identical ... criteria used by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE).”

It says that it prefers the SMC approach to the approach south of the border. That the SMC process is robust has substantial support from many people.

There is much evidence that the individual patient treatment request process, which applies to drugs that have not been authorised by the SMC, has factors in it that could be improved, and the health secretary set up Professor Routledge's review to see whether we could improve the situation further.

Johann Lamont should be careful about suggesting that cancer treatment in Scotland is not improving, because it is. She should not say that there is not a commitment to cancer research, because there most certainly is. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

The First Minister: Well, £6 million is being spent on 24 cancer research projects by the chief scientist's office.

Johann Lamont should also accept that we are dealing with hugely difficult circumstances around how to successfully approve and make available to the people of Scotland new, experimental drugs that become available; how to find a safe process for authorising them; and how to find the best possible way of making them available to the community of Scotland.

Every single person in the chamber is committed to better outcomes for cancer patients in Scotland. Let us go forward to find that better solution, supporting the Routledge review, in an atmosphere that accepts that in essence this cannot be seen as a party-political matter but as a matter of trying to improve the health and welfare of the people of Scotland.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S4F-01032)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): There are no plans in the near future.

Ruth Davidson: One party in the chamber has consistently argued for a Scottish cancer drugs fund. The First Minister is right: that argument, which the Scottish Conservatives have put forward, has consistently been opposed by the Scottish National Party and the Labour Party. Today, he says that that is because it is an imperfect solution.

A cancer drugs fund may not be perfect, but it is a solution to enable Scottish cancer patients to get better treatment and access to the same drugs as people elsewhere, and to address the difficulties in recruiting cancer specialists north of the border. I have raised that point with the First Minister, as has my predecessor. The postcode issues that the First Minister cites today have been being addressed down south since the fund's inception.

Does the First Minister even know which drugs are routinely denied to Scottish patients, but are now available in England?

The First Minister: I have seen a number of drugs cited that are available via the cancer drugs fund in England, but are not available—except through individual patient treatment requests, if those are successful—in Scotland. Equally, the Scottish Medicines Consortium's authorisation process for medicines means that a range of drugs, for a range of conditions, are available in Scotland that are not available in England. I can list some of those if Ruth Davidson would like me to.

We should properly conduct a debate on trying to get the best possible system for the people of Scotland. To argue—as Ruth Davidson seems to be saying—that the cancer drugs fund that has been introduced in England is the best solution tends to ignore the substantial evidence of the difficulties, drawbacks and inequities of the situation in England, and the evidence that a range of charities have submitted to the Parliament to say that they do not want to go down that road.

The suggestion that a cancer drugs fund is the solution is not met by the evidence. This Government's willingness to look for a better position than we have in Scotland is symbolised by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing setting up the Routledge review. If we were not interested in finding better outcomes for Scottish patients, we would not have set up Professor Routledge's review.

Ruth Davidson: I have information here—which I am happy to lodge in the Scottish Parliament information centre—to show that, between October 2010 and 27 November of this year, more than 23,000 cancer patients in England have had their lives extended by the cancer drugs fund. That is 23,000 families who have been able to spend more time with their loved one and who thought that that road was worth going down.

Because of the fund, patients in England have had access to everolimus to tackle kidney cancer, which is a drug that is not routinely available in Scotland; Avastin for kidney cancer; lapatinib and eribulin, which are available for those with breast cancer and are not routinely available in Scotland; and bendamustine for those who are suffering from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and chronic leukaemia—that drug is not routinely available in Scotland.

This Government has failed the Scottish patients who died of those conditions and who, with access to those drugs, could have had more time. It does not have to fail thousands more. Rich people do not need free prescriptions: cancer patients need better treatment. Will the First Minister, in his review, at least reconsider his opposition to a cancer drugs fund?

The First Minister: The review exists, as has previously been discussed, to look at all areas that could improve the situation in Scotland. Ruth Davidson should at least acknowledge not only that there is substantial criticism of the cancer drugs fund—not least from cancer charities themselves and from Conservative members of Parliament—but that the fund is a temporary fund before value-based pricing is due to be introduced.

In acknowledging that different systems produce different outcomes, I could cite to Ruth Davidson the range of drugs, for a range of conditions, that are available in Scotland through the SMC process and are not available through the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. We try to find the best possible system for Scottish patients, and, generally speaking, the SMC process is well regarded by members on all sides of the chamber and by the medical profession and patients in Scotland. It is a system that we can have confidence in. The Routledge review is designed to look at whether particular improvements can be made, whether in the SMC

process or the individual patient treatment request process.

There is huge willingness on the part of this Government to look for better outcomes for the people of Scotland, but there is also a track record that indicates that cancer patients in Scotland are receiving better and earlier treatment than they have ever had before. In terms of the move in prevention and early detection of cancer, there have been very substantial advances.

So, let us proceed on this subject with the understanding that every single member of this Parliament in every single party is trying to get better outcomes for the patients of Scotland and that our national health service in Scotland has certain advantages over models that might be pursued elsewhere.

The Presiding Officer: I have a number of back benchers who wish to ask questions and I am determined that they will do so. Can the questions and answers be brief?

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The First Minister will be aware of the outcome of the ballot of RMT members serving on the Orkney and Shetland ferry service and that the islands now face the threat of industrial action over the Christmas holiday period. When my colleague Tavish Scott raised the issue with the First Minister last month, he rightly highlighted the potentially devastating impact on the islands of any strike action affecting those lifeline services. In light of that, can I urge the First Minister to take whatever steps he can to ensure that the strike does not happen, so that people in Orkney and Shetland can look forward to Christmas without the threat of disruption to those genuine lifelines?

The First Minister: The Scottish Government is aware of and concerned about the situation. We hope that all involved will recognise the importance of talks and coming to a satisfactory conclusion to minimise the likelihood and impact of disruption on a lifeline service.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): Does the First Minister share my deep concern about the announcement this morning by Remploy in a company statement that three Remploy businesses are not commercially viable and have no realistic prospect of being sold as going concerns? The businesses are those in Stirling, Dundee and Clydebank and they are now to be closed. Does the First Minister agree that the workers in those factories have been badly let down by the United Kingdom Government in the way in which they have been treated in this matter?

The First Minister: I think that UK Government's attitude to Remploy speaks very poorly of its attitude to workers in that position. I

feel particularly for the workers in those factories, who were given the indication that there could be a successful outcome to the change of process, which has not as yet come to pass. As I have said before in the chamber, Fergus Ewing, the Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism, is working very closely with individual constituency members to try to find a satisfactory outcome. I think that that work, again, should be supported across the parties in the chamber.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): I was contacted by a couple this morning who are concerned that they may have been affected by the problems at the Glasgow assisted conception unit, but they have not yet been contacted by the health board. Does the First Minister agree that no women or couples should have their chance of a family reduced by that situation and that, if necessary, some should begin their treatment again? Will he ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing to look at the resources available to the board to ensure that the result is not even longer waits for women and couples who are still at the back of the queue for treatment?

The First Minister: I will look into why the member's constituents have not been contacted by the health board to say what the way forward will be. I shall make arrangements for the cabinet secretary to contact the member directly.

Autumn Budget Statement

3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): To ask the First Minister what impact the autumn budget statement will have on Scotland. (S4F-01048)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): There are two aspects in particular to consider. Once again it is quite clear—I suspect from the statement yesterday and certainly from analysis of the figures—that the poorest in society are to bear the brunt of the prolonged austerity that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is now indicating. The Treasury's own analysis indicates that the poorest households will be £200 worse off next year as a combined result of the tax and benefit measures that were outlined in the autumn statement.

I should also say that the autumn statement contained an increase in capital spending, which is a measure for which the Scottish Government has campaigned over the past two years. There will be about £330 million net in consequentials. However, it should be remembered across the chamber that that will just undo some of the position of the previous cuts, because the net capital budget will still be going down by 26 per cent. I think that that perhaps indicates that the chancellor's change of heart on capital spending is in itself an admission that the previous strategy was clearly not working and that the economy was

flatlining. However, his tendency to punish those least able to protect themselves is in itself an indictment of the chancellor's approach.

Patrick Harvie: The failure of the UK Government's programme of economic bloodletting is clear for all to see, but instead of changing tack, the chancellor takes billions more from the pockets of the poorest, forcing them to fund yet another massive tax cut for big business. In that context, is it not time for the Scottish Government to give up on the dream of even deeper corporate tax cuts and accept that corporation tax is a necessary tool for raising the investment that we need for a fairer society and a healthier economy?

The First Minister: I think that we should plan our tax policies to increase the wealth in the community and the economy, and having a competitive economy is part of that. We should also plan our tax and distribution policies to bring out an equitable distribution of that wealth.

I do not accept, and I am not sure that Patrick Harvie would put forward the argument, that an increase of wealth necessarily means unfairness in distribution. I think that the most successful economies in the world are those that have an equitable distribution of wealth as well as the ability to create that wealth. One reason why an independent Scotland will be so successful is that we shall be a just nation.

Transport Network (Winter Preparations)

4. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking—

The Presiding Officer: Can we have Mr Eadie's microphone on, please?

Jim Eadie: —to ensure that the transport network is prepared for winter. (S4F-01049)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): All that I heard at first was:

"To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking".

I thought that this was, in that case, going to be an extremely long answer.

We cannot control the weather and transport disruption can never be ruled out, but there has been a great deal of proactive planning. For trunk roads, additional gritters will patrol the busiest roads and there are increased stocks of salt and alternative de-icers. There are also two new ice-breaking vehicles and increased technology to get real-time information to people on the move. We have seen the completion of a £2.2 million programme of investment to improve the resilience of the railway network to adverse weather, the

investment of £1 million in an ice-buster train that can quickly thaw out junctions and other key equipment, and the completion of a programme of points-heater upgrades by Network Rail. There is significant investment by Scotland's airports, including new equipment such as walkway sweepers, a new snow blower and de-icing equipment, and increased snow team numbers at Edinburgh airport.

All of that means that, although the weather cannot be controlled, the member can be reassured that the resilience and preparation of the Scottish Government and our partners are very good indeed.

Jim Eadie: I accept that the First Minister does not control the weather, but will he endeavour to ensure that all relevant departments and agencies work together so that the vital work is both prioritised and funded, for the safety of all people who travel on foot or by bike this winter? Many of my constituents use the Edinburgh Innertube map and travel to work or school by bicycle or on foot. As well as keeping our vital roads and motorways open and safe, we must do all that we can for all our people who travel on foot or by bike.

The First Minister: As Jim Eadie knows, Transport Scotland treats a number of key footways on the trunk road network. It is working with communities that are keen to play their part in helping to keep their footpaths free of snow and ice. It is also providing footway self-help kits to communities that are adjacent to trunk roads, not to replace the service that is provided by the operating companies or, in the case of local authority roads, by the local authorities, but to allow people to play a fuller part in contributing, if they are able to do so. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: I will now take question 6, from Mary Scanlon.

Mental Health (Supreme Court Ruling)

6. Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government will take following the recent Supreme Court ruling relating to the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. (S4F-01034)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): As Mary Scanlon is well aware, the case arises from the provisions of the 2003 act and arrangements that have existed since that act came into force. The member also knows that arrangements that were in place in respect of security arrangements and forensic care facilities outwith the state hospital at Carstairs were found by the Mental Welfare Commission to be appropriate in the visits in 2009 and 2010. The Scottish courts, interpreting Scottish legislation, agreed with the Government's

position and found that there was no requirement to make regulations. It was on that basis that the appeal was contested in the Supreme Court.

It should be noted that the case turned on a technical issue of statutory interpretation. We are currently considering the terms and implications of the judgment in order to decide on the most appropriate course of action in responding to the ruling.

Mary Scanlon: Notwithstanding further interpretations, I note that the Supreme Court judgment relates to two amendments in my name, which were passed unanimously by Parliament in March 2003.

Given that the Supreme Court has now found that ministers acted unlawfully by failing to implement regulations to ensure that mental health patients receive security appropriate to their needs, will the First Minister give Parliament an indication of how many potential compensation claims for victims are expected as a result of the Government's failure to comply with its own laws?

The First Minister: It is not possible to do that at the moment.

I will say two things to Mary Scanlon. I know the background: I know that an amendment was lodged on 20 March 2003, I know that she lodged it and I know that Shona Robison seconded it. We have the full background. Mary Scanlon should accept that it is important to note, when considering what is in the interests of the welfare and natural justice for the people involved, that the Mental Welfare Commission considered in 2009 and 2010 that the arrangements were appropriate. That is a very important point, which perhaps was not the case when Mary Scanlon was extremely concerned about the issue back in 2003.

It is not possible to consider the full implications of the court judgment. The Government is currently considering the terms of the implications of the judgment and deciding on the most appropriate course of action.

Waiting Times (Cancer Patients)

5. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the maximum time is that a patient has waited beyond the cancer waiting times targets in 2012. (S4F-01039)

The First Minister: As Richard Simpson is aware, we have two targets for cancer treatment: the 62-day target, which is measured from the point at which the patient is referred to a specialist, and a 31-day target for treatment to begin once a course of action has been agreed by the patient and the specialist.

In the second quarter of 2012, 2,975 patients were seen within the 62-day limit, which represents 95.3 per cent of those who were referred for treatment. That is good performance; it is the first time those targets have been met over the past couple of years. However, there are individuals for whom that target was not met. The maximum wait for one patient was 399 days, which is totally unacceptable. However, I am sure that Richard Simpson will reflect on the fact that the vast majority of patients in Scotland are now treated within the target time.

The Presiding Officer: Please be brief, Dr Simpson.

Dr Simpson: Yesterday, the whole Parliament joined together in acknowledging the achievements of national health service staff in reducing waiting times. Is the First Minister aware that annually 600 Scots are not being treated for cancer within the 62-day target? The Government's early detection of cancer programme is very welcome, but one third of those who breach the target for treatment are colorectal cancer patients. Will the First Minister undertake to get the health department to investigate, track and research those patients, to see where the problems lie? Those problems could be resolved by making more of the hard choices that Johann Lamont referred to today.

The First Minister: I will certainly take a look and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing will reply specifically to Richard Simpson's information on that aspect and on his advice—given his specialism—in the subject.

We aspire for the 95.3 per cent figure to be 100 per cent. Richard Simpson should reflect on the fact that the reason why we have the 95.3 per cent figure, as opposed to the 85 per cent figure that we inherited when we took office—which means that a huge number of patients are being seen within the timescale—is a result of the hard choices that this Government took in order to protect the revenue budget of the NHS. My clear memory—which will no doubt be confirmed by the leader of the Labour Party, who is sitting alongside Richard Simpson—is that that was not the position of the Labour Party in the election campaign, or was not confirmed by the Labour Party leader.

The hard choice that we took to protect the revenue budget of the NHS has been a substantial addition, in terms of providing a successful outcome for many people. I accept totally that we should aspire to 100 per cent, but we should reflect on the fact that our NHS has achieved that 95 per cent target. We all should aspire to do more.

The Presiding Officer: That ends First Minister's question time. Members may be aware

that there has been an incident in the gallery; I thank Richard Simpson for attending at that incident. I ask people in the gallery to sit where you are, and to follow the instructions of the security guard. I understand that an ambulance has been called. Please do not rush for the exits; follow what the security guards say, to allow us to deal with the person involved as quickly as possible. To allow that to take place, I suspend the meeting for 15 minutes.

12:35

Meeting suspended.

12:50

On resuming—

Bobath Scotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-04624, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on Bobath Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of Bobath therapy for people with cerebral palsy, which it understands affects one in every 500 births and impacts on people's ability to walk, move, talk, eat and play; considers that, while there is no cure for cerebral palsy, it is possible to improve independence and quality of life with therapy; understands that the Bobath centre in Port Dundas, Glasgow, is the only one of its kind in Scotland and provides multidisciplinary specialist therapy, thereby giving children the opportunity to grow and develop and make a huge difference to their lives and the lives of their families, and wishes Bobath well in its important work.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab):

I ask members to imagine the experience of Dominic and his parents. Dominic was born three and a half months prematurely, weighing just 2 pounds and 11 ounces. He struggled to survive for the next 12 weeks and was diagnosed as suffering from cerebral palsy at the age of nine months. Dominic cannot walk or talk, and for five years his parents did not know whether he understood them when they spoke or was able to make sense of the world he lived in.

It was at the end of an intensive block of therapy for Dominic, while his parents were discussing with the therapists what had been achieved, that the breakthrough came. As his mum and dad answered questions and made points, the therapists noticed that when his parents answered "yes", Dominic blinked. The session was interrupted so that Dominic could be asked whether he was saying "yes", too. He blinked again and, after some further exploration of this newly recognised trait, his parents knew that a whole new range of possibilities had opened up for Dominic.

Dominic is now 19 years old and, like most other teenagers, he enjoys a full life. He is now a student at college and for six years he attended St Ninian's high school in Eastwood, where he loved the daily buzz of a large mainstream secondary school. He enjoys nights out at the pub and attending gigs with his personal assistants, and—like many other teenagers—he plays his music far too loudly. He also visited Parliament for the first time two weeks ago. Without the help of the Bobath therapists, however, Dominic's world would be much more limited.

Bobath came to Scotland in 1995 because Dominic's parents wanted to avoid the long and wearisome journey to London for Dominic and other Scottish children who would benefit from Bobath's expertise. Dominic's dedicated parents and others who shared their vision set it up and the charity now has excellent premises at Port Dundas in my constituency. Many members will have met some of the staff of Bobath when they visited Parliament two weeks ago, and I am sure that they will have been impressed by their passion and commitment.

The staff at Bobath think that all cerebral palsy sufferers in Scotland should have access to the kind of therapy that they can deliver, and I agree with them. Bobath is an holistic therapy that looks at ways of making more natural movements that can be used in everyday life. It recognises that everyone has their own needs and develops therapies that are tailored to the individual. It combines the disciplines of physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy to give people with cerebral palsy the skills to explore the world, communicate their needs and participate as much as possible in all aspects of their lives. It also allows the family to continue to work with and support their child.

People with cerebral palsy also need emotional support and help to reduce the pain that the constriction of muscles and joints can bring. The staff would be keen to point out that Bobath may be based in Glasgow but is available to children around Scotland. However, that is the nub of the problem. Bobath therapy is available, but its take-up is patchy because it is not always funded by local national health service boards. Sessions are intensive and families usually come to Glasgow to experience Bobath, but if the therapy is not paid for by the NHS, the family is left to cope with the cost themselves.

I met several families at the Bobath reception in Parliament who told me of the difficulty that they had in finding the money to pay. Some used savings; others were able to rely on a good employer. One parent made the point that having a child with a disability is expensive: if the parent of an able-bodied nine-year-old plans to buy a bike for their Christmas, they can expect to pay about £100, but the cost of a running bike for a nine-year-old is £1,400. Having to pay for vital therapy for a child is another cost.

Last year, 24 per cent of Bobath's funding came from NHS boards, whereas the proportion the previous year was 29 per cent. It is projected that in 2012-13 only 17 per cent of funds will have come from the NHS. In addition, the Scottish Government contributes £6,500 from the unified voluntary sector fund, but even that is not guaranteed to continue in the future. That means

that access to Bobath therapy can depend on where someone lives.

Many health boards will rightly argue that they employ Bobath-trained therapists, but the opportunities that those therapists have to use their skills in the way that Bobath teaches are often curtailed by the size of their case load and the volume of work that they have. That is why Bobath has launched its precious lives appeal, which seeks to ensure that no child is denied such therapy because of their family's inability to pay.

I know that the minister has visited the Bobath centre and has observed for himself the work that is done there. I sincerely hope that, in his closing remarks, he indicates that he will look at the funding arrangements for what is a tried and tested range of therapies with a view to helping Bobath to provide a service that is accessible to everyone who needs it, regardless of where they happen to live.

12:56

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I thank Patricia Ferguson for bringing this welcome debate to the chamber. I also apologise to Ms Ferguson and the chamber, as I will have to leave before the debate concludes, because I have a Finance Committee-related meeting with the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee.

Cerebral palsy is the term for a group of disorders of the development of movement and posture that cause limitations of activity and which are caused by damage that occurred to the foetal or infant brain. As well as having a movement disorder, most people who are affected will suffer from disturbances of sensation, cognition, communication, perception, behaviour and/or epilepsy. People who live with cerebral palsy have little independent ability to walk, talk, write and take part in everyday activities. Patricia Ferguson pointed a poignant picture of the life of Dominic, a youngster who suffers from the condition.

Cerebral palsy affects around one in 500 births in Scotland. Despite developments in maternity and paediatric care, the number of children who are born with cerebral palsy is not decreasing. Its most common cause is damage to the brain while the baby is growing in utero, which can be found in 80 per cent of children with cerebral palsy. Other factors can include genetic problems, malformations of the brain and maternal infection, such as rubella or toxoplasmosis.

The Bobath centre in Glasgow is the only one in Scotland to provide multidisciplinary specialist therapy for young children, which helps them to become more independent and improves their lives and those of their families. Bobath therapy is extremely effective because it is tailored to each

individual who is cared for. Each child's limitations and abilities are assessed and a care and therapy plan is devised by specialists. Bobath ensures that each child's needs are met. The therapy plan is frequently reassessed in accordance with the child's developments.

As we have heard, the therapy that Bobath provides includes physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy, and one of its most successful treatments is neurodevelopmental treatment. Studies of children who have received Bobath NDT therapy have demonstrated improvements in motor function and self-care skills and improved walking, reaching, hand opening and hand use, which are all highly significant for children who are unable to develop at a similar pace to others. That shows that Bobath therapy vastly improves the life of the child and their family.

Since April, Bobath has had an adults centre for people who live with acquired neurodisability caused by strokes, head injuries, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury and Parkinson's disease, as well as those who live with cerebral palsy. The fact that Bobath goes out of its way to care for people with short-term disabilities as well as those with long-term disabilities makes it a diverse and giving charity.

The treatment that is given to adults improves or, in some cases, restores function that has been impaired, and Bobath's approach to treating adults with neurological disabilities, which was developed in the 1950s, has achieved international recognition as one of the most successful approaches to the treatment and management of people with neurological conditions. That treatment has been made possible in Scotland by a £100,000 grant from the Robertson Trust for a two-year pilot scheme to provide adult therapy.

The excellent Bobath Scotland charity also provides a parent support group at its centre in Glasgow, which gives parents and carers the opportunity to meet others in similar situations and gives affected families support, advice and reassurance that they are not alone. Each group meeting is facilitated by a member of Bobath's therapy team and meetings are held at lunch time, to make them highly accessible.

There are many opportunities to fundraise for Bobath. It provides training and allows people from all over the country to take part in raising money for an excellent cause. However, as Patricia Ferguson pointed out, the charity needs more Government and health board support.

Many of us attended Bobath's excellent reception in the Scottish Parliament last Thursday, which Patricia Ferguson mentioned. Volunteers do things such as mailing out literature, data input

and placing collection boxes in communities, and they organise charity events such as coffee mornings, fashion shows and quizzes. Members can assist with that.

I am running out of time, so all that I will do is make a plea to the minister to support Patricia Ferguson's view that we must not have a postcode lottery in the provision of Bobath services. In my area, NHS Ayrshire and Arran does not assist Bobath. That should change, so that people from across Scotland who need the therapy can benefit from it.

13:01

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I applaud Patricia Ferguson for bringing Bobath Scotland to the Parliament's attention and I thank Kenneth Gibson for speaking in support of her motion.

Bobath Scotland has existed for 18 years. As we have heard, approximately one in 500 children born in Scotland is affected by cerebral palsy. Bobath Scotland supports 135 such children across the country. I have no doubt that it benefits from the fact that its cousin organisation in England has existed for somewhat longer—50 years—and treats 300 children a year, as well as the families connected with those young people.

I outline the existence of both organisations because, as I hope the minister is already aware, Bobath Scotland's existence creates a body of knowledge about the challenges that relate to cerebral palsy and about the problems that are faced not only by the young people concerned but by families and friends who are trying to help. That body of knowledge informs the national debate about what is required for the future and about the changes that can be made to affect young people's quality of life and quality of experience.

Patricia Ferguson outlined the difference that therapy had made to one young person's life. One hopes that every young person in Scotland who needs access to the support and treatment that are available through Bobath Scotland can benefit from that. I have no doubt that the minister will outline that the national health service across Scotland has many Bobath-trained practitioners, but I think that he and other members would accept that the centre of excellence develops the way forward for the future and informs the best treatments.

I also have no doubt that the excellent facility at Port Dundas in Glasgow—I know it reasonably well and I know the quality of the environment that is provided there—enables the education of people who are new to the experience of cerebral palsy and who are trying to come to terms with what it will mean and the impact that it will have.

The facility creates a training environment for people who want to develop and to support families who are experiencing cerebral palsy in their midst. It also provides a support mechanism—a means of mentoring and counselling family and friends who are trying their best to ensure that young people can make the most of their lives and develop appropriately.

The centre of excellence in Glasgow is an important resource for Scotland. I would like to think that all families in Scotland can access it and that it can be used as a resource for all of Scotland. As a member for South Scotland, I know the difficulties for families who try to travel to Glasgow to access treatment. Nevertheless, given the quality of the treatment that is provided there, it is important that that avenue should be made available to them.

The main part of Patricia Ferguson's speech was about the funding element. Currently, Bobath relies heavily on charity. Many people would think that it is appropriate that, where a cause reaches out to the public in Scotland, the public will want to support it. It is right that we pay due regard to the Robertson Trust's support, and I hope that the minister will bear in mind the need for funding and that he will support Bobath Scotland where he can to the best of his ability.

13:05

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): At the outset, I put on record the apologies of my colleague Alex Fergusson for not being able to attend the debate but assure Bobath Scotland that he continues to work on its behalf in his constituency in Dumfries and Galloway.

Like others, I thank Patricia Ferguson for bringing the debate to the chamber and for highlighting the important work of the Bobath Scotland charity, which has done much since its inception in 1995 to improve the independence and quality of life of those affected by cerebral palsy who have experienced the multidisciplinary specialist therapy programme that it provides. From its centre in Glasgow, Bobath Scotland has helped young people with cerebral palsy to develop the skills that they need to live a full life. It has done so by involving the whole family and the extended support network and by bringing together specialists in occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech and language therapy with community therapy teams to support on-going work with young people at home and in the community. As a result of that co-ordinated approach, there is a can-do attitude, which helps parents to focus on what their children can achieve rather than the negative side of what they cannot do. That is of enormous help to those who

are faced with the day-to-day problems of attaining achievable goals for their loved ones.

I confess that I had never heard of Bobath Scotland before it came to Parliament, but Stephanie Fraser and her colleagues ensured that we knew about it whenever we went near their stall in the members' lobby. At the garden lobby reception on the Thursday evening, it was a privilege to meet and speak to families who have benefited from Bobath's work for their children.

Bringing together the various allied health professionals who can help those affected to develop their skills and reach their maximum potential seems such a simple concept, but it is not always easy to treat people holistically within the NHS. Specialists operate within their own silos; each does excellent work, but they sometimes achieve less for their patients than they could achieve by working together.

When Bobath Scotland was first set up—the centre was then and is now the only one of its kind in Scotland—north-east children would travel to Glasgow for therapy. Clearly, that was not ideal and satellite outreach clinics were planned for the north-east—which, of course, I represent—but unfortunately, those clinics did not come about, and communication with the Glasgow centre gradually broke down over the years. Therefore, I was very pleased to learn from Stephanie Fraser that efforts are now under way again to strengthen links with therapists in the north-east and explore potential ways of working together.

The meetings between Bobath and therapists in Aberdeen and Elgin this summer were very productive. An introductory Bobath course took place in the north-east. It started with a study day in Aberdeen on "The Therapeutic Use of Play When Treating Children with Cerebral Palsy" and was followed by master classes in Aberdeen and Elgin that included the theory of eating and drinking, hand use and postural control. Demonstration treatments of children were identified by the local therapists.

That outreach work was supported financially by the R S Macdonald Charitable Trust and the MacRobert Trust. It was viewed a bit sceptically at first, but in fact it generated very positive feedback. The local Bobath-trained AHPs said that they thought that working together during the study days and master classes to solve problems and having the time to think and talk through clinical issues were very valuable and relevant to all their disciplines of occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and speech and language therapy. Unfortunately, time is limited for such multidisciplinary clinical management of cases, but with Bobath support and the possibility of involving classroom assistants in future outreach sessions, such collaborative management could be

undertaken more widely. There was real enthusiasm for further outreach visits to both Aberdeen and Elgin next spring.

Bobath Scotland hopes that the success of that approach in the north-east could be used as a blueprint for other areas, allowing Bobath to give local therapists support and training to work together to help people with cerebral palsy throughout Scotland.

Clearly, in these straitened times, funding is a problem but, given the determination and enthusiasm of Stephanie Fraser and her colleagues, I believe that Bobath Scotland will ultimately achieve its goals with, I hope, help from the Scottish Government. Bobath Scotland is a very worthy organisation indeed and Patricia Ferguson deserves our thanks for introducing it to Parliament.

13:10

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): As others have done, I thank and pay tribute to Patricia Ferguson for bringing the motion to the chamber and for hosting Bobath Scotland's visit to the Parliament ahead of this debate. A friend of mine was at the garden lobby reception, so I know that people who have children and other family members with cerebral palsy know about the awareness raising activities that are taking place right now and are grateful for them.

The number of people with cerebral palsy in Scotland has never been definitively recorded, but Capability Scotland is in the process of establishing a register for that purpose. Currently, it estimates that about 15,000 people in Scotland—approximately one in every 350 in society—have cerebral palsy.

Although cerebral palsy is not directly life-threatening, certain associated conditions, such as epilepsy and respiratory complications, can be. The primary debilitating effect is on movement and reflexes. The Bobath approach is particularly important, as it addresses the issues directly by focusing on improving motor skills, posture and speech, and helping people to live more independently. The therapy that is offered is highly flexible and tailored to the specific needs of the individual.

The main aim of Bobath therapy is to encourage the child and increase their ability to move and function in as normal a way as possible. Normal movements cannot be achieved if a child stays in a few positions and moves in a limited or disordered way. The intervention of Bobath therapy, which helps to change a child's seemingly abnormal postures and movements, can lead to real progress. Bobath involves a transdisciplinary approach that includes physiotherapy,

occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy that enable children to participate in daily activities.

In preparing for the debate, I read Bobath Scotland's annual report and found the case of five-year-old Katie, which is a particularly good example of the Bobath approach. Because of underdevelopment in Katie's leg and arm muscles, she tended to bottom shuffle around the floor, which led to further muscular problems in her hips. Following just two months of treatment at the Glasgow centre, the problems were alleviated and she was able to pull herself up using furniture. To some people, that might not seem a great deal, but that sort of thing can be revolutionary for families and can improve the quality of life in their homes.

I was pleased to meet with people from Bobath Scotland at the recent exhibition in Parliament and to sign their petition calling for equal access to Bobath treatment throughout Scotland. I was comfortable with that and relaxed about it. The Glasgow centre provides a world-class service and caters for people from throughout the country. It was established 17 years ago and so far has treated 700 children. Of course, their families have also benefited.

We have heard much about the provision of Bobath therapy across Scotland. It is right to draw that to the minister's attention but, from my discussions with Bobath Scotland in the Parliament, I understand that the issue is not just about Bobath Scotland doing what it does so well as a centre of excellence; it is about skills transfer to teams throughout Scotland to allow allied health professionals in all of Scotland's health boards to act appropriately and to provide such a holistic service.

We cannot and should not take away the independence of health boards to make clinical and care decisions, but we need a co-ordinated approach to ensure that we share best practice and systems across the country, and the minister has a role in ensuring that that happens. That is not just about supporting Bobath Scotland as an organisation but about ensuring that the various allied health professionals have the support and time that they need to care and treat.

I mentioned that we are not sure how many people in Scotland have cerebral palsy and that Capability Scotland is carrying out an exercise on that. To plan services we have to capture need, and to capture need we have to know the numbers. Therefore, anything that the Government can do to assist Capability Scotland in that work would be greatly appreciated.

I again thank Patricia Ferguson for bringing the motion to the Parliament.

13:15

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I am delighted to speak in the debate, and I congratulate Patricia Ferguson on bringing the matter to the Parliament. I commend her for highlighting the personal experience of a family's journey while they live with cerebral palsy.

As we know, Bobath Scotland provides support and assistance to children with cerebral palsy. The centre in Port Dundas is the only one of its kind in Scotland. I have had the pleasure of visiting the centre, and members can believe me when I say that it is very impressive. I recommend a visit to members who have not been there.

Bobath's purpose is to help children and families to gain skills, through a holistic, hands-on approach that involves work with the whole family and the child's external support network. Members have spoken far more eloquently than I can about the importance of the services that Bobath offers and the transformation in families that have received support, so I do not intend to repeat what they said. There is no question in my mind about the value of what Bobath Scotland does. The staff, parents and children are passionate about the service; indeed, we are all, rightly, passionate about the service and the organisation. We are constantly amazed at what the children can be helped to achieve.

Support for Bobath extends to my local area. Several of my constituents volunteer to organise and participate in the dragon boat race in Loch Lomond, which I think raised £40,000 this year. I applaud all their fundraising efforts.

That takes me neatly on to money. Patricia Ferguson was right to point out the scale of the task that Bobath undertakes and the scale of the funding challenge that it faces. Without a shadow of doubt, health boards' resources are declining year on year. Referrals are still being made, but they are often not backed by a transfer of resource. There are health boards that do not refer at all, because they do not want to spend money and cannot afford to do so. It would be surprising if any organisation, let alone Bobath Scotland, could budget or plan effectively in such circumstances.

It is fundamentally wrong that a country the size of Scotland should have such a postcode lottery. We need to ask ourselves whether a child with cerebral palsy in Greater Glasgow and Clyde is somehow more deserving than a child with cerebral palsy in Highland, Grampian, Tayside or anywhere else. The answer, of course, is no.

I offer the minister a positive suggestion, which I hope that he will consider. Rather than just moan about the problem, let us try to do something a bit differently. Funding arrangements are in place for the Children's Hospice Association Scotland. I

know CHAS because Robin House in Balloch is in my constituency. CHAS takes children from across Scotland in very much the same way as Bobath Scotland does. A lead health board negotiates with all the other health boards, which means that CHAS is not chasing round 14 health boards with 14 different sets of funding criteria. It is a sensible and effective model, which I commend to the minister. It works for the NHS and it works beautifully for CHAS.

Will the minister consider whether the model could apply to Bobath Scotland? If he finds that it can do, I will thank him, as will lots of people, because he will be giving their kids access to Bobath's services and the opportunity to have a better life.

13:18

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): I congratulate Patricia Ferguson on securing time for this important debate.

The debate is of particular interest to me because I had the pleasure of visiting the Bobath centre earlier this year to learn at first hand about the work that is done there. I was already aware of Bobath from my previous career as an occupational therapist. I confess that when I went to the centre I was a little surprised to find that my former maths teacher is a member of the board of Bobath Scotland—he was still looking for my homework. It was good to be able to meet the professionals and other staff in the centre.

Of course, it is essential that those with cerebral palsy and other conditions receive the appropriate therapeutic assessment, treatment and intervention that best suits and meets their needs. I recognise—I say this as a therapist rather than as a minister—the specialism that exists within the centre in Glasgow, but I also recognise that that has to be balanced against the fact that different models may be appropriate for different individuals in different circumstances.

That is to say that, in some instances, Bobath may not be the best approach for some individuals with cerebral palsy. Sometimes, Bobath will provide part of the answer along with other forms of therapeutic intervention. Very often, the evidence base will suggest that a range of therapeutic interventions may be needed in order to maximise and improve the independence and quality of life of individuals with conditions such as cerebral palsy. However, that is not to say that, in some instances, Bobath will not be the most appropriate intervention for some individuals.

In taking forward this type of approach, the challenge is not so much whether the centre should be in Glasgow or Edinburgh but how we ensure that we have a range of skill sets within the

allied health professional workforce that therapists can make best use of when they are working with individual patients. That is a matter of giving people the skills and assets that they need so that they can deploy the best therapeutic intervention for the patient. That is why there is provision for therapists within NHS Scotland to receive training in Bobath so that they can use the technique with patients for whom it is appropriate.

Some work that has been taking place in the north-east is a very good example of partnership working with Bobath Scotland to expand and develop people's skills so that they can discharge the Bobath therapeutic intervention in whichever setting is most appropriate to the individual patient. That means, therefore, that the centre in Glasgow is not the key; the issue is about the skill sets that the therapists can deploy in different settings at a local level.

The challenge going forward, in particular for Bobath Scotland, is how we can continue to scale up the work with AHP teams in different health board areas so that Bobath can work with and support people on an outreach basis to deliver Bobath interventions to patients in different areas as they see appropriate. The allied health professionals delivery plan provides a good opportunity for that.

I am acutely aware from my previous professional experience that AHPs have not been properly valued within our NHS in the way that they should have been and in the way that they can be. With the AHP delivery plan—the first of its type in the United Kingdom—I was determined to ensure that we recognise their work much more effectively. Part of that is about ensuring that boards recognise the role that AHPs can play. If we can ensure that that role is given a greater priority, there will be a greater opportunity for more young people and adults to be given access to services such as those provided by Bobath. Ultimately, however, the decision on the best and most appropriate therapeutic intervention for a given patient is for the therapists themselves in partnership with the patient.

Patricia Ferguson: No one would disagree with the minister's comments on upscaling and increasing the availability of Bobath in other parts of Scotland, but at the end of the day what makes the difference for a child and their family is the sheer intensity of the experience of a range of therapies over an extended period of time. With the best will in the world, health boards may train up their therapists, but those therapists do not have the time to spend with the young people in question.

Michael Matheson: I recognise that it can be difficult to create in the NHS the same type of intensity that might be provided in a specialist

centre, but my point is that the approach of having a single specialist centre in Scotland does not always serve people in other parts of Scotland who need to travel a considerable distance to get to it. The challenge is to have a model that allows the intensity of service to be delivered in the locations where individuals actually require it.

That is why it is important that Bobath Scotland engages with AHPs within individual territorial health boards, to look both at what skill sets AHPs need in order to take forward Bobath therapy for patients who may benefit from it and at how Bobath Scotland can support that. The work in the north-east is a good example of how that can be taken forward. I encourage Bobath Scotland to continue with the approach that it has taken in the north-east, engaging with boards—either with local boards or with professionals within individual board areas—to look at how it can scale up that approach and create some of the intensity that I acknowledge can be provided in a single specialist centre.

Giving a greater profile to AHPs and the role that they can play in helping to support individuals will assist in making sure that boards recognise that resource allocation in therapies such as Bobath is of value and can provide a real benefit to patients.

There is an opportunity for Bobath Scotland to work with our AHP teams within NHS Scotland and to look at how those teams can develop their skills so that they can provide the quality of services that we wish to see being provided across the country, in a way that allows people to receive therapeutic intervention in their own local area.

Jackie Baillie made a suggestion, and I am always open to looking at positive suggestions. However, to go back to the original point, it is not for Government to prescribe a particular type of therapeutic intervention, which Bobath is. The situation is different for CHAS, for example, because of the type of care and support that it provides. However, it is important that Bobath engages with AHP teams in territorial board areas and looks at how they can develop the service further. From the discussions that I had with Bobath Scotland, I have no doubt that it will be keen to look at taking that forward.

13:26

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Rail

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business is a statement by Keith Brown on rail. As the minister will take questions at the end of his statement, there should be no interventions or interruptions.

The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a further statement on the future of rail franchising in Scotland.

Members might recall my statement in October following the west coast mainline franchise debacle. In that statement, I mentioned that the Secretary of State for Transport had initiated both the Laidlaw inquiry to look into the course of events at the Department for Transport that led to technical flaws and ultimately the termination of the process, and the Brown review to look in detail at the implications for the remainder of the rail franchising programme and, in particular, whether changes might be needed to the assessment of risk and to the bidding and evaluation processes.

The Laidlaw inquiry reported today. I received a call this morning from Simon Burns MP, Under-Secretary of State for Transport, and was provided with a copy of the report at 11.40 am. The inquiry's findings make it clear that there was inadequate planning and preparation, a complex organisational structure and a weak governance and quality assurance framework. I expect that in light of the report the DFT will want to revise its internal structure and processes. We in Scotland are clearly in a better place, but we are not complacent and are reviewing the findings to glean where we can make improvements.

The Brown review is expected to report at the end of the year and I await its conclusions with interest. Should its findings give us cause to change our procedures, changes will be made. It is obviously imperative that we absorb any lessons that are learned.

Speaking of lessons learned, I feel a sense of frustration in having to advise Parliament that, yet again, the United Kingdom Government offered no discussion about or notice of its proposals regarding the west coast mainline franchise. That is a ridiculous state of affairs when we are talking about a key service that directly affects millions of travellers to and from Scotland.

I understand that the deal struck between the UK Government and Virgin Rail Group is for a new franchise agreement to run for up to 23 months from 9 December 2012—this coming Sunday—to 9 November 2014, after which the west coast main

line will be let under a longer-term franchise. It is reassuring that the previously planned timetable improvements from 10 December, which will at long last deliver regular hourly services between Glasgow and London, are to proceed. However, I await details from the UK Government about any benefits that it has managed to secure for Scotland as a result of the new agreement.

In this statement, I intend to set out three things: first, the procurement programme for Scotland's rail franchises; secondly, the date on which the existing franchise will terminate; and lastly, some proposed benefits of the future franchise that I will now bring forward to the current franchise.

As members will be aware, there will be two rail franchises: a 10-year ScotRail franchise with the option of a break after five years; and a separate sleeper franchise for up to 15 years. Although each future franchise is an exciting proposition, I, like many others, recognise that they are distinctly different; that they serve different requirements; that they deliver different outcomes; and that they will be of interest to different bidders. Accordingly, they will need to be evaluated against criteria that are specific to each.

For those reasons, I have decided to run not a combined procurement exercise but two quite separate exercises to allow me to secure the best outcomes for each franchise. As well as running two exercises, I want to ensure that we do not overstretch either ourselves or bidders and I therefore intend to phase the procurement of the franchises to allow a smoothing of the peaks of the procurement tasks. That might be another lesson learned from the DFT situation. As a consequence, I intend to commence the procurement programme for the sleeper franchise in the spring of 2013 to allow sufficient time for any outcomes of the Brown review to be incorporated, if necessary. The ScotRail procurement will follow in the summer.

Although there is real benefit in the focus of having a separate sleeper franchise, the proof of the proposition will be seen in the quality of the bids received. Prudently, therefore, the timing of our procurement schedule would allow the sleeper franchise to be reincorporated into the ScotRail franchise if we were not satisfied with the quality of bids received. I should say that we have already received a very high level of interest.

I hope that members will note that I am seeking to manage risks through a measured, careful approach. That is particularly important when we note that the sleeper franchise is likely to be a contract in excess of £200 million. That is a sizeable sum, but it is dwarfed by a 10-year ScotRail franchise that may be in excess of £2.5 billion. That is the biggest procurement project that the Scottish Government will enter into. Such

sums necessitate a cautious, prudent approach. We will not be rushed; we will not be hasty. There will be no risky short cuts to franchising in Scotland: our approach must be measured.

On 4 October I advised members that I would not countenance compromising the procurement programme. I was clear that it would take at least 20 months to deliver the programme. Inevitably, starting the procurement exercise in the summer of 2013 for the refranchising of ScotRail has implications for the length of the current franchise. However, the current franchise contract gives me, as minister, discretion to decide the end date of the current franchise within the range of 9 November 2014 to 30 May 2015. Accordingly, I have been considering what the best contract end date would be for Scotland's rail passengers and for the rail staff affected by the change. I have looked for a date that will strike a sensible balance; that allows us to maintain our prudent procurement programme while providing a suitable period to take full account of emerging views from the Brown review; and that allows us to conduct a handover at a time that will not cause undue disturbance to passengers or staff. I have therefore decided that it will be sensible to plan for the franchise handover at the end of the 2014-15 financial year on 31 March 2015.

I turn briefly to service specifications. I will be in a position to share more details on the precise specification of the future franchises next year. However, I am keen to ensure that service benefits are realised at an early opportunity. I am pleased to announce a number of benefits; I had intended to deliver them in the next franchise, but they will now commence in the current franchise. That underlines this Government's commitment to a passenger-focused railway.

I want to ensure that the rail service is an attractive, affordable option. I am pleased to advise that I have successfully negotiated an early fares cap with First ScotRail. I confirm that peak fares will be capped in January 2014 and 2015 to the retail prices index, which will deliver benefits two years earlier at no additional cost to the franchise subsidy.

I want to encourage greater off-peak rail use. I want attractive fares that will encourage commuters, when they can, to switch to off-peak services and better spread the demands on our rail services. I want greater use of the train, rather than the car, for leisure travel. Successful negotiations with First ScotRail have resulted in off-peak fares being frozen after 2013. Provided that the RPI remains below 3.5 per cent each year for the remainder of the franchise, off-peak fares will not increase by a single penny after 2013.

Those benefits will be delivered at no extra cost to the subsidy.

I realise that for many travellers improved services are as important as lower fares. In 2014, there will be, for example, more frequent services between Glasgow and Ayr, improved services to Oban, additional Sunday services between Aberdeen and the central belt, and improved commuter services serving Aberdeen.

I am also in a position to advise today that advance works for Stirling-Alloa-Dunblane electrification have been approved. We are working with Network Rail to prioritise delivery of that project within its 2014 to 2019 programme.

I have set out our measured approach to procurement, outlined the process timetable, confirmed the date of the handover from the existing franchise, and provided details of some early benefits. I hope that Parliament notes that although we are ambitious for the future of our rail service, we are cautious in the management of its realisation. Good management is what taxpayers, passengers and those who operate our railways expect of a responsible Government. That is what we intend to deliver.

The Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on his statement. I intend to allow about 20 minutes for questions.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): First, I thank the minister for the opportunity to have early sight of his statement. However, it is disappointing that, once again, members of the Scottish Parliament have learned of the Government's intentions for the rail service in Scotland through the columns of a national newspaper and tweets rather than in the chamber.

The 10-year ScotRail franchise will have a break point at five years. Will the minister commit—this time—to genuine consultation with stakeholders on whether the contract should be broken at that point?

I note the announcement of the approval of the advanced works for the Stirling-Alloa-Dunblane electrification, in which I am sure the minister has a keen interest. Does that signify a reinstatement of a part of the Edinburgh Glasgow improvement programme, which was dropped from the programme in his July statement? If so, are other EGIP reinstatements under consideration? Many of us would hope that they are.

Finally, in drawing up the franchise, will the minister and Transport Scotland ensure that there is sufficient flexibility to allow additional services and routes to be included, such as—and here I am being parochial—an early-morning service between Carlisle and Edinburgh, via Lockerbie?

Keith Brown: First, I cannot be held responsible for what appears in the columns of newspapers. I made the statement first of all to Parliament before making it to anyone else. I think that that is the right way to go about things.

The terms of the five-year break will be the subject of discussions with the potential bidders. However, we have made that decision already; we have said that we will do that. I concede that there is some information to go with that about exactly what will happen and what the context will be in relation to, for example, the rights of partners on either side to break the agreement. That will become more evident when we go into the franchise detail in the coming months. We do not intend to consult specifically on that matter, other than in the discussions that we will have with potential bidders.

We have never dropped the Stirling-Alloa-Dunblane works or other parts of EGIP. We have always said that those will continue in future phases. What has been announced today concerns the advance works that are required, and which are on-going in any event, such as vegetation clearance and—not that I want to be parochial—two bridge heightenings that are taking place in my area. All I am saying is that Network Rail, in discussion with the Scottish Government, has agreed that all those advance works will proceed. Some parts of EGIP will proceed in the first phase, and some will proceed subsequently.

Elaine Murray mentioned additional services. I take on board her points. We will make more details available once we get into the greater specification of the franchises. The issue of additional services in particular parts of Scotland can be covered at that stage.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement and welcome the fact that, regardless of what might be contained in it, the statement goes a long way towards ending many of the uncertainties that we had after the previous statement and the circumstances that surrounded it.

I welcome much of what is proposed. The news that there will be an extension of the west coast rail franchise should also be welcome. However, the criticism that the Government has chosen to level at its counterpart in the south should be taken with a pinch of salt, as this Government wades towards the inevitable deep water of the Clyde and Hebridean ferry services issue. We will see what develops.

I welcome the scale of improvements but, like Dr Murray, regret that many of the cuts that have been announced to EGIP will result in a failure to deliver the service improvement between

Edinburgh and Glasgow that would have been possible under the next franchise. Instead we have a promise of jam tomorrow.

Nevertheless, I ask the minister to say quite clearly that the statement and his ambitions for the next franchise vindicate the current structure of the rail industry as it is organised in the United Kingdom and in Scotland, and invite him to give confidence to future bidders by giving a genuine commitment to the structure of the industry in the long term.

Keith Brown: Alex Johnstone could really have picked a better day to ask for a pronouncement that the franchising system has been vindicated. I do not know whether Mr Johnstone saw any of the debate at Westminster earlier, but the criticisms that have been levelled at the UK Government, the DFT and the franchising process itself have never been more pronounced. It is perhaps not the day to say that the process has been vindicated.

Alex Johnstone might be aware that I, the cabinet secretary and, previously, Alex Neil have written to UK ministers to say that we believe that the franchising process is one of the most expensive and drawn-out ways of procuring rail services. We have asked for greater discretion to decide our own way forward with regard to how we procure rail services, but we have been refused that discretion. That can come only through constitutional change or a change of mind on the part of the UK Government; that is nowhere in prospect, given that the UK Government has made clear that it wants to try to mend and continue with the franchising process.

Mr Johnstone's first point was about uncertainties. It is worth pointing out that the uncertainties are not all gone. We do not know what the Brown review will come up with. This morning, I had a very frustrating phone call with the under-secretary of state in which I said that we are trying to proceed with the franchise process at the same time as the UK Government is reviewing the whole basis of franchising. The fact that it is doing that without even giving us the courtesy of a call to tell us what was in the report makes the situation very difficult. However, we have taken on board everything that has been evidenced so far in the Laidlaw inquiry and everything that we know about the problems at the DFT to ensure that we meet any challenges that arise.

In relation to the Clyde and Hebrides contract, there may well be deep water and we do not expect plain sailing. Nevertheless, we are confident that we can negotiate those waters carefully. We have done that so far in relation to the Clyde and Hebrides services and we will continue to do so.

Alex Johnstone's final point was on the Edinburgh to Glasgow line. The improvements that are expected are a different set of propositions from the amount of money that we are spending on the line. There seems to be a great focus within both Opposition parties on the fact that we should spend more on it. We have said that 80 per cent of what we propose can be delivered for that price, with the rest of it following either in phase 1, or even quicker if that is thought possible in our discussions with Network Rail.

It is perhaps best to focus on the massive improvements and the massive investment of £650 million that we will put into improving services not just between Edinburgh and Glasgow, but in associated areas. I think that we have a pretty good track record to build on.

The Presiding Officer: A number of members want to ask the minister a question. I urge members to keep their questions brief and encourage the minister to keep the answers brief, too.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): What gives the minister greater confidence that we are in a safer position than the Department for Transport?

Keith Brown: I will be as brief as I can, but there are a number of points to make. We are not pursuing the high-risk long franchise with a complex gross domestic product adjustment that was at the centre of some of the problems that the DFT encountered. We have announced a 10-year franchise with the break option that I mentioned, which provides the opportunity to de-risk the franchise for ourselves and for the parties that bid for it. Crucially, we are allowing 28 months for the franchise process. We have also set up a dedicated commercial unit—something that did not happen down south—and ministers are fully engaged in the key policy and programme decisions. Those things give us more reassurance about our process than we had about what happened down south.

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the minister agree that the extension to the current franchise allows more time for us to consider different options for running the next franchise, including a not-for-profit model? Will he agree to meet trade unions and other parties that are keen to promote such a model for the future?

Keith Brown: We are willing to engage with the trade unions and have done so regularly. I met them this week. As I have said before, within the current constraints that Westminster lays down for franchising, it is possible for a not-for-profit option to come forward. We cannot create that ourselves; other people must bring that forward. However, we

will engage with the trade unions and others on such issues.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will there be an option in the next franchise to allow for improved connection between rail and bus transport? We do not want a monopoly, but we could do with some improvements.

Keith Brown: As I have said before, a vital part of the next franchise process will be an obligation on bidders to demonstrate links between, for example, bus and rail. Initiatives such as plusbus, rail and sail and smart, integrated ticketing will be central to the next franchise. Some bidders may provide bus services as well as rail services, but some may not. That is why there is an obligation on all those who bid to come forward with ways to properly integrate the different transport modes.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): The minister has stated that advance works for the electrification of the Stirling-Alloa-Dunblane line have been approved. Will the minister outline when the electrification work is due to go ahead? That is a vital component of a possible direct Stirling to London service run by Virgin that would potentially start in 2016 and would call at Cumbernauld station, benefiting my constituents massively.

Keith Brown: Once again, we are responding to a very late announcement, which in this case concerns possible direct services to Stirling. Nothing could have been done about it in advance of 2014 in any event. The advance works for the electrification of the Stirling-Alloa-Dunblane line are continuing and we have said that the next phase will be delivered in whole between 2014 and 2019. We will keep an eye on any opportunities that arise—such as the one that the member has mentioned, as described in the press today—for direct services to Stirling. The advance work is going on anyway and no time is being lost in relation to that. We will consider the Virgin announcement. The electrification was, in any event, due to be delivered between 2014 and 2019.

Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Will the specification for services to the Highlands in the next rail franchise include better provision for luggage and cycles to cater for holidaymakers and better provision for disabled passengers? Will the general comfort of passengers and the provision of adequate toilet facilities be given more consideration, given that we are talking about long journeys of several hours and that the current rolling stock is inadequate in that respect?

Keith Brown: I have a great deal of sympathy with the points that Dave Thompson makes. Bidders for the next franchise will be asked to

demonstrate how they will improve the comfort and the suitability of longer-distance trains over the life of the franchise.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thank the minister for early sight of his statement. I agree with his point about the importance of the discussions that should have taken place between his Government and the UK Government prior to the statement that was made in the House of Commons earlier.

Does the minister accept that the Scottish Government consulted on ending the Highland sleeper service to London 12 months ago, following which the UK Government offered him and his colleagues £50 million to replace the Caledonian sleeper fleet, on the basis that funding would be provided jointly by Holyrood and Westminster? Does today's statement mean that that welcome investment has now been agreed, to the great benefit of overnight passengers between London, Inverness, Fort William and Aberdeen?

Keith Brown: I can confirm that the provision of £100 million of funding—£50 million from the UK Government and £50 million from the Scottish Government—for the sleeper services has been agreed; that was confirmed some time ago. The initial offer of £50 million included a condition that it was to be spent within a period of five or six months, which was never really credible in the context of the replacement of rolling stock. We have an agreement with the Treasury that that money can be spent over a period of time.

In the "Rail 2014" consultation, we did not consult specifically on ending the sleeper service. We always said that we saw a real opportunity to increase patronage levels on it. Our work has been about expanding rail services, which we are demonstrating through today's announcement.

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): What emissions reduction targets are to be included in the new franchise agreement? What scrutiny measures will be put in place to ensure that the targets are met?

Keith Brown: As the member will be aware, ScotRail has a number of initiatives in that regard, which include the provision of driver training that seeks to improve emissions levels. For example, since the start of the current franchise, ScotRail has been required to operate a driver simulator facility, and an eco driving module has subsequently been implemented. All drivers are assessed on an annual basis.

It is difficult to isolate the scheme's benefits, because it is coupled with other interventions such as coasting boards, but fuel savings of more than 2.5 per cent—the target that ScotRail set—have been identified. The new franchise will include a requirement to monitor and target carbon

reduction, which will contribute to meeting the requirements of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): In July this year, I wrote to the minister to ask him to take note of the fact that it is cheaper to buy a single from Dundee to Perth and another single from Perth to Glasgow than it is to buy a direct ticket from Dundee to Glasgow. In that letter, I asked him to extend the regulated fares zone to include Dundee. In August, the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment—

The Presiding Officer: Can we just have a question, Ms Marra?

Jenny Marra: I was told that officials would be asked to look at ways of addressing that situation under the terms of the existing franchise. What progress have the minister's officials made in finding a solution under the existing franchise? What are his plans for Dundee fares under the forthcoming franchise?

Keith Brown: I reiterate that the ability to deal with a number of anomalies in the fare structure will be much greater in the new franchise. At the moment, to address anomalies, we have to buy out the relevant part of the existing franchise, which was signed up to in 2004. That is more expensive and complicated than the approach that we intend to take. We want to remove all the anomalies in the new franchise, but work is under way to see what we can do during the current franchise with the arrangements and obligations that we inherited from previous Administrations.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): What were the minister's reasons for selecting the service improvements that he set out? Can he confirm that any new franchise arrangements will not preclude new services being put in place to stations such as Croy, Greenfaulds and Cumbernauld in my constituency, if they are identified as being a possibility?

Keith Brown: The new franchise will not preclude such improvements, as I mentioned in response to Elaine Murray. In the next few months, we will provide greater specification of what we expect to see in the franchise. The Brown review that has been announced at Westminster might propose greater separation of the specification and the evaluation of franchises, or even an organisational split. We must be aware that things could change as a result of that review, but there is no reason why we cannot look at improving services.

As the member knows, we have announced as part of the new franchise a £30 million fund for new or improved stations. The prospect for growing the railway and increasing patronage is substantial.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Does the minister share my view that increasing the speed of rail services is the best way of getting drivers out of cars and on to trains and that the necessary capacity improvements on the Highland main line can best be achieved by providing more strategically located dynamic loops, to allow trains to pass each other at speed rather than wait in short loops? Is he satisfied with the fact that both lines that connect Inverness with the north-east and the south are still largely single track?

Keith Brown: As Dave Stewart knows, it is true to say that we have inherited in the rail network—and the road network—decades of underinvestment in transport infrastructure. We are trying to remedy that as best we can by improving journey times and improving the infrastructure. We are doing that at the same time as providing a new railway service to the Borders and many of the improvements that I have mentioned, such as EGIP and—potentially—a high-speed rail line between Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Doing everything at once is not possible, but we are well aware of the pressing need to do more on the Highland line. I have already responded to some of the points that the member has raised. We intend to improve journey times to the Highlands. Of course, more work on major infrastructure will require more funding, which can be committed only when it becomes available.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I welcome the much-improved service between Ayr and Glasgow under the new timetable, but the minister is aware of the reduction in service between Ayr and Paisley under the new timetable, which adversely affects my constituents who work for and study at the University of the West of Scotland, for example. The minister mentioned in his statement improved services between Ayr and Glasgow in 2014. Will the problem in and around Paisley be addressed then, if it cannot be resolved before then?

Keith Brown: I do not recognise the service reduction to which John Scott refers. The changes that we are making to Glasgow to Ayr services are providing a huge number of new seats and new services. What has been announced today, as part of the discussions that we have had with ScotRail about the franchise's timing, is a further increase—two further services. I am happy to write to the member with all the details of the services as they will stand after the agreement takes effect.

Careers Services

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-05109, in the name of Angela Constance, on the modernisation of Scotland's careers services.

14:57

The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance): Having the right people with the right skills in the right jobs is central to growing Scotland's economy, and an effective careers service is a crucial foundation for that. Scotland has and will maintain careers services for people of all ages and we must ensure that they respond to all service users, regardless of where they are in their careers.

Within that, we have a clear and necessary priority of supporting our young people as they move on from the world of education into the world of work. There is a compelling case for modernising our careers services. We know that people who use the services want them to be flexible and responsive and that those people want to access them at a time, in a place and in a way that suits them.

Let us not forget that the world of work is changing rapidly. We must ensure that individuals get the support that they need to plan and manage the choices and changes that they are likely to face throughout their careers. The time is therefore absolutely right for modernising Scotland's careers services. The framework for service redesign and improvement, which I launched last March, provides the blueprint for that.

Moving on from school is an important and exciting step for young people. A huge amount of learning and career opportunities is out there. However, knowing which direction to take can be challenging and confusing, which is why it is important for young people to understand their options, what is involved and how they can access those options.

Young people will of course look to their parents, peers and teachers to help them to make decisions about their careers. Together with the support that is provided by highly skilled and well-informed careers services, that gives young people access to a valuable package of information, advice and guidance.

My aspiration is to have a high-performing education and skills system that is centred on the learner and responsive to employer needs, and which enables individuals to develop the skills that they need to get a job, keep it and progress to a

better one, regardless of how far away they are from the labour market.

With that in mind, our careers system will deliver a universal service for all young people, with career management skills delivered in the classroom and additional tailored support for young people who are in the greatest need.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I am interested in the minister's comments on a

"universal service for all young people".

I have in front of me "Putting Learners at the Centre—Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education", which says that she intends to have a "universal all-age" service. Is she abandoning people who are not under the age of 25?

Angela Constance: Absolutely not. One of the strengths of the careers service as it stands but enhanced by modernisation is that it will be flexible and responsive. With the use of technology, the system will enable people once they have left education to access information and exercise their right to face-to-face contact. Nobody—certainly not anybody in the Government—is abandoning any young person of any age.

Skills Development Scotland is, of course, driving forward modernisation, and it is working closely with partners in doing so. Our approach in Scotland can truly claim to be pioneering, in marked contrast to the approach taken south of the border. Indeed, it has been praised by Dame Ruth Silver, who is co-chair of the House of Commons skills commission, as being both

"impressively panoramic and highly professional in its ambition for its nation".

She described it as an approach that

"transfers hands over to"

individuals

"the skills to navigate for themselves a changing world of changing options."

I certainly endorse that praise.

We need to equip our young people to seek and grasp career opportunities and ensure that they have the agility to cope when their circumstances change and adapt their plans accordingly. We want all young people to have the skills to do that throughout their working lives.

Skills Development Scotland's my world of work online service is at the heart of our universal offer. It is available 24/7 and is a cutting-edge resource that holds a wealth of information about the widest range of possible careers and an extensive range of courses that are available to enable people to move towards and into those careers.

We all know that the way in which we communicate and exchange information has changed, and we know that digital devices are ever present in young people's lives. Young people use the internet to get information on all sorts of things—more than any of us here do—and careers advice is no exception. That is why we are enhancing the careers service with online facilities through my world of work.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): The move from face-to-face support to online support has its challenges, of course. Is the minister aware, for example, of the recent figures that I have, which suggest that 83 per cent of schoolchildren in Glasgow are not registered for my world of work?

Angela Constance: Let us be clear that a person does not need to be registered to access the careers service, but of course we want young people to register, as we think that that is in their interests. The tool is good and valuable, and we will promote registration.

I believe that the figures to which Mr Smith referred are out of date.

Kezia Dugdale: Will the minister take an intervention?

Angela Constance: Not just now—I have not finished dealing with Mr Smith's point.

With every month that goes by, registration increases by 10 to 15 per cent.

I also take exception to the notion that we seem to be replacing face-to-face contact. We are not. If Mr Smith looks at parliamentary questions from Ms Dugdale that I have answered, he will see that 130,000 young people in secondary 4, 5 and 6 will receive a universal careers service.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Angela Constance: No, thank you.

Those young people will receive career management skills in the classroom as part of the curriculum for excellence. That is our baseline universal service. In addition to that, we want to tackle the adversity that some of our most disadvantaged young people face in our society. We are determined to use the highly skilled professionals in careers guidance services to help to tackle disadvantage in young people's lives and to help to improve the life chances of all our young people.

Of course, all young people—and, in fact, everyone in Scotland—will continue to be able to use drop-in careers centres across Scotland and to telephone Skills Development Scotland's contact centre, in addition to having face-to-face contact. All young people will develop career management skills as part of the curriculum for

excellence. For those who most need support, intensive services will continue to focus on young people who are at risk of disengaging beyond school and those who have already disengaged. That will involve individually tailored coaching and planning and on-going support to enable young people to find a career path and then take it up and sustain it.

Our modern careers services therefore offer a much more integrated approach, including face-to-face contact, web-based resources and contact centres, and enable young people to develop their career management skills as an integral element of curriculum for excellence. I want careers guidance services to be at the heart of our education system. Under this Government, they will no longer be a bolt-on service.

Kezia Dugdale: The minister says that she wants careers services to be at the heart of the system. How, then, can she explain a 20 per cent cut in front-line services? That is not my figure; it is the figure that Unison has given every member of the Parliament.

Angela Constance: Miss Dugdale will be aware—it is no secret—that Skills Development Scotland has had a voluntary severance scheme, which ended in March 2012. However, there has actually been a marginal increase in front-line staff in schools. *[Interruption.]* Well, I think that the figure for full-time equivalent staff in schools has gone from 246 to 251, which I would have thought should be celebrated, given the tough times in which we live.

It is important that we provide a greater mix and a better balance of support that is firmly focused on individuals' needs. The new approach is challenging and will require Skills Development Scotland, working with its partners, to build capacity across the learning and support system to ensure that, collectively, they provide the best possible careers services for young people. In doing so, Skills Development Scotland has not sought to reinvent the wheel; rather, it is building on the system and processes that are already in place, including those that several local authorities use to identify individual needs and to tailor and personalise careers services accordingly.

As I said, we need to recognise that the world of work has changed and is constantly evolving. Today, on average, a person will have about 10 different jobs during their lifetime, spanning different occupational sectors and geographical locations. As they go through that, they will need to adapt, move and keep pace with a changing industrial base. To operate successfully in an ever-evolving global economy, Scotland needs a responsive and skilled workforce. Our young people, who are our greatest asset and resource, understand that and are moving with the times.

Our careers services need to support the change—standing still is not an option.

I accept that any organisational change is difficult and can be daunting for staff, which is why Skills Development Scotland is supporting its team of skilled careers professionals through the change. That includes unprecedented investment in a programme of professional development, new mobile technology to aid flexible working and, crucially, the creation of a Skills Development Scotland academy. Together, those measures will ensure that all our careers professionals remain at the forefront of international best practice.

The work does not stop there. Careers advice must be supported by a strong understanding of labour market needs. Skills Development Scotland is committed to providing up-to-the-minute information on where the jobs are and where they will be, and on the skills issues that Scottish companies face. That will help us to support individual ambition and drive economic growth. I am pleased to say that our approach for individuals has already been recognised as best practice by the United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I am not a member of the Education and Culture Committee and I am quite new to the issue, but I have read the briefing from Unison, which says that 93 per cent of SDS staff disagree with the statement that the new service delivery model will result in an enhanced service. If the new approach is so good, why do the staff not support it?

Angela Constance: I am aware of that survey only because it is quoted in the Unison briefing that has been distributed to members today. I have of course seen press comments about the Unison briefing. It is unfortunate that the briefing has not been provided to SDS, the employer. I cannot comment in detail on information that I and Skills Development Scotland have not received.

I will say, to reassure Mrs Scanlon, that the survey—

Kezia Dugdale: Will the minister give way?

Angela Constance: No.

The survey had 350 staff—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Ms Dugdale, sit down.

Angela Constance: I understand that 350 staff participated in the survey, out of a head count of 1,150 staff. The survey took place before the intensive face-to-face engagement of senior Skills Development Scotland staff with their front-line staff and before the commencement of the intensive continuous professional development training that I mentioned. I hope that that

reassures Mrs Scanlon, who is understandably concerned about Unison's concern—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Can we stop having remarks from a sedentary position?

Angela Constance: The Government is firmly committed to high-quality universal careers services for people of all ages. We are committed to services that are independent, impartial and informed and which support individual young people and employers.

We should rightly be proud of our careers services, which have been instrumental in achieving a record 87.2 per cent of school leavers sustaining further learning, training or work. However, we still have a job to do and I am confident that if we work together we can build in our young people the capacity to plan and manage their careers, which will improve their life chances and help to grow our economy.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the modernisation of Scotland's career services is vital to economic recovery in Scotland and to improving people's ability to manage their careers throughout their lives; agrees that Skills Development Scotland's service modernisation is in line with the Scottish Government's careers strategy, published in March 2011, which focuses on offering a modern service for all Scotland's people, making use of the latest technology, training and labour market information to ensure that individuals get the support that they need to enable them to succeed in their careers; also agrees that this supports delivery of Opportunities for All and plays a key role in ensuring that Scotland's young people make a successful transition from education into the world of work, and further agrees that the Scottish Government's commitment to continue working with a wide range of partners, including employers and individuals, will help to achieve its shared ambitions for young people across Scotland in the short, medium and long term.

15:11

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): My experience of being a recipient of careers guidance at school was not particularly good, but that probably says more about my attitude as a surly, spotty youth than it does about the ability, or lack of it, of the careers staff involved—[*Interruption.*] I hear Mr Russell muttering about that.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): No.

The Presiding Officer: I think that in this case Mr Russell was the innocent party. Some of his colleagues were certainly intervening.

Neil Findlay: I humbly apologise. Someone must have the same dulcet tones as Mr Russell.

Help for young people with careers development is important. Our young people need to develop skills and make the right subject choices at school and the right choices for college and university, so

that they can prepare for the increasingly fast-paced and volatile jobs market.

Careers services are also critical to development in the wider economy, as is evident from the high levels of youth unemployment in Scotland. In my council area, which the minister knows well, the youth unemployment rate is a worrying 30 per cent.

On the basis of the evidence that is before us, the minister's self-satisfied motion, which seeks to celebrate reform, is misguided and does not reflect life in the real world. As I am sure that the Presiding Officer knows, I am always willing to applaud the Government when it does good things, and I would genuinely have preferred to be able to compliment the minister on implementation of effective reforms in the careers service. It is unfortunate that evidence is mounting that the so-called modernisation of the careers service is, like college regionalisation, driven by a cost-cutting agenda, which is leaving tens of thousands of young people with little or no real careers guidance.

As SDS confirms in its "Corporate Strategy 2012/15",

"The Scottish Government's Career Information Advice and Guidance Strategy ... places a particular emphasis on giving individuals the ability to manage their own career journeys by developing the relevant skills."

However, the ability to manage the career journey is being driven in one direction: away from people and human interaction and towards the web-based service, my world of work.

There are serious misgivings about the effectiveness and impact of my world of work. Those concerns fall broadly into two camps: first, the number of young people who have registered for the service—a key point is that this is not the number who have actually used it; and, secondly, the effectiveness of the web-based service for those young people who actually log on and use it.

In 2009, academic researchers Cathy Howieson and Sheila Semple were commissioned by SDS to look at web-based services. Their report concluded:

"the value of career websites in supporting users' career development remains untested. Very little is known about the impact of career websites on young people's career-related knowledge and skills and whether such websites can deliver the gains that have been identified as accruing previously from CIAG"—

that is, careers information, advice and guidance. The researchers went on to ask:

"Do all young people have the technical abilities to use websites, are they able to deal with the volume and complexity of the information available?"

Angela Constance: I am certainly aware of the research that those reputable researchers conducted in 2009, which was actually pre my world of work. Does Mr Findlay accept that an important finding of that work is that young people value both access to web-based information and face-to-face contact?

Neil Findlay: I am just coming to that point. The academics suggest that web-based services, while potentially a useful tool, should not replace the current face-to-face contact, which they found was “valued by pupils and also by teaching staff.”

We agree with that. The researchers say that web-based services provide information, not advice—which is a critical distinction—and that young people, no matter their ability or background, need help in interpreting information and developing a career plan. Incidentally, the research that the minister referred to was embargoed by SDS because it did not like its conclusions.

An SDS spreadsheet identifies that tens of thousands of young people across Scotland are no longer accessing any form of careers guidance. Drew Smith has referred to the figures for his area, but the national figure is that, up until 31 October, only 17 per cent of Scotland’s school pupils had registered with my world of work. In my local authority area, the registration rate is only 16 per cent. That is not the fault of councils because, irrespective of the political colour of the administration, the registration figures across Scotland are alarming: in Angus, the figure is 11 per cent; in Argyll and Bute, it is 19 per cent; in the Shetland Islands, it is 14 per cent; in Perth and Kinross, it is 17 per cent; in Dumfries and Galloway, it is 16 per cent; and in Highland, which has the highest registration rate, it is 37 per cent.

Why are those numbers so low? Well, SDS has adopted a new traffic-light system, which categorises our young people as red, amber or green. That determines whether they will receive careers guidance or be left to manage their own career journey. It is estimated that 100,000 young people are in the green category, where pupils receive what the minister referred to as the “SDS universal offer”. That sounds very grand, but in practice it means half a school period—which could be delivered to a class or a group—on the CMS framework and another half period on my world of work. SDS counts those as two interventions per pupil. A session delivered to a year group of 200 pupils in a hall counts as 400 individual interventions and is recorded accordingly.

Even with that creative accountancy, if only 17 per cent of pupils are registered, we can see clearly that tens of thousands are receiving little or no careers guidance at all.

Angela Constance: Will Mr Findlay give way?

Neil Findlay: Certainly.

Angela Constance: As Mr Findlay is so well informed by his trade union and Skills Development Scotland sources, does he accept the commitment that has been given that, in the context of classroom groups, over the course of the next year SDS staff will see every S4, S5 and S6 pupil to tell them about career management skills and to introduce them to my world of work, in addition to which people can come forward to seek more advice? Does he recall what standard of information and advice were available prior to 2008? Is he saying—

Neil Findlay: Presiding Officer, I think that we have heard enough from the minister now.

Angela Constance: Is the member saying that we used to guarantee every young person access to careers guidance pre 2008?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Mr Findlay, you accepted the intervention, but I will give you the time back.

Neil Findlay: My question is not about whether SDS will eventually get round to seeing all pupils. There are pupils in classes now who are getting no careers guidance at all. That is the real issue. I am also advised by people in education that many pupils are unassigned to any category, but that was denied by SDS senior management when they appeared before the Education and Culture Committee last week. Perhaps, in her closing speech, the minister could clarify the position.

The Government’s approach seems to be underpinned by an unproven and untested assumption that the 100,000 young people categorised as green will use the my world of work website and may not want or need face-to-face guidance. However, the university drop-out rate of 9.4 per cent suggests that young people of all abilities need to be helped into making good careers choices.

In the post-school setting, staff numbers and office opening hours are being reduced, drop-in services are being ended, an appointment-only system is being introduced and advisers are being stopped from carrying out home visits and taking clients to interviews in their cars. How will those actions help to make inroads into youth unemployment?

That is all dressed up in the language of modernisation—a loaded word that is often applied to give the impression that it means progress. Unison, which represents SDS staff, believes that modernisation is a cover for

“budget cuts rather than the drive to improve the service”.

Those cuts have resulted in 200 front-line staff losing their jobs. I have no idea where the minister gets the idea that it has been an increase in staffing.

Unison was so concerned at the changes and cutbacks that it conducted a survey of its members, as other speakers have said. The results are startling. Only last month, 89 per cent of the 400 staff who responded either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the assertion that

"The new service delivery model will result in an enhanced service for the people of Scotland".

Morale is low, and staff feel deskilled and that their professional judgment is no longer required.

Unison also identifies SDS as having a culture in which there is no room for any debate on the organisation's direction. SDS has form on that. It does not appear to like to hear other people's views. As I mentioned, it embargoed the previous research, despite the fact that it commissioned it. The academics who conducted the research are currently engaged in further research, but SDS has ordered its staff not to co-operate with that research. To be frank, that is astonishing and the minister simply must step in and not allow that to happen.

Just because somebody brands something with the label "modernisation" does not mean that it is good or that it is better than what went before. The changes that are being made are untested and unproven.

There is no independent research that states that the more clever somebody is, the less they need to see a careers adviser or the better they are at managing their own career. By the end of October, 83 per cent of secondary school pupils were unregistered. We are very worried about that. The Government should be worried too but its approach so far is complacent in the extreme.

I move amendment S4M-05109.2, to leave out from first "agrees" to end and insert:

"acknowledges that, at a time of high and rising unemployment, careers information, advice and guidance is increasingly important to young people in school and those seeking opportunities post-school; believes that web-based services should be viewed as useful information tools that complement and supplement the careers advice and guidance system rather than as a replacement; is concerned at what it understands are the very low levels of registration by school pupils on the web-based system, My World of Work, and believes that the red, amber and green method of categorising pupils is resulting in many receiving little or no careers guidance; notes the reduction of 20% in frontline staff and the decline in opening hours of careers offices; further notes the results of two recent careers staff surveys that have raised serious concerns about the new service model, and urges the Scottish Government to reconsider its careers strategy and to work with Skills Development Scotland, careers staff, trade unions, academics and other stakeholders to carry out a full and

rigorous assessment of the services being provided."

15:23

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Last month, the importance of careers guidance was put into sharp focus for the cross-party group on colleges and universities. Bill Porterfield of Burn Stewart Distillers, who was providing a report about the ambitions that he and some other local businesses have for helping young people into successful careers, began his contribution with the following observation:

"When exam time comes, the education system tells you to put away your calculators, your mobiles and your textbooks, and try to remember everything you have learnt for the last two years for a two hour exam. Don't copy anyone ... and don't ask anyone for help. This must be all your own work".

What happens on day 1 in the workplace? You are handed a calculator, a mobile and a set of instructions. You are told not to rely on anything that you have learned up till now and, whatever you do, to ask for help. It is the absolute opposite of the academic experience that finished only a few weeks before.

That is a bit of satire, perhaps, but it nonetheless serves to set out the culture shock that many young people face when they enter the world of work. At stake is somebody's future career and their ability to know what to expect, understand the appropriate ethos, take instruction and know their rights and responsibilities. In short, it is as much about having good communication skills and how the person adds value to the workplace as it is about their qualifications.

The earliest discussions in a pupil's school life about possible career paths can have the most significant impact. They by no means determine exactly what the pupil will do post school, but they certainly sow the seeds for possible paths.

It is, therefore, vital that those initial discussions are well informed and properly followed up, rather than involving mandatory chats from a teacher to the whole class or in some cases the whole year group. In the past, and even at a few schools today, the latter approach has been all too familiar and has done little more than advise pupils which prospectuses to read or which websites to use.

If the philosophy of earliest identification is true in looking after the social and educational needs of our youngest children, it is also true for careers guidance. In my book, that means starting out with better careers guidance in the early years of secondary school, prior to subject choice for external qualifications.

I would argue strongly that effective guidance is needed on why there are different approaches to the disciplines of science, arts and social

sciences. Members may be surprised to learn that although pupils often know which subjects fall into those categories, they are not always aware of how one learns in the different disciplines. Knowledge must be complemented by an early understanding of the world of work and the skills that are required in any occupation.

We should be clear about schools' obligations. First, there is—not least because of the principles that underpin the curriculum for excellence document "Building the Curriculum 4"—an obligation to ensure that the guidance that is provided at school is personal and no longer shaped by a one-size-fits-all approach. Such an approach may be fine for the initial session, but it is certainly not appropriate as pupils begin to discuss their individual programmes.

I commend those schools throughout Scotland that take time to interview their pupils on a regular one-to-one basis and which, in the later years of school, ask pupils to select one member of the school staff to act as a personal tutor. The fact that the pupil has a choice has the huge advantage of ensuring that the system has a high chance of success and that the pupil sees that member of staff on a regular basis.

Secondly, schools have an obligation to ensure that they fully involve parents in the process, given that parents remain the biggest influence on young people's choices in the early stages. It makes things much better if school and home are working together, and it is beneficial when local businesses or recruitment agencies can be involved too. As was said at the cross-party group, it is never too early to start work on what expectations are in the workplace and which skills are required in any professional working environment.

Schools are also obliged to ensure that they track pupils once they have left school so that they become much better informed about how well the careers guidance has worked and where it might be falling short. Universities and colleges are doing that exceptionally well just now, and such an approach should be done at school level.

This afternoon, the Scottish Government has set out the key elements of the strategy to modernise careers services across Scotland. That is welcome, but only as far as it goes. There is no doubt that some of the new approaches that have been highlighted will be enormously beneficial in providing youngsters with a much better awareness of what options are available. However, the strategy must be expanded considerably. I have concerns on two fronts, one of which echoes the concerns that Labour set out this afternoon.

First, what matters most is the quality of the information that is available and the ability of the

youngster to understand and use information appropriately. New technology—especially new collaborative websites—can be important, but success will be determined by the qualitative judgments that the youngster makes. That requires human as well as technical input, and we should be in no doubt about the need for a fully co-ordinated approach in providing that. I wholeheartedly agree with Labour's view that there is grave cause for concern about some of the evidence that was provided to the Education and Culture Committee, from which it was clear that by no means all the stakeholders involved agree on the best way forward.

Specifically, as Labour has said, there is concern that there is still scope for too many people to fall through the net. Labour has pointed to the registration issue, which is a serious concern. While I understand the principles of the system that the Government is trying to put into operation, I think that we must look carefully at expanding the whole process so that we not only have more youngsters involved, critically, at an earlier stage, but are satisfied that the process has the confidence of the main stakeholders.

As a politician and a former schoolteacher, I cannot overemphasise how important careers guidance is. We must get our approach to it right and we must be a bit broader in our outlook than the Scottish Government currently is.

I move amendment S4M-05109.1, to insert at end:

" , and recommends that the most significant progress is likely to be made if there is more personalised careers guidance available to all pupils in the early years of secondary school that is in line with the main principles of the curriculum for excellence and actively involves other partners such as local businesses, colleges and universities."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now turn to the open debate. We have a little bit of time in hand at this stage, so we will have speeches of six minutes.

15:30

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): The Institute of Career Guidance, the leading professional body for the careers guidance sector in the United Kingdom, with a membership of 3,500 practitioners, has on its website the following definition of what careers guidance should be:

"Career guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Such services may be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in the workplace, in the voluntary or community sector and in the private sector. The activities may take

place on an individual or group basis and may be face-face or at a distance (including help lines and web based services). They include career information provision ... assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, career education programmes (to help individuals develop their self awareness, opportunity awareness, and career management skills), taster programmes ... work search programmes, and transition services."

The definition was adopted by the Institute of Career Guidance after it was used in international reviews conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Commission and the World Bank.

Last year, the Government published the report "Career Information, Advice and Guidance in Scotland: A Framework for Service Design", which stated that the careers service must

"make more of a difference to more people – school pupils; students and graduates; those who are in work or out of work; and those with low or no skills."

In the foreword, the Minister for Youth Employment, Angela Constance, said:

"Career Information, Advice and Guidance is more important than ever in enabling people and businesses to develop their knowledge and skills in order to take full advantage of the opportunities before them."

She continued:

"our aim is to enhance significantly the range and quality of services across the country – and make it easier than ever for people and employers to access Career Information, Advice and Guidance."

The new framework continues the self-referral model of young people accessing careers services in schools, which was introduced in 1984. It aims to respond to the differing needs of individuals. Those requiring only a little assistance will be encouraged to use the new website; others will require six to eight face-to-face interviews with careers advisers; and a small number will require a more intensive support mechanism to get ready for the world of work.

In August 2011, SDS launched the my world of work website, which is dedicated to all-age careers advice. Since its launch, it has attracted 150,240 registrations, and the number is up 11.6 per cent in November alone. More than 70,000 registrations were by young people between the ages of 12 and 19, which is the result of careers advisers visiting schools and promoting the website to young people.

The Careers Service, the forerunner of SDS, previously had a careers website. Danny Logue explained at the Education and Culture Committee:

"In 1985, we discussed the introduction of a careers database called microdoors; in 1993, we discussed careers company websites; and in 2002, the Careers Scotland

website was introduced."—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 27 November 2012; c 1649.]

The new website—my world of work—continues that tradition, but it is an enhanced and expanded website, with additional tools. The website has a curriculum vitae builder; tests to help identify an individual's strengths and where their skills would be relevant; and film clips providing insights into unfamiliar fields, which is useful for people who are either starting off in their careers or who have lost their job and need to widen the search. The website also carries a list of current vacancies.

In Scotland, more than 70 per cent of homes have internet access, and many young people have access to the internet on smart phones or tablet computers.

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Gordon MacDonald: Not just now, thanks.

Therefore, young people are now able to access the careers website 24 hours a day, seven days a week. However, if an individual still needs assistance, they will get it. Malcolm Barron of SDS stated:

"if they find that they are still confused, uncertain and unsure about what their next step should be, they should get advice from a highly qualified, professional careers adviser."

He added:

"The other point is that, if a parent feels that their son or daughter is struggling, they have an opportunity to make the application as well."—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 27 November 2012; c 1644-5.]

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Gordon MacDonald: That was confirmed by the minister when she said in her recent answer to Drew Smith:

"we are retaining access to a universal service in which any young person who wishes an appointment or face-to-face contact with a well-paid professional will receive that."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2012; c 12506.]

SDS is, along with school guidance staff, integrating a whole system of career management into the curriculum for excellence. Danny Logue stated at the committee:

"we are looking at how we build young people's capacity to manage their careers, not just at the transition point of leaving school but throughout their working lives".—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 27 November 2012; c 1653.]

David Cameron, an education consultant, agrees that the curriculum for excellence can support this development. He stated in *The Times Educational Supplement* in June:

"I think a lot of the skills we are trying to encourage through CfE would actually help young people around this,

because it is about decision-making, being able to see what is out there, to look at that against your own capacities and make good choices.”

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Gordon MacDonald: One measure of the success of the modernisation of the careers service, in conjunction with the opportunities for all guarantee, will be the successful outcomes of those pupils with positive destinations. The latest figures that are available show 87.2 per cent of school leavers achieving a positive destination, which is a record high.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Neil Bibby, I say again that I have some extra time for members who take interventions, so I can give them some time back.

15:37

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): That was the first time that I have heard an SNP member quote David Cameron, but there is a first time for everything.

It is important that we have this debate, because there is no doubting the important role that good-quality careers advice, information and guidance play in setting young people on the best path for the future. The Scottish Government's 2011 framework for service redesign and improvement describes a

“commitment to all-age, universal Career Information, Advice and Guidance as a central feature of the Scottish skills system.”

That is something that we would all welcome, across the chamber. However, it appears from the reaction to the new system from those who are working directly on its implementation and from the recent registration statistics for the my world of work website that young people are not getting the advice or information that they need. I believe that the Scottish Government has failed to grasp the difference between careers information and careers advice.

As we have already heard, the new schools service that is offered by Skills Development Scotland categorises pupils according to perceived need in a traffic-light system. Green pupils are expected to use the online services that are offered by Skills Development Scotland's my world of work website. Amber pupils—those who have poor attendance or low attainment or who come from so-called difficult backgrounds—are seen by careers advisers. Red pupils, of whom there are only about 400 nationally, according to Unison, are those who are already disengaged from education, involved with social work or in criminality, or who have learning needs. They are diverted to organisations, including charities, that

offer alternative provision, such as the Prince's Trust.

About 100,000 pupils, or 75 per cent, will be put in the green category. They are considered to have good training or job prospects. As a result, about three quarters of Scottish students will not automatically get tailored, professional advice about their next steps in life. At the vital juncture between school and employment or tertiary education, about 100,000 young people will not get that advice. I appreciate that, in tough times, it is necessary to make choices about priorities, but I do not believe that it is necessary or the right thing for 100,000 pupils not automatically to get tailored careers advice.

Angela Constance: Is Neil Bibby aware of the system that Skills Development Scotland inherited, whereby young people had to request information and guidance from professional careers staff? Even in the good old days, young people did not get advice automatically; they had to request it through an antiquated card index system.

Neil Bibby: I do not contend that the situation before was brilliant, but the fact is that the current situation is unacceptable. Giving young people one-on-one advice, to allow them a decent chance of getting a job, is not too much for them to ask for. However, that is exactly what it is for the minister, and she is asking young people to ask for advice. I fear that many young people will not ask for it when they need it and that many people will fall through the gap if things proceed as they are.

The evidence from professionals is clear. In its evidence to the Education and Culture Committee last week, Unison argued that its members working in careers advice had serious reservations about the careers information, advice and guidance strategy. In a survey of Unison members, 92 per cent believed that the new RAG—red, amber, green—model created a danger of people slipping through the net. The message is clear: a website is not a replacement for face-to-face contact.

Additionally, a web-based system presents problems for young people. Gordon MacDonald mentioned that 70 per cent of people have access to the internet. However, more than 30 per cent of Scots do not have access to broadband in their home. It is therefore no wonder that registration for the website is so low. Closing careers offices will not help those young people to access the new online careers service.

Drew Smith: Does Neil Bibby agree—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have Drew Smith's microphone on, please?

Drew Smith: Thank you, Presiding Officer. Does Neil Bibby agree that it is precisely in those

areas where young people are most likely to find themselves unemployed that we find the lowest rate of high-quality broadband access, at home and often in schools?

Neil Bibby: I agree with that, as a West Scotland MSP, and will come to that later.

It is not just professionals who appear to be at odds with the new careers system. The uptake of the my world of work website has been frankly anaemic in the region that I represent and across Scotland. The most recent figures that I have seen show that in Inverclyde around 12 per cent of school pupils have signed up to the website; in Renfrewshire, the figure drops to 11 per cent; and in East Renfrewshire, it drops again to just 10 per cent. The average in my region is 14 per cent—below the Scottish average. My region has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the UK. I worry that a majority of pupils will not access the my world of work website and not only that pupils will miss out on careers advice but that up to 80 or 90 per cent of pupils could even miss out on careers information. That situation is unacceptable.

Many parents and young people will be rightly worried about pupils not having access to a careers adviser. All pupils—regardless of their academic performance—deserve the right advice. As Neil Findlay alluded to, even in areas with the highest academic achievement in Scotland we see high rates of university dropouts. In the current economic climate, it is more vital than ever that pupils make the right decisions when leaving school.

The minister regularly claims that she cares passionately about young people and giving them the best life chances. I do not doubt that for a minute. What we need the minister to do is to show that her policies are in the best interests of young people and give people confidence in the system. I hope that she will use her power to allay the fears of professionals, parents and—most importantly—pupils.

Finally, the Government has framed this debate as being about modernising the careers service; the reality is that the Government is cutting the careers service. It is a cut when there is a 20 per cent reduction in front-line careers service staff and it is a cut when 100,000 Scottish pupils do not get tailored careers advice.

There is a difference between information and advice. I have already set out the information; my advice is for the Government to rethink its approach.

15:44

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Before I start, I point out that the David Cameron whom my colleague, Gordon MacDonald, mentioned is in fact a highly respected educational consultant in Scotland. I would hate for Mr Bibby to get into trouble for making an inadvertent error, and I am sure that he will correct the record timeously. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Joan McAlpine: I want to talk about the amber group of young people that Skills Development Scotland has identified as being in need of additional support from the careers service because of poor academic attainment or attendance. I understand that an estimated 35,000 people will be classified as amber under the new strategy, and I understand that they will receive between six and eight one-to-one meetings per term.

I am surprised that Labour in particular has such a negative view of the traffic-light system that targets this group, given that it was the previous Labour Administration that identified this group as a priority. They were identified as NEETs—or young people not in education, employment or training. We do not use that term now but it was understood at the time that there were far too many of them in Scotland. The highest proportion—

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

Joan McAlpine: No, thanks—I want to make progress. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Findlay.

Joan McAlpine: Scotland had the highest proportion of these young people in Europe. Such was the concern over these teenagers that the previous Administration under Jack McConnell brought together the Smith group, which comprised our most successful business leaders, to work with Government on a solution. As well as the chairman, Lord Smith of Kelvin, the group included Tom Hunter, Willie Haughey and Jim McColl, who have all put their money where their mouths are to fund various entrepreneurial and innovative educational opportunities.

The Smith group has continued to work closely with this SNP Government. It was on its recommendation that the Minister for Youth Employment, the first such appointment in these islands, was created, and we have taken forward many of its ideas about increasing vocational education with our record number of modern apprenticeship starts and our opportunities for all programme for 16 to 19-year-olds.

The modernisation of the careers service, with a focus on the young people now identified as amber, was a recommendation of the Smith group from its earliest times. These businessmen did not give up their time and money because everything was hunky-dory. The system, including the delivery of careers advice, was simply not working for a great many of the young people who needed the most help.

That was made clear by none other than Jack McConnell himself. In February 2006, a Government press release announcing the establishment of the Smith group said that

“Additional careers advice based in schools, targeted on those who need it most”

was an essential part of the way in which Governments should move forward. The Smith group itself said:

“effective targeting, based on reliable evidence, supports a case for significant levels of investment in those parts of Scotland where the NEET problem is highest. This population of young people is the most likely to become highly dependent on the public sector throughout their adult lives. Early intervention can make a profound difference to their life chances.”

Early intervention has been a byword of this Government's approach to service delivery, and it applies as much to the careers service as it does to other areas of Government policy such as early years education. The approach is already having a positive effect on the problems that the Smith group identified. For example, figures published in June show that 87.2 per cent of pupils who left school in 2010-11 were in positive destinations by March 2012, up from the previous year's 85.2 per cent and a record high.

Of course, we must not forget the majority of our youngsters, who are in the 100,000-strong group classified as green and who will benefit from careers advice throughout the school curriculum through curriculum for excellence, the my world of work website and engagement with professional careers advisers, if that is what they want. I was very encouraged to hear Skills Development Scotland's Malcolm Barron tell the Education and Culture Committee that there is no single solution for each young person and that careers professionals will work with teachers to deliver careers advice through group sessions and personal and social education classes. As the minister and Skills Development Scotland have repeatedly pointed out, no young person who wants an interview will be denied one.

I, too, was concerned about the allegations that young people might be unable to access one-to-one careers advice but I am now absolutely satisfied that that is not the case. A number of people have quoted the Unison survey, which we have still to see. It strikes me that it is not the most

extensive survey, although I might revise that view once I have had the opportunity to examine it more closely. However, when I carried out my own survey by calling my own local college—Dumfries and Galloway College—I heard very positive feedback on the website from staff and young people.

One young person said:

“The website was very helpful. It is easy to understand and sorts everything out with a step by step guideline for you. I would use it again in the future.”

Another person said:

“I used it loads recently for my strengths and weaknesses. My CV is on there and I will use it in the future for accessing this.”

The staff feedback was positive, too. One staff member said:

“We do use it a lot and it is great as the students can pick up their CV, cover letter, strengths and weaknesses on the move with any computer.”

I want to comment on other feedback on the website and the modernisation of the careers service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you will have to be brief.

Joan McAlpine: Ken Cunningham CBE, the general secretary of School Leaders Scotland, has endorsed the SDS's approach. He says:

“it dovetails with the wide range of support which schools are able to provide through a pupil's time in school. It recognises the sheer diversity of need and offers a wide range of support targeting specifically those most in need at the appropriate time.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude, please.

Joan McAlpine: I am happy to conclude with the words of Ken Cunningham, who endorses the modernisation of the careers service very effectively.

15:51

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): Youth unemployment is a huge problem, and it is getting worse. In my Motherwell and Wishaw constituency, there are more than 3,000 unemployed 16 to 24-year-olds.

Young people need help. They need help to make the right choices about their future, to get qualifications, to acquire skills and to apply for jobs. I was not convinced that the right help was being provided so, a few months ago, I looked into the local careers service that is offered by SDS. I was not happy with what I found.

For example, the local careers office is hidden away in Motherwell College and its location is not

signposted. With thousands of young people in North Lanarkshire not in education, employment or training, and with the cuts in the college sector, it occurred to me that that may not be the most convenient location. To compound that, there is a 20 per cent reduction in front-line staff.

I doubted that the face-to-face access provided by those staff could be replaced by pushing young people towards web access and centralised careers provision, so I also had a look at the my world of work website. There was one telephone number on the contact page, but even that was a helpline for using the website—it did not put people in touch with someone who could give careers advice. Searching the site for Motherwell or Wishaw returned a couple of couple of courses at the college, but—surprise, surprise—there was no link to the local careers advice office that was based in the college. Was that the minister's vision for an improved service?

It also came as no surprise to discover that, locally, only 14 per cent of the young people have registered on the my world of work website. That is only one in seven, which proves to me that the plan is not working. Will the minister explain why SDS is not co-operating with the academics who are conducting research into the new web-based service? What are the minister's views on the previous research carried out for SDS?

It has been identified that there are shortcomings in the system. I hope that the minister agrees that SDS should work with anyone who can help address the problems or improve the system.

Having visited my constituency's local careers office in Motherwell College, I was more convinced than ever that careers advice should be more easily accessible for all, which means somewhere central where people can go and speak face-to-face with an adviser. The staff whom I spoke to appreciated those concerns, so I decided to approach the council to see whether it could identify suitable premises in Motherwell or Wishaw town centre.

When SDS was put on the spot, the inaccessibility of the service was clear. With only 14 per cent of young people signing up to the my world of work website, the weakness of the web-based solution cannot be denied. SDS agreed to work with the council.

I am pleased to say that that has borne fruit, with the careers service now lined up to occupy part of the one-stop-shop in Motherwell. Of course, that victory for common sense is only part of what needs to be done, but it is also very much the exception to the rule, as has been heard from other areas.

I am also concerned about the traffic-light system that is being used to filter young people in order to decide who deserves attention. For many young people, the system is failing to provide support. There is an issue about whether the support that is offered is appropriate to the categories and whether the categories are being correctly assigned or, in some cases, even assigned at all.

The web system is aimed at the 75 per cent of the 16 to 19-year-olds who are in the green category. What we know of registrations suggests that only a quarter of them have actually signed up. Those pupils are those who fare best academically, but it is a mistake to assume that that translates into their not needing help with careers beyond what is provided on the my world of work website. It can be difficult for pupils to pick the right courses and plot out career destinations, whatever their level of academic ability or attainment.

Where is the evidence to support SDS? How does it compare to the evidence that it does not want to talk about?

The move to an appointments system is also making life difficult for older users, with drop-in opportunities diminishing and outreach for vulnerable youngsters being put out of reach.

All in all, the picture is one of a service that is perpetuating a dogma that underpins its reforms, which are being shown to be unfit for purpose. The strong suspicion is that the dogma serves the purpose of saving money rather than of serving the people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are now getting a bit tight for time and I can allow only a little leeway for interventions.

15:56

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Most of us have said, in one way or another, how important the careers service is and how important it is that we get it right. I believe that the proposals before us are the right way to go and are a way in which we can get things right.

It has already been mentioned that the days of a one-size-fits-all careers service are over and that the heart of the new careers service is the view that the individual is the most important factor. The claim that the new careers service does not meet the needs of young people is unfounded, and the new approach that was rolled out in September is progressing well.

As I said, the days of a one-size-fits-all careers service are over. Like Mr Findlay, I remember standing in the careers office—it was in the historic town of Paisley a long time ago, probably

before Mr Findlay had his meeting—and having my 10-minute interview with the guidance teacher. At that time, saying that I wanted to be an astronaut was probably a wee bit ambitious and caused the teacher to lose interest, but I was a rather headstrong and stroppy teenager. I see that Mr Stevenson is nodding in agreement—he remembers me from then.

Three years ago, a strong-willed young woman from Paisley—Jessica Adam, my daughter—went into the careers service and she, too, had difficulty engaging with the service and ensuring that she could move things forward. Luckily, things worked out for Jessica, but that shows us how important this subject is.

Much has been said about the traffic-light system. It is important that we do not leave anyone behind, regardless of their background. It is naive to say that everyone should follow the same path through the system, because there are people from difficult backgrounds who, if we do not catch them through the curriculum for excellence, will end up not having the fulfilled career that they deserve.

Careers guidance is now much more tailored to the needs of the individual. Any young person—I repeat, any young person—who wants a face-to-face appointment with a careers guidance professional can get one. In Scotland, we are fortunate that we have professional careers information and advice guidance staff. However, given how young people interact with the world these days, using a web page is a lot easier for a lot of them than a face-to-face meeting—between their phones and the web, many of them can get access to absolutely anything in that way. We have to ensure that we go down that route.

As has been said with regard to the traffic-light system, some young people need extra-intensive support. The system provides an opportunity for that to be delivered to those who need it. That is the most important thing. Most of us in the chamber agree that we want to do what is best for Scotland's young people and ensure that they have fulfilled lives, but I think that we have to agree on making systems such as this one work. That is important.

The fact is that the service needs to be tailored to individuals. As the minister said, the workplace has changed dramatically over the past few years, and flexibility needs to be part of the service. The system needs to ensure that all Scotland's people have an opportunity—I almost said “opporchancity”, which is like something from Francie and Josie—to access a universal careers service. Integrated into the curriculum for excellence, that can and will make a dramatic difference.

Let us put the scare tactics away and have a mature, open debate. Young people are falling through the net. As has been said, any young person who wants an appointment with a careers adviser can get one. At the Education and Culture Committee, SDS's Malcolm Barron said:

“The group is not fixed. I do not want the committee to get the idea that we are simply putting a stamp on someone and that is that. It is all about working with the school to target the best possible support at the people who need it.”—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 27 November 2012; c 1655.]

Kezia Dugdale: Considering that long-term youth unemployment in his constituency is 386 per cent higher than it was just a year ago, I am surprised that the member is not using his speech, which I have listened to for four minutes, to challenge his Government to do something about the lack of jobs in his constituency.

George Adam: With the greatest respect, I am defending the good people of Paisley by supporting the minister and the Government's ideas to make a difference. That is exactly what I talked about earlier. We need to look at ideas, as there is no point in the negativity from the Labour benches and saying that nothing can work. Our job is to make things better and make them work. Labour members should give us something constructive, not just say negative things.

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

George Adam: I will, as it is Mr Findlay.

Neil Findlay: Does the member realise that only 11 or 12 per cent of young people in his constituency are registered?

George Adam: As I said, the system has been up and running only since September and things are progressing as time goes on. We must ensure that we make these things work. Are we going to sit here and argue for two and a half hours, getting nowhere, or are we going to build something that can give young people in Paisley and the rest of Scotland an opportunity to move things forward? That is what the Labour Party forgets; Labour members are letting politics get in the way of delivering for the people of Scotland.

For me, the modernisation of the careers service is another example of the Scottish Government's commitment to Scotland's young people, ensuring that they have the opportunity to succeed and find a career path that suits them. We must focus on our young people and support them in their future endeavours. The current generation of teenagers and future generations are the most important people in this—let none of us in the chamber lose sight of that.

16:03

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): For a while, it looked as though the debate might fall victim to the controversies surrounding the Scottish Government's cuts to the colleges budget and the need to make time for that issue to be debated. I am pleased, however, that the minister has persevered and welcome, in the words of George Adam, the opportunity to participate in this important debate on the modernisation of Scotland's careers services.

The need for such modernisation is not hard to justify, given the way in which the world of work has changed and continues to change. As Scottish Chambers of Commerce observed, those who are leaving our schools, colleges and universities now and in the future will

"enter into careers which will cross multiple disciplines in several industries. The roles they perform and the industries in which they do so may not now yet even exist".

That presents enormous challenges for those who are tasked with developing the skills of our young people and those who are returning to update their skills, but it also places a weighty burden on those who are responsible for providing careers information, advice and guidance.

In that sense, Angela Constance—in her motion and in her remarks this afternoon—is right to underline the rationale for the changes that are being made. She is right also to link the modernisation process with ensuring not simply that Scotland emerges strongly from the current economic difficulties but that we prepare people to manage their careers throughout their lives. She is right to highlight the importance of collaboration with a wide range of partners in achieving the most effective careers service possible.

Where I disagree—and, therefore, where I find difficulty in supporting the motion as it stands—is in the failure to acknowledge any of the concerns that exist in relation to the strategy and, in particular, the way in which it is being implemented. Those concerns are reflected well in Neil Findlay's amendment, albeit that more of the original motion could have survived the cut, for the reasons that I have mentioned.

Nevertheless, having acknowledged the shared understanding of the need for change and how it might best be achieved, I will expand a bit on where I think the problems in approach and/or execution arise and how they might be addressed.

From a constituency perspective, I remain concerned about what appears to have been a centralisation of service provision. Certain senior roles have been removed from the islands and although attempts have been made to mitigate the impact of that, I believe that there has been a move in the wrong direction.

In its briefing, Unison reflects on the wider problem of office closures and staff cuts across the country. Quite reasonably, it contrasts that trend with the increasing demand that is being placed on the service at a time of high unemployment. In part, that leads Unison to claim that the changes that are being made are driven by a desire to cut budgets rather than by a desire to improve service. Whether that is fair or accurate is largely academic; it is clearly the perception of a large number of staff who are involved in the careers service, whose morale, by all accounts, is worryingly low.

Morale is also being affected by the approach that is being taken to use of the my world of work website. The problem is not the website itself. Scottish Chambers of Commerce is far from alone in recognising that my world of work is

"an excellent innovation ... bringing together advice and information ... in a single portal."

When they appeared before the Education and Culture Committee last month, Unison representatives absolutely accepted that fact, but serious concerns remain that SDS management, if not the minister, still see the web tool as a replacement for one-to-one careers advice for too many of our young people, as well as for those who have left school.

The research by Howieson and Semple, to which a number of members have referred, demonstrates that although

"young people do indeed value self help services they also wish for personal contact and advice."

It goes on to point out that, although young people are comfortable in using the internet, many find it challenging to interpret the "volume and complexity" of the information that is available and, importantly, how it relates to their circumstances. That can affect even very able and confident young people, as well as those who have already been identified as needing more intensive support. Moreover, it seems a little premature for SDS and ministers to be making some of their more extravagant claims about what my world of work can deliver before more road testing—ideally, by young people themselves—has been done.

Despite reassurances that a flexible approach is being adopted, school-based careers resources are being focused according to the so-called risk matrix. Those in the red category are to receive six to eight face-to-face sessions, while those who are categorised as green are expected to sign up to the website, which—as Neil Bibby and others have pointed out—a relatively modest number have actually done.

In evidence to the Education and Culture Committee, Unison confirmed that advisers are still offering interviews to proposed green pupils,

even when they have not registered on the website. In its submission to the committee, Unison insisted that advisers

“will not turn people away when they seek help just because they haven’t registered on a website.”

That is quite right, too.

Danny Logue of SDS agreed that no young person should be discouraged from seeking advice, yet guidance to advisers has not changed and the firm impression remains that registering on the website is a prerequisite for getting one-to-one advice. If that is wrong, as Ms Constance and others have argued, it is time for ministers to insist that SDS makes that more explicit within the organisation and that it be communicated through schools.

I have a couple of points to make on the critically important careers advice that is available in our colleges and universities. In the case of the latter, I welcome the steps that are being taken to build in careers advice from the outset of a student’s time at university. That may take time to bed down, but it is certainly a sensible approach, and it might avoid an overreliance on the final-year milk round.

As far as colleges are concerned, one of the many concerns about the significant cut in budgets has been about the reduction in the number of staff who are available to provide guidance and careers support. That is another reason why I believe that there must be a rethink by ministers before the budget is finally approved.

The minister opened by reminding us that the debate is about getting the right people with the right skills in the right jobs. I believe that that is achievable, but it will require change. I hope that the minister will reflect on the concerns that I and many others have raised to ensure that we make the right changes in the right way and for the right reasons.

16:09

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I welcome the debate. We can all surely agree on the importance of ensuring that young people—indeed, any person—can get the advice that they need to allow them to make informed decisions about their career path.

In preparation for the debate, I am sure that all of us who are taking part in it will have thought back to our experience of careers guidance. Some members have already mentioned their experience. My experience involved one face-to-face interview, which seemed to work out okay for me. That tells me that I was a far less obstinate teenager than Mr Findlay or Mr Adam was, but that is probably no surprise to me, at any rate.

I wonder whether such an approach would be as appropriate or work as well in these times. After all, the world is somewhat different from how it was then. Scottish Chambers of Commerce makes that point in its briefing in advance of the debate. It says:

“The young people graduating from Scotland’s schools, colleges and universities today and in future are entering into a world of work unrecognisably different to that which they would have encountered a generation ago.”

It is appropriate to ensure that careers guidance now is much more tailored to individuals’ needs. The point has been made, but it is worth repeating, that some people will need more intensive support than others.

The my world of work website has come in for some criticism, but it would be somewhat odd these days not to use the internet for careers advice. It is right to use that as part of the approach.

At the tail end of my school experience, I was introduced to this thing that was not called the internet then—it was called the information superhighway—and to email. I thought that it was a load of bunkum and that I would never need to use it, which probably partly explains why I am not an internet millionaire. I make that point because, if I was at school now, my experience would be radically different, because I would have grown up with such technology. Given that, it would be peculiar if we did not use the internet as a key component of any careers service.

Lest people should think that that is the only approach, I say that I would be worried if any young person who is seeking careers guidance and is watching the debate felt that the web-based approach was the only approach to careers advice. I emphasise the point that has been made that any young person who seeks a face-to-face interview for careers guidance with a careers guidance professional can get one.

We should get behind the new approach. I observe that, if it is not working, I am not aware of a single constituent—young person, parent or teacher—who has contacted me to express concern about the new approach. That cannot tell us everything, but it must tell me at least something about what is happening on the ground.

Liz Smith: Notwithstanding what Jamie Hepburn just said, does he accept that significant concerns were expressed to the Education and Culture Committee about the extent of the service that is being provided?

Jamie Hepburn: I am not a member of that committee, so I have not looked in detail at everything that it has examined. It is right to assess the scheme, but it is a new approach. The my world of work website has been promoted only

recently in schools, so it is early days. As for the idea that the registration rate is low, the point was well made that, if we judge a careers service's success merely by the number of registrations, we are looking at the wrong thing—at the input rather than the output.

Of course we need to look at the approach and ensure that it is working, but it is right at this time to look at modernising the careers service. I return to the point that we are in different times from those formerly, so it is right to look at a new approach.

The my world of work website is a good development, because it is available for people to access 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That is not the case if face-to-face interviews are the only thing on which people are relying, as might previously have been the case.

As Gordon MacDonald said and as I have just pointed out, the website's roll-out has happened only recently—it began only in September. If we were looking for 100 per cent registration, we would be setting ourselves up for a fall. I reiterate the point that Gordon MacDonald made. Between 31 October and 29 November, there was an 11.6 per cent increase in registration. We should welcome that.

Do I have a little leeway, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Very little.

Jamie Hepburn: Okay.

People argue that it is all about the web, but that is clearly not the case. There is the SDS helpline and there is the possibility of face-to-face interviews. The approach is multifaceted, and that must be right.

It is peculiar that the Labour Party has criticised the traffic-light system, because it is designed to support those who have been identified as being in the greatest need. I think that Joan McAlpine made that point. I would have thought that Labour members would have welcomed that. I urge them to ditch their negativity and get behind a careers service that is fit for the modern age.

16:15

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I am pleased to have been given the opportunity to speak about Skills Development Scotland, and especially the my world of work website. That is an innovative and modern approach to career advice. I enjoyed visiting the website and taking the visual my DNA quiz, which described my aptitudes. I am glad that there are still some options open to me. We never

know where we will end up in this fast-moving world.

Skills Development Scotland is best placed to make effective changes after successfully delivering 26,427 modern apprenticeships and supporting 165,578 young people through face-to-face careers services, 54,082 active learners through individual learning accounts, and 13,017 individuals dealing with redundancy. That is quite a formidable record.

SDS is the key organisation that is driving the modernisation efforts. The availability of professional career guidance, information and advice to anybody who desires it is tremendously important, and the ground-breaking skills website is one of the many ways in which SDS will continue to provide exceptional service. Most important, my world of work, along with the contact centre and face-to-face interviews, will allow SDS greater flexibility in supporting youths and tailoring guidance to the specific needs of individual young people. The modernisation of careers services will assist SDS in providing both quality and quantity of support.

Any young person will be able to request a face-to-face appointment with a careers adviser, but it will no longer be the quick, 10-minute appointment of past days. Services will be personalised and focused. No two young people are alike, and planning for their future should not be a cookie-cutter service. Some individuals will need thorough and intensive support. The new range of support options will allow for singular needs to be met.

My world of work is available for 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I am always impressed that young people are becoming ever more technologically savvy. Having a cutting-edge careers system—many of our young people have cutting-edge information technology skills—is essential. In fact, it is the only thing that makes sense.

I mentioned my visit to the my world of work website. The quiz that I took was only one of many services that are available. Users can plan their careers by looking at a range of information about various training opportunities, including video clips. The site even includes ways to find a job using social media. I imagine that that will appeal well to the Facebook and Twitter generation. Access is increased not only by the site's being available all the time, but because it allows SDS to reach more people in remote locations. As I said, a higher quality and greater quantity of service will be provided.

I have met many young people in secondary schools in my constituency who are determined and have bright futures, and I believe that most young people are like those I have met. That is

why the traffic-light system makes sense. There will be young people who have a plan in mind and who will use the my world of work tools to further develop their ideas and career goals. The traffic-light system enables SDS to provide different levels of support as required. Again, the system has been designed to tailor services better to the needs of individual young people. Any individual can request a face-to-face meeting with a careers adviser, but those who are in the red category and those who are most at risk will receive the attention that they desperately need. No student will be stuck in one category for ever; they are not permanently fixed.

Careers services need to be triaged. Those in most need should receive the most personal support, but I doubt that those who are in the red or amber category will have backgrounds that create an environment that enables them to make swift or confident decisions about their future.

As a member of the Education and Culture Committee, I was pleased to have the opportunity to hear from Skills Development Scotland. It is clear that the new approach is better placed to give everyone the opportunities to succeed. The programme was rolled out only in September this year and, by 31 October, there had been 134,629 registrations, more than 70,000 of which were by young people aged 12 to 19. A month later, the total had risen by 11.6 per cent to 150,240 registrations. The programme is in its infancy and, although the number of registrations will certainly increase in the coming months, the success will not be determined immediately—it will be measured by the ability of young people to achieve their desired careers.

A record number of pupils—87.2 per cent—are moving on to positive destinations and the Scottish Government is doing everything in its power to tackle youth unemployment. Although our situation might not be as bad as that for our neighbours, such as Spain, where unemployment among under-24s is running at 55.9 per cent, we can all agree that it is too high.

The Scottish Government's opportunities for all initiative gives young people between 16 and 19 a training or education opportunity if they desire one. Between 2007 and the end of the current spending review period, the SNP Government will have invested £5 billion in colleges. The SNP promised to deliver 25,000 modern apprenticeships per year in the current session of Parliament. The target has been exceeded, with 26,427 modern apprenticeships being delivered. Fifty-five per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds are employed, compared to the national average of 51 per cent. Completion rates for modern apprenticeships are at the record level of 75 per cent.

The Government is dedicated to providing careers advice and guidance that ensures partnership with organisations that will give high-quality services across a range of careers. That is made evident in the single outcome agreements, which involve working with employers and supporting SDS.

It is no longer the case that individuals will be in only one job for a lifetime. We are in the midst of an era of opportunity when changing one's job stream is the trend, rather than the exception to the rule. Our careers services need to be prepared to help individuals to track their careers through their lifetimes to unleash their potential.

SDS and the Scottish Government are doing just that by modernising the current system. I look forward to visiting the schools in my constituency and speaking to young people about the resources that are available to them. I will definitely advise them to take the my DNA quiz, as I have done. I commend it to my fellow MSPs, who might gain an insight into alternative opportunities for the future.

16:22

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Most speakers have rightly referred to the importance of careers advice. As I think most of us agree, this nation's greatest resource is its people, particularly its young people, and the careers service is right at the centre of helping them to achieve their potential. It is not only about fitting young people into the right place; it is about opening their eyes and raising their aspirations. I remember the entrepreneur Tom Hunter telling a story about the place where he grew up in Ayrshire. In his village, everybody worked in the pits. People who were working class went down the pit and those who were middle class worked in the office, but everybody worked in the pits. However, when the pits closed, the issue was not just that there were no jobs, but that people in the community could not conceive of how they could earn a living.

I became a teacher for similar reasons. I was the first person in my family to go to university and join a profession. Many of us in that position became teachers, because people aspire to the things with which they are familiar. As a teacher, I found that, too. I well remember arguing with a young guy who was better at physics than I ever was and who wanted to go to college. I tried to get him to go to university, but he was adamant that he did not know anyone who went to university and he would not go. I remember trying to convince a young woman who wanted to be a nurse that she could in fact aspire to be a doctor.

Sometimes, careers advice is about people turning their back on opportunities. On a later occasion, when I worked in Livingston during the

previous recession, when youth unemployment was high, Ferranti suddenly took on 100 apprentices and my higher physics class disappeared in its entirety. Many of the people in that class could have aspired to highers and going to university and so on, but they felt that they had to take the chance that was presented to them.

Careers advice is important in trying to ensure that we have the skills that we need in our economy. Even in these difficult times, there are skills shortages, particularly in areas such as science and engineering. There are still opportunities in those areas. The Institute of Physics recently produced a report that showed that there are 190,000 jobs in Scotland in physics-based sectors.

Joan McAlpine: I agree that there is a skills gap in relation to engineering. Dr Peter Hughes, the chief executive of Scottish Engineering, said:

"We welcome the proposals with regard to Delivery of Career Management Skills in the classroom and Group based Career Management Skills for all pupils with coaching for pupils deemed to be at risk. We will do whatever we can to assist you"—

that is, Skills Development Scotland—

"in your endeavours."

Does the member agree with Dr Peter Hughes?

Iain Gray: I find that I almost always agree with Dr Peter Hughes.

I will focus on a particular issue to do with science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects, to which no one has referred, and in relation to which I think that careers guidance has a role. I am talking about gender stereotyping and the self-limiting choices that young women often make. A group that does not access such opportunities is young women. Only 28 per cent of standard grade physics students are women and only 15 per cent of engineering undergraduates are women. There are opportunities into which careers guidance should be moving young women.

In my experience, careers guidance is about opening and changing minds. That is not just necessary at school—I think that the people who went to Ferranti will have looked for careers guidance later in life—and it is not just for low achievers. However—and I think that this is what Dr Hughes was talking about—it needs to come at an early stage and it needs to be consistent and proactive, because gender stereotypes, for example, are set very early in life.

Above all, careers guidance needs to be face to face. Members talked about the importance of an individualised, personalised service. There is nothing more individualised or personalised than a sensitive professional listening carefully to the

person with whom they are dealing and responding in a way that is appropriate to their needs. That is individualisation and personalisation. I was astonished when the minister, without a trace of irony, told us that we should not worry about the 92 per cent of SDS staff who were cynical about the new system, because they had all had high-quality "face-to-face" interventions on the new system. That is the best way to change people's minds.

The issue is whether the new system is fit for those purposes, and members have brought to the debate a weight of evidence that it is not. The traffic-light model is excluding 100,000 higher achievers from the front-line service that they need. Sign-up rates for the my world of work website must be a cause of concern—the rate in my constituency is 15 per cent, which is even less than the average.

What we have here is a trend in government. The internet-based approach to careers guidance is analogous to approaches that are developing elsewhere. Benefits applicants are expected to apply online, and in preparation for the introduction of self-directed support, local authority social work departments are planning to create web-based choices for the disabled and elderly people who are trying to create their own care packages. I think that we know what is happening. Such approaches sound plausible in an organisational change-management presentation, but they leave the people at the sharp end frustrated, ill-served or downright excluded.

The careers service was not perfect before, but the evidence is that the changes that we have debated are not an enhancement. We should pause, re-examine them and get our approach right.

16:29

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I might be one of a tiny minority of people who benefited from having no contact with formal careers advice. As a youngster I was not very well and missed a fair bit of my primary education. The most important classes that I missed were those on how to learn from the education system—a skill that I absolutely flunked.

However, I was fortunate to have well-educated parents and to be brought up in a house that was full of a diverse range of books, which I simply devoured in random order. I read J D Mackie's "A History of Scotland" when I was five and I read a biography of Lloyd George when I was seven—that probably shows that we are what we read. My reading and my enquiring mind enabled me just about to muddle through—

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Stewart Stevenson: I will wait a little, but I will give way later.

I muddled through and eventually graduated with a modest degree in mathematics. Had I had a good degree, I would have been headhunted for a traditional role in the civil service, ICI, BP or whatever. My girlfriend—now my spouse of 43 years—was the person who consulted the university careers advisory service and, right at the end of my academic career, the advice filtered through to me that I should go into computers. That was the best move that I ever made, but throughout my career I got there by chance.

Neil Findlay: Given the member's exciting career—I know that he has been a pilot and a water bailiff and invented the computer—is the answer that we should not give careers advice but just let people read about Winston Churchill and so on when they are five years old?

Stewart Stevenson: I used my individual example to illustrate that I have been incredibly lucky by not having careers advice, but luck should not play a part in the lives of children across Scotland.

Such a casual attitude to careers advice, which was adequate or good enough for me in the 1950s and 1960s, is absolutely no longer adequate today. There are now more careers and the more prescriptive rules about entry to careers mean that people need qualifications and need to have studied subjects. To do that, people may need to have received, 10 years in advance of acquiring a qualification, the kind of guidance that Iain Gray talked about—from a very informed basis, I thought—in a way that I neither got nor, as luck would have it, required.

Clearly, having only a single skill is also risky—again, Iain Gray made reference to this—so we need to learn how to learn and learn how to adapt. The first law of epigenetics is that the more highly optimised an organism is for one environment, the more adversely it is affected by a change in that environment. The way in which villages where everyone was employed in coal faced problems when the coal industry went away perfectly illustrates that risk. Good careers advice can pinpoint potential in students that those close to them, and even the students themselves, simply will not spot.

Today's students are very different from the student that I was. They have keyboard skills and they work computers as extensions of themselves. I was typing by the age of eight and nine, but I did not use a telephone for the first time until I was 15. That might seem rather odd, but the telephone

was a much rarer beast, to which I had less access than to a keyboard.

The term “moody teenager” applied not just to Neil Findlay but to me, and I will bet that, if we compare photographs, we will find that I was spottier than he was—and that is an unusual claim to make. As a teenager, the last thing that I would have wanted would have been to have someone looking over my shoulder. I was adapted to private study and to doing things for myself. For many children, that is why it is useful to have online systems that are comprehensive in detail, timely in content and—a key point missing from the debate so far—personalised. Such interactive systems are not like the first websites of 20 years ago—that is when I produced my first website—which were simply an electronic library.

Kezia Dugdale: Would the member rather have an algorithm or a one-to-one conversation?

Stewart Stevenson: I would rather that we indulged in heuristic learning, where the computer adds to the available ways in which we can learn of the needs of the person sitting at the computer, in addition to the interactions with human beings.

Computers will continue to be part of people's lives in years to come. The worldwide web will develop and become even more important and its interactivity is the vital thing. Its ability to guide, to search and to respond to people is vital, so personalisation is important.

I will give members one little insight into how we may be making wrong assumptions about people's relationships with technology. I worked in technology in the Bank of Scotland for 30 years. When we introduced our first cash dispensers in 1980—my brother had developed them for the Royal Bank of Scotland three years earlier, so I was behind him—we found that people would stand in the rain to queue for a cash dispenser rather than go into a bank branch. We did a survey and found that usage in Scotland was three times higher per head of population than in England, because people would rather deal with a machine than share intimate things in their lives with somebody behind a counter.

That is a narrow, specific example. It need not map to the subject that is before us, but we should not, by any means, discount the electronic world.

I will say a word about the red-amber-green system. I feel very disappointed because, in essence, I hear that we should divert resources from the red group, who need help the most, to the green group, who can be more adaptable, start online and get human interaction when they need it.

I am delighted to participate in this important debate.

16:36

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

It is never easy to follow Stewart Stevenson, but here we go.

The debate has been interesting; the Conservatives are in the rare position of agreeing with a Government motion, which says that

“the modernisation of Scotland’s career services is vital to economic recovery”.

How could we not agree with that? We also agree with Labour that the web-based system should be complementary to face-to-face careers advice and not a replacement for it.

My colleague Liz Smith highlighted the significant progress that could be made with more personalised careers guidance. She also mentions in her amendment—which I hope will gain support across the chamber—the critical need for early discussion of careers options in schools so that pupils can choose subjects that are appropriate to a career.

I am not a member of the Education and Culture Committee. However, following my intervention on the minister, I can only say that, if Unison has misunderstood the web-based approach, many people who gave evidence to the Education and Culture Committee share that misunderstanding. I would have had more respect for the minister had she acknowledged that there are concerns and said that the Government would address them. Instead, we heard evidence from the Labour Party and total denial from the Scottish National Party. That is not helpful. Liam McArthur made a thoughtful and measured speech along those lines.

Before being elected to Parliament, I had a career as an economics lecturer. Like Stewart Stevenson, I had no careers advice, but I was a single parent with two young children and chose lecturing so that I could spend the school holidays with them. It turned out to be an enjoyable and rewarding career.

I remember looking at a careers website as a student at the University of Dundee along with some friends from my class. It was obviously not as sophisticated as the systems that we have today. One question asked, “Do you like people?” We all said, “Well, yes, they’re okay, you know,” and the careers advice that we were given was that we should all be social workers. I certainly respect and admire the work that social workers do, but when we got back to the lecture theatre and asked the rest of the year whether they had taken the same careers advice, by coincidence, they had said that they liked people as well, so they had all been advised to become social workers, too. I make that point to highlight the need for a more personalised system to suit

individual needs and talents. The 31,000 young people who are currently not in education, employment or training may also benefit hugely from face-to-face careers advice, rather than facing a computer screen.

I also support better careers advice because I saw many mature students come into further and higher education after years in low-paid jobs with no career progression as a result of their having had little or no careers advice and support at school. If our careers services are to move people towards employment, it is important that they be able to steer people towards the parts of the economy where there is a demand for jobs.

I welcome the skills academy at Nigg in the Highlands, and the Aberdeen model, both of which are long overdue but will, nonetheless, work to achieve a much better match of skills, industry and NEETs. Recent research into skills shortages in the energy sector highlighted the need for approximately 120,000 new recruits by 2022 if Aberdeen is to continue as a global energy hub.

The Unison briefing is helpful, and I note the point that it makes about information and advice. There is no shortage of information online, as Neil Bibby and other members have said, but that is quite different from a face-to-face discussion on careers advice.

The views of SDS staff cannot be ignored. If 93 per cent of the staff who offer the careers advice—the same would apply if it was 10 per cent, 20 per cent, 30 per cent or 50 per cent—disagree that the model will result in an enhanced service, the Government should say that it is listening to what those staff are saying rather than dismissing their views.

I congratulate Energy North on the work that it has done in bringing together businesses from throughout the Highlands and in working with the University of the Highlands and Islands, Highland Council, Jobcentre Plus, colleges and OPITO. The organisation has identified a requirement to match education and training to the needs of the energy industry, which is desperately needed, given the opportunities in oil, gas and renewables and the lack of good advice and career guidance. Energy North is also working with schools and colleges.

Iain Gray made a good point—which I have made before now—about female pupils and graduates, who need to be given the appropriate options and career advice. It is sad that, today, there are 15 fewer women working offshore in the North Sea than there were in 2007, and that only 5 per cent of offshore engineers are women. That industry offers great opportunities, so it is only right that women be given the advice, access and confidence to take advantage of them.

I want to use the debate to highlight careers that require more prominence and respect; I am referring mainly to the hospitality industry. The perception remains that it is an industry for students and part-time staff, but in recent years Scottish food, drink and hospitality have achieved worldwide success. Exports have risen, Scotland is a destination for tourists and visitors, and the sector employs 200,000 people and generates total spend that is close to £11 billion. While we in the chamber regularly welcome the jobs and economic benefits from the sector, we rarely take time to praise the professionalism and commitment of the staff who make that happen, given the contribution of tourism to our economy. I hope that careers services will not, in the future, be dismissive of the retail or hospitality sectors. There are careers there, just as there are in other sectors.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if the member would close.

Mary Scanlon: I support the Labour amendment, and the Government's strategy—up to a point. We will vote for the Government's motion and live in hope that ministers will take on board the many reasonable and constructive points that have been made in the debate today.

16:43

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): At Jewel and Esk College along the road, there are 1,800 full-time students and just under 8,000 learners overall. I understand that there is just one member of SDS staff left at the college, who is there for one and a half days a week. There has been a huge reduction in the service in the past 12 months alone.

However, SDS is not only scaling back services in colleges; offices are closing down, and where they remain open the opening hours are reduced and the service has been moved into jobcentres. At first glance, that seems to be a good thing, but, when set against the changing practices of the Department for Work and Pensions and the reality of how jobcentres work, it is devastating. Many jobcentres operate on an appointment-only basis. I have spoken to countless young people who find going to the jobcentre incredibly intimidating, especially when the first thing they are faced with is a security guard asking them why they are there. I mentioned that because we cannot ignore the wider context of this debate and the wider context of SDS service revision.

I have heard numerous SNP members who are somehow bemused as to why Labour would oppose the RAG system—that is, the red, amber and green system. Jamie Hepburn said that it is designed to focus on those who are in need. Let

me take a moment to explain to him and others why we hold our view. The Unison briefing notes that the vast majority of drop-ins at careers centres were diagnosed as needing one-to-one advice help. In some instances, 80 per cent had an identified need. The 2009 annual report for SDS boasts that 242,000 young people dropped in. If we apply Unison's evidence that 80 per cent need help, what we get is a figure of 193,600 one-to-ones taking place in 2009-10. The SDS expects to deal with 35,000 amber clients, which is a huge reduction in service in only three years; in fact, that is less than a fifth of the number from three years ago. It looks to me as though tens of thousands of young people will simply slip through the net as a consequence of the changes.

Jamie Hepburn: Does Kezia Dugdale accept that any person who wants a face-to-face interview will get it?

Kezia Dugdale: I accept that, but I will come on to why that is misguided, in a second.

Face-to-face contact goes hand in hand with the website, which should not replace those services, but that is what is happening. Joan McAlpine said that the 35,000 people in the amber group are NEETs. I say gently to her that NEETs are, of course, people who are not in education, employment or training, so how can 35,000 school pupils be considered to be NEETs?

Joan McAlpine: I think that it was quite clear from what I said that those young people were identified as potentially becoming part of that group. That is clearly what it was about and that is why they have been targeted. I think that Kezia Dugdale has made a rather specious point.

Kezia Dugdale: I am sure that Joan McAlpine will go to the *Official Report* to check that and, perhaps, rectify it, following the debate.

The minister talked about the pioneering service that my world of work represents. I read in papers ahead of the debate that many people praise the service, including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank. I say to the minister that it is a shame that just 17 per cent of pupils know that it exists. The minister's response to my colleague Drew Smith was particularly misleading, because it is necessary to register on the website in order to access a number of the tools. I know that because I had to do it in order to see what tools are available on the website. So, I am afraid that what the minister said is just simply wrong, because 83 per cent of Drew Smith's constituents are missing out and 88 per cent of the kids in Edinburgh are missing out, which means that 14,975 pupils in Edinburgh alone are missing out as a consequence of the programme.

Mary Scanlon rightly pointed out that 93 per cent of staff whom SDS surveyed are unhappy with the new system. It was not unreasonable of her to expect the minister simply to listen to what the union is saying. We have a Tory spokesperson here asking the minister to listen to a trade union. Does the minister not understand that that is a simple ask? I hope that in her closing remarks she will reflect on that.

While we are on the topic of the Education and Culture Committee, I refer the minister to a point in the *Official Report* of the meeting of 27 November, which I am sure she read before she came to the chamber today. One of the committee's members asked SDS how much the my world of work website cost, and SDS said that it would write to the committee with the details. I checked with the committee clerks this morning and found that SDS had told them that they would get an update response before this debate started. However, I am afraid that such a response has not arrived with any of the committee's members, and I have not seen it, either. I think that it is unreasonable to be asked to debate a website without knowing simple things such as how much it cost the Government to produce. I hope that the minister will be able to provide some information on that at the end of the debate.

This is not, of course, the first time that I have complained to the minister about how difficult it is to extract information from SDS; it happened to me over apprenticeships and it happens to many of my colleagues every time they submit a freedom of information request. I asked the minister during a previous debate to address that issue, and I ask her again to look at the obfuscation and SDS's deliberate attempts to stop members of the Opposition having simple facts ahead of debates.

Neil Bibby perhaps put it best when he said that giving young people one-to-one advice allows them a decent chance of getting a job. It is not too much to ask, but asking for it is exactly what the Government wants young people to do.

An SDS official told the Education and Culture Committee:

"If a young person finds that they are struggling, they will come forward. They have done so in the past ... and there is nothing to stop them doing so now."—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee, 27 November 2012; c 1646.*]

How complacent. How arrogant. If we ask any teacher, youth worker or anybody else who has contact with young people, they will tell us that often the last thing a struggling young person will do is ask for help, and that serious interventions are needed to help them to move forward.

I believe that tomorrow marks the minister's first anniversary in her job. There has been little mention of that today, with no cake and no party—certainly not one that Neil Findlay and I have been invited to. I wonder whether that is because, after the minister's 12 months in the job and with £18 million spent, youth unemployment is higher than it was when she took up her post. Is that any surprise after what we have heard in this afternoon's debate—arrogance and complacency from a Government that is out of touch and ill-informed? Today, more than 100,000 young people in Scotland are unemployed, but the minister says, "Everything's fine. We've got a website for that."

16:50

Angela Constance: I very much enjoyed the speeches that were made this afternoon by members from across the chamber and across the political divide.

Let me start by making some remarks specifically to Ms Dugdale. All that I can say is, "Look at this face." Every one of my 42 years—and more—shows. I am the Minister for Youth Employment, the mother of one child, I have 64,000 constituents, and I just do not have time to participate in playground politics. Never in my life as an MSP, a minister in the Government or a social worker have I walked around pretending that everything in life is all right. I wonder whether the Labour Party would spend as much time as it spends challenging the Government—something that I am quite comfortable with—in challenging our UK Government counterparts and arguing for more constitutional and economic powers for this Parliament, which would really enable us to tackle youth unemployment.

I am proud that, in my first year, I have managed to secure an additional £80 million that will help 23,000 young folk towards and into work, but I have no illusions: there is much, much more to do. I have a vision of a Scotland that will learn from and match the best in Europe—countries such as Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, which, despite the global economic recession, have youth unemployment rates of less than 10 per cent. That is what we should be working towards.

As I said, I enjoyed the speeches from members from across the chamber—even some of the more idiosyncratic contributions. I was pleased to hear that Mary Scanlon was advised to be a social worker. I am told that Alasdair Allan was once advised to be an undertaker. [*Laughter.*]

However, in all seriousness, we are fortunate in Scotland to have professionally trained and qualified careers information, advice and guidance

staff. We know that, south of the border, they have removed the funding altogether and placed a statutory responsibility on schools. I want to maximise the impact that those professionals can have on young lives by fully utilising the skills that careers staff possess.

At the Education and Culture Committee, one of the witnesses commented that they did not expect careers services to change lives. I have to tell the Parliament that I and the Government are in the business of changing lives, and the expectation that we must all have of one another as politicians and of anybody who has contact with and influence over young lives—be they careers staff, teachers, social workers or youth workers—is that we are all in the business of raising hopes and aspirations.

What an opportunity exists for our talented, skilled and professional careers guidance staff to work more intensively with some of our most disadvantaged young people. Those staff have the opportunity to improve life chances and indeed to change lives. To me, the issue is one of equality of opportunity, and we need to provide more support to those young people in need.

Yes, we will retain a universal baseline service with which we will provide careers guidance to 130,000 young people. I repeat that we are not replacing face-to-face contact with a sole reliance on web-based facilities. We are working with young people; we will work with them differently and we will work with more young people and groups. We need to use technology to not replace people but extend our reach and modernise the way that they work.

It genuinely saddens me that we do not recognise that the need to provide the most vulnerable with more support is a way to prevent young people from becoming NEET statistics, which is the point that Joan McAlpine made this afternoon.

The red, amber, green methodology is a framework for identifying and managing risk. As I am a former social worker who has worked with risky people and risky situations day in, day out, I know that no risk management tool ever replaces professional judgment. In SDS, ultimately I expect good professional judgment and common sense to prevail. However, we need a framework to work within, to try to prevent young people from slipping through the net and to ensure that no one is left behind.

In his opening remarks, Neil Findlay spoke of the need for evidence and I was glad that Ms Dugdale spoke of the evidence from the OECD in 2004. We have had evidence from the European Commission and the World Bank, and indeed the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, which

has commissioners who are prominent trade members. The UKCES supports our direction of travel, as does the Smith group, which Joan McAlpine mentioned.

Neil Findlay: Surely the most important evidence is from the people who are delivering the front-line services to the young people that need them.

Angela Constance: Absolutely. I appreciate any evidence that people have the courtesy to bring me—I have not seen it in full. I assure Neil Findlay that if he brings the evidence to me, it will have my full, undivided attention.

Drew Smith: Will the minister give way?

Angela Constance: Not just now. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Mr Smith—

Angela Constance: I am running out of time. I want to be helpful to members and make progress.

Let me emphasise that we continue to have more than 40 contact centres. We have a slight increase in full-time equivalent staff in schools and we will use technology not to replace people but enhance their reach.

If people are concerned about registration, as I am, I suggest that we work together to increase registration the length and breadth of Scotland.

Liz Smith: Will the minister give way?

Angela Constance: I am just coming to the Conservative Party amendment. I will accept the Conservative Party amendment because, quite simply, it chimes with what young people are telling me. They want information and advice at an early stage, before they make their subject choices.

There are huge opportunities to integrate career management skills earlier, even as early as in primary school. We have huge opportunities to prepare our young people for the world of work better than ever before on the platform of curriculum for excellence.

Iain Gray touched on an important point about gender stereotyping and occupational segregation, which are indeed alive and well and with us today. The previous system of careers guidance did not help to tackle or change that. I do not claim to have a monopoly on wisdom or how we ensure equality of opportunity for all our young women, but we will work together. We have had the first ever women's employment summit and we have introduced the careerwise initiative. Our focus—particularly in public sector reform—must be on tackling inequalities through early intervention and prevention.

I appreciated Liam McArthur's more reasoned and balanced comments and I assure the chamber that we will take on constructive remarks. I will undertake to reply to every member who contributed to the debate to reassure them and respond to their particular issues.

In the time that I have left, I want to make some remarks from a personal perspective and make a pledge to Parliament. I personally, politically and professionally believe that modernisation of the careers service is the right thing to do and I—I hope—have the humility and common sense to recognise and acknowledge that all change is difficult. No one, including me, has a monopoly of wisdom on how best to navigate our way through that change.

I assure the Parliament that where there are issues of concern—and I have listened to them carefully this afternoon—I and this Government will indeed work in the interests of our children and young people to resolve any difficulties. I also make a pledge to this Parliament that I and this Government will have the tenacity to see that work through, because it is in the best interests of our young people that we equip them with the skills to cope with the many career changes that they are likely to make and not just to survive but to thrive in this world. Our economy and the future of our country depend on it.

Points of Order

17:00

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Further to my question at First Minister's question time, I have since been told that three 24-hour strikes have been set for the Serco NorthLink Northern Isles routes for 14, 21 and 28 December. Can you advise me whether the Scottish Government will be provided with an early opportunity to update Parliament on the steps that ministers and others are taking to help resolve this potentially damaging dispute?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Ministers have not so far indicated to me that they wish to make such a statement. However, the Parliamentary Bureau meets on Tuesday. I am sure that your business manager has paid attention to what you have said and that ministers, too, have heard your remarks. I am quite sure that we will have a discussion on just that issue on Tuesday.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I make this point of order with reference to rule 1.6 of standing orders, on the "Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament".

At First Minister's question time, Johann Lamont made comments to the First Minister in respect of the case of a Mr Morrison, his inability to access cancer drugs under the current Scottish Medicines Consortium regime and the fact that he has been charged an administrative cost for the drugs he has purchased privately. I immediately recognised that the person referred to is my constituent and that this is a live case that I am dealing with, having met Mr Morrison and his wife. I am in correspondence with NHS Borders and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing on behalf of Mr Morrison, and indeed I raised the issue of VAT and administrative charges at topical question time a week or so ago.

Section 8.1.2 of the code of conduct states:

"A constituent can approach any of the MSPs (whether a constituency MSP or one of the seven regional MSPs as the case may be) elected to represent them as all MSPs have equal formal and legal status." [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Christine Grahame: Section 8.1.3 says:

"In the event that a member is made aware that a constituent's case is already being pursued by a constituency MSP or regional MSP, it is recommended that the member notifies that MSP. Whilst this is not a requirement of the Code of Conduct, adopting such an approach should avoid any duplication of case work or

MSPs working at cross purposes thereby damaging a constituent's case. Notification between members should only take place with the explicit consent of the constituent." [Interruption.]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Christine Grahame: Section 8.1.4 says:

"An MSP must not deal with a matter relating to a constituency case or constituency issue outwith the member's constituency or region (as the case may be) unless by prior agreement."

Presiding Officer, I seek your guidance. Ms Lamont is not a member for South Scotland; she did not seek my "prior agreement"; and neither she nor any of the regional Labour MSPs for South Scotland who might or might not have drawn her attention to this case have made any contact with me regarding this matter. Is it appropriate that she appears to be pursuing the case of Mr Morrison, who, I should add, is blameless in this matter? Indeed, whose "prior agreement" has to be sought?

The Presiding Officer: I thank the member for notice of this point of order. I have been able to consider the matter briefly this afternoon.

The matters raised by Christine Grahame are, as she has said, more appropriately raised under the code of conduct rather than as a point of order. Under volume 2, section 9 of the code of conduct, the member should write to me raising these issues, and I will consider them.

Decision Time

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-05109.2, in the name of Neil Findlay, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05109, in the name of Angela Constance, on the modernisation of Scotland's careers services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

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)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 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)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

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

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-05109.1, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S4M-05109, in the name of Angela Constance, on the modernisation of Scotland's careers services, 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, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)

Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Against

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 78, Against 33, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-05109, in the name of Angela Constance, on the modernisation of Scotland's careers services, 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, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)

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

Against

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

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 76, Against 33, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the modernisation of Scotland's career services is vital to economic recovery in Scotland and to improving people's ability to manage their careers throughout their lives; agrees that Skills Development Scotland's service modernisation is in line with the Scottish Government's careers strategy, published in March 2011, which focuses on offering a modern service for all Scotland's people, making use of the latest technology, training and labour market information to ensure that individuals get the support that they need to enable them to succeed in their careers; also agrees that this supports delivery of Opportunities for All and plays a key role in ensuring that Scotland's young people make a successful transition from education into the world of work; further agrees that the Scottish Government's commitment to continue working with a wide range of partners, including employers and individuals, will help to achieve its shared ambitions for young people across Scotland in the short, medium and long term, and recommends that the most significant progress is likely to be made if there is more personalised careers guidance available to all pupils in the

early years of secondary school that is in line with the main principles of the curriculum for excellence and actively involves other partners such as local businesses, colleges and universities.

The Presiding Officer: Before I close the meeting, I want to say a few words about John Park. As members know, he has tendered his resignation from the Parliament. As a fellow Fifer and a member of Parliament who has represented Mid Scotland and Fife, I will personally miss him in the chamber. I will miss him for the work that he has done on Scotland's Futures Forum, too.

John Park has been a very fine parliamentarian, who is well liked across the chamber. He has such a great deal of experience in the trade union movement and the campaigns for working people. He is a great loss to the Parliament. I wish him well—and I know that members will wish him well—for whatever he does in the future. *[Applause.]*

Meeting closed at 17:08.

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