



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 8 January 2013

Session 4

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.scottish.parliament.uk or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Tuesday 8 January 2013

CONTENTS

	Col.
TIME FOR REFLECTION	15123
TOPICAL QUESTION TIME	15125
Accident and Emergency Units (Increased Demand)	15125
Flooding (Assistance for Victims)	15128
EMPLOYABILITY	15133
<i>Motion moved—[Kenneth Gibson].</i>	
Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)	15133
The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney)	15139
Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab)	15143
Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con)	15145
Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)	15148
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)	15149
Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)	15152
Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)	15154
John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)	15156
Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP)	15159
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	15161
Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)	15164
Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)	15166
Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)	15168
Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab)	15171
Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP)	15172
Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)	15174
Gavin Brown	15176
Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)	15178
John Swinney	15181
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)	15184
DECISION TIME	15189
ADDICTION	15190
<i>Motion debated—[Kenneth Gibson].</i>	
Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)	15190
Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)	15193
James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)	15195
The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson)	15197

Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 8 January 2013

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

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

Good afternoon, everyone. A happy new year to you all. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Ian Miller, retired minister of Bonhill parish church, Alexandria. The Rev Miller is also a freeman of West Dunbartonshire.

The Rev Ian Miller (Retired Minister, Bonhill Parish Church, Alexandria, and Freeman of West Dunbartonshire): A good new year to you all, Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament.

When Charles Kettering of General Motors wanted a problem solved, he would call a meeting and say, "Leave your slide rules outside." If he did not, during the meeting, someone would surely say, "Boss, you can't do that." Is that not true no matter what we try to do in life? There is always someone saying, "You can't do that." I suspect that, as politicians, you know that more than most.

Robert Fulghum tells the story of a primary school that decided to stage the story of Cinderella. All the girls wanted to be Cinderella. Finally, all the pupils got a part except one wee lad. His name was Norman. The teacher asked, "Norman, what are you going to be?" Norman said, "I think I will be the pig." The teacher said, "Norman, there is no pig in the story of Cinderella." Norman said, "Well, there is now."

The teacher could tell that it would be daft to argue with Norman, so she left it to him to decide what part the pig would play. As it turned out, the pig went everywhere that Cinderella went and did everything that Cinderella did. Norman had nothing to say, but his face reflected what was going on. When things were serious, he was serious. When things were happy, he was happy. When things looked difficult, he looked worried. He began to fill the stage with his presence.

At the end of it all, when the princess was carried off by her prince to live happily ever after, Norman stood up on his hind legs and barked. In rehearsals, that had been a problem because the teacher said, "Look, Norman, even if there is a pig in the story of Cinderella, pigs do not bark," and Norman said, "Well, this one does."

You can imagine what happened on the night of the first performance: at the end there was a standing ovation for the pig.

Word got round. People called up the school and asked, "What is so special about this play?" The teacher said, "Well, there is a pig in it—actually, a barking pig." The person at the other end of the telephone would say, "But there is no barking pig in Cinderella," and the teacher would say, "Well, there is now."

Norman was a wee fellow who would not let other people set boundaries. He was going to be what he was going to be. Without risk takers, the world would not move forward. No new relationships would be formed. No new businesses would be started. No new homes would be built. There would be no new initiatives and, almost certainly, nobody would ever want to be a politician. Helen Keller surely got it right when she said:

"Life is either a daring adventure or nothing."

God bless you in whatever risks you may have to take—in government or in opposition—for the good of our country in 2013.

Topical Question Time

14:03

Accident and Emergency Units (Increased Demand)

1. Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that national health service accident and emergency units are able to cope with increased demand on their services during the winter. (S4T-00192)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Alex Neil): Presiding Officer, I wish you, the chief executive and all your staff a happy new year for 2013. I also wish every other member of the Parliament a happy new year.

NHS Scotland "Preparing for Winter" guidance was circulated to NHS board chief executives and partner organisations on 16 October 2012. The guidance was developed in consultation with NHS Scotland and focuses on helping NHS boards to make efficient use of capacity and to optimise patient flow from point of admission through to point of discharge.

As part of their winter planning arrangements, NHS boards have also been asked to ensure that they have effective preparations and outbreak control measures in place for norovirus and seasonal flu, and to consider resilience and business continuity factors such as mutual aid arrangements relating to staff, vehicles, service support and other resources. NHS boards have been given an extra £3 million to help to manage winter pressures and to ensure that patients are not delayed in hospital, and they will use the extra money to make sure that people can be discharged from hospital as soon as they are ready. Those measures are over and above what NHS boards have already put in place.

Jim Hume: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response and wish him and all others a happy new year.

Little more than a month since that £3 million in winter surge capacity funding was promised in order to, in the cabinet secretary's words,

"make sure the winter runs smoothly",

we are reading in the media alarming reports from consultants that accident and emergency units are so overstretched that some patients are waiting up to 12 hours to be assessed. The additional funding has clearly failed. With the national four-hour target likely to be under threat for January, does the cabinet secretary agree that more must be done to ensure the timely treatment of patients with the dignity and respect that they deserve?

Alex Neil: As Dr Jason Long, who was quoted in that article, said, the Scottish Government is working and has been working with the College of Emergency Medicine to make sure that any problems are quickly addressed. There is no doubt that an upturn in seasonal flu and norovirus incidence has had various knock-on impacts in certain hospitals. For example, as it stands today, 14 wards are closed in eight hospitals across Scotland because of norovirus. Inevitably, that has some knock-on impact, but we are managing that effectively. In a number of health board areas additional bed capacity has been brought in to deal with the situation.

Jim Hume: Dr Long also said:

"The capacity isn't there at the moment."

Before the Christmas recess, the publication of their waiting times audits revealed that in certain health boards a culture exists of pressure on staff who are battling to achieve national targets. Despite the additional funding, the constraints on staff are so severe that as few as 62 per cent of patients at some hospitals were treated within four hours over the festive period, with some patients being forced to wait almost half a day in their hospital ward before treatment. I think that we would all agree that that is unacceptable.

The cabinet secretary must get a tighter grip on the situation, and quickly. Why did the additional funding not have an impact on A and E waiting times? Will the cabinet secretary confirm this afternoon that he will host an urgent meeting with his officials and health board chief executives to ascertain what solutions are available to him and what additional emergency funding may be available to tackle this crisis?

Alex Neil: We should make a distinction between two issues: number 1 is the NHS's on-going business; and second are the particular pressures that arise over the holiday period. Indeed, unusually, instances of the norovirus bug started in October this year, which is much earlier than normal.

There is no doubt that in recent weeks the NHS has been dealing with a very challenging situation because of the combination of a huge incidence of norovirus and an increased incidence of seasonal flu. For example, the seasonal flu figure last year was something like nine people per 100,000. This year it is something like 37 people per 100,000, which is a quadrupling of the incidence of flu that the NHS is dealing with.

We should not paint the kind of picture that Mr Hume is trying to paint. I certainly do not recognise the 62 per cent figure in relation to any health board or hospital in Scotland.

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary tell me how the Government works with NHS boards in monitoring and co-ordinating responses to mitigate the impact of the sort of event that we saw with the earlier-than-anticipated spike in the incidence of norovirus and seasonal flu?

Alex Neil: We are dealing very effectively with the 14 territorial health boards, and Health Protection Scotland and the directors of public health are, of course, heavily involved in looking at what we can do to prevent incidents from happening and ensuring that we are prepared in each area. We are also working with general practitioners throughout Scotland. Indeed, in recent days, we have been in touch with nearly 1,000 GPs throughout Scotland so that we have a clear handle on the incidence of norovirus in the community as well as the likely impact on the acute, secondary sector. As I have said, we are working very closely with the College of Emergency Medicine on the short-term and medium-term challenges that the national health service faces.

I should point out that there are measures that people themselves can take. For example, a very high percentage of accident and emergency admissions are alcohol related. If people took more responsibility for their own behaviour, that would certainly reduce the pressure on A and E departments throughout the country.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I draw the cabinet secretary's attention to the fact that, in September 2012—that is, before the winter season really got under way—only two out of 11 mainland health boards met the 98 per cent A and E target, and to the fact that, since September 2010, the 98 per cent target has been met only once on the Scottish average.

My colleague Jim Hume raised the issue of capacity. This is not just about the winter situation or the norovirus; it is about the capacity in the system. Will the cabinet secretary join me in paying tribute to accident and emergency staff for their extremely hard work in endeavouring to meet the targets? Will he also respond to Mr Hume's question and say whether he will urgently hold a further meeting with the College of Emergency Medicine to try to determine what capacity is necessary so that the target can be met on a regular basis?

Alex Neil: I am absolutely delighted to join Dr Richard Simpson in paying tribute not only to the tremendous work that is done in accident and emergency departments, but to the work that is done by many other services throughout the national health service, particularly during the challenging period over the festive season. On 2 January, I visited NHS 24 in Glasgow and saw the

tremendous work that it is doing and the huge increase in contacts that it has had, particularly as a result of the norovirus and the increase in the incidence of seasonal flu.

On the capacity issues, I am working with the College of Emergency Medicine on an on-going basis. Indeed, we work jointly and have joint meetings on a regular basis precisely to deal with the point about ensuring that we meet the 98 per cent target in relation to people waiting for less than four hours for accident and emergency treatment throughout Scotland. We believe that we are putting in place the necessary measures to ensure that that is achievable. That is in addition to all the other work that is going on—for example, with the Royal College of Physicians on developing a strategy to eliminate boarding in the national health service, which was announced just before Christmas. A great deal of work is therefore going on with the medical profession and others, including allied health workers, nurses and midwives, to ensure that we achieve the targets in 2013.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): For many years, the intention of policy has been to reduce the number of emergency admissions by developing services in the community. Has the Government carried out any assessment of why that has not happened? Are there any plans to ensure that it will happen in the future?

Alex Neil: Until the recent surge, there was a sign of an overall reduction in A and E admissions, and particularly in board areas. However, Malcolm Chisholm raises a fair and valid point. My view is that tackling unscheduled admissions, which make up 70 per cent of all admissions into hospitals in Scotland, must be a high priority. Some of those admissions are preventable. As I have already mentioned, those that involve alcohol are certainly preventable if people behave responsibly.

Malcolm Chisholm is absolutely right. We need to do much more to prevent unnecessary admissions to accident and emergency departments or other forms of unscheduled care in the acute sector.

Flooding (Assistance for Victims)

2. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what assistance it is providing to the victims of recent flooding in Stonehaven and other areas. (S4T-00188)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): First, I take this opportunity to express my and the Scottish Government's sincere sympathies to all those affected by the recent storms and flooding. It was

particularly traumatic for that to happen at such a key time of the year. I record my thanks to local authority staff and emergency responders, who did their best to mitigate the impacts and provide support to those affected.

On Christmas eve, I visited Stonehaven and Brechin and saw at first hand the devastation and distress caused by the flooding. I reiterate what I said on my visit, which is that the Scottish Government has given a strong commitment to work with the local authorities whose communities have been affected to support them in any way that we can. Specifically, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth has committed to consider all eligible expenditure under the terms of the Bellwin scheme when formal claims are received from the council. I heard that, in the light of the circumstances of the most recent event, Aberdeenshire Council will revisit the specification for its proposed flood scheme on the Carron.

During my visit, I was hugely impressed to see the generosity and community spirit demonstrated by the people of Stonehaven. The flood victims also received valuable support from the Scottish flood forum, which of course receives funding from the Scottish Government.

Alex Johnstone: I thank the minister for his reply and associate myself with his remarks in relation to those who have been heavily involved in the charitable effort by raising money and giving time. However, my concern is that raising money takes time but need is immediate. Has the minister any provision available to ensure that no one in need of direct assistance will have to wait for the money to be raised locally?

Paul Wheelhouse: The member is right to indicate that the Bellwin scheme and other forms of funding, including the money that has been raised locally, will take some time to be distributed. Indeed, I am aware that some work is going on with the Scottish flood forum and the Stonehaven flood fund to develop legal advice so that those involved understand the parameters within which donations can be administered to local people. I think that the SFF has indicated that its immediate priority is to use the fund to dry the properties of those without flood insurance.

I encourage the member and other members with a constituency interest in this regard, such as Nigel Don, to encourage communities to apply for crisis loans through the Department for Work and Pensions, which is another means by which people can access funds to help with the cost of disasters.

Alex Johnstone: I thank the minister for that answer. Moving on, while not forgetting the needs of those who were the victims of the high tide on

Saturday 15 December, I want to look specifically at the incident of the morning of Sunday 23 December, which was almost a carbon copy of one that occurred just over three years before. Will the minister give an undertaking at this stage to work closely with the local authorities and other interested agencies to ensure that action can be taken in a shorter timescale than the one that appears to be in action at the moment and that, if there is a recurrence of the bad weather conditions, we can avoid the same flooding incident happening for a third time?

Paul Wheelhouse: I certainly sympathise with the sentiment of what Alex Johnstone is saying. Clearly, there is an imperative under the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 for the local authority to identify a scheme for flood prevention in Stonehaven and to deliver the detail of that to the Scottish Government for a joint decision by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and me, as minister, on its administration.

As I understand it from my visit, the problem is that the recent flood is a quite different type of flood from the previous one, although that point may be subject to revised information that the member may be aware of. The recent flood's severity was similar—in fact, it was slightly worse than what happened in 2009—but circumstances suggest that it was slightly different in its origin from the flood of 2009. I understand that, once the council has a fuller understanding of how the floods occurred on this occasion, it will revise its proposals to ensure that they take into account exactly what happened, so that any proposals that it submits to the Government for consideration do not miss the opportunity to prevent a similar flood from happening in the future.

I support what the member says about seeking to ensure that the community of Stonehaven avoids being affected by a similar flood again. I will do everything that I can to ensure that we do not prevent any fast consideration of the council's proposals. However, unfortunately, we do require Aberdeenshire Council to come forward with its plans before we can consider them.

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I want to pick up on a couple of issues. First, the minister is well aware of the flooding. He came to see it, for which I thank him. Quite a number of the houses that were flooded are, in effect, uninsured because they have become uninsurable. It is not a question of people not wanting to insure their houses; they cannot get the insurance. Can the Government do anything to help people in the future who simply cannot get commercial insurance in such circumstances?

Paul Wheelhouse: Nigel Don is quite correct. I understand from the information that the Scottish

flood forum has provided that approximately 10 per cent of those affected by the Stonehaven flood do not have flood cover. Early indications are that 3 to 4 per cent have no contents insurance, 6 per cent have no flood cover at all, and 2 to 3 per cent face flood excesses of between £2,000 and £10,000. Clearly, there are significant issues to address.

On how we can help those individuals, I stated earlier—as I have on previous occasions—that I will meet the Association of British Insurers shortly to discuss the information requirements to inform the identification of flood premiums and, indeed, the excesses that are charged to businesses. It is important that we ensure that all the available information on planned and available flood defences is taken into account when insurers determine their premiums. I hope that we can work with the ABI to ensure that individuals who are suffering as a result of situations such as the one that occurred in Stonehaven have affordable insurance in place.

Nigel Don: I am grateful that the minister visited Brechin. Frankly, Brechin got away by the skin of its teeth. The minister is aware of the proposed scheme there, and I seek his assurances that that will be progressed through his officials as quickly as possible.

Paul Wheelhouse: I assure Nigel Don that I will encourage my officials to deal with it as speedily as possible.

Annabelle Ewing (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I want to pick up on the important issue of insurance that arises post-flooding following events such as the one in Comrie in my constituency. The insurance company, at the time of renewal, will say that it does not have clear information about what remedial action the specific local authority is taking. Will the minister undertake to discuss the matter with Perth and Kinross Council and, indeed, other affected council areas, to seek that they proactively communicate with the insurance sector what they are doing to reduce the risk that flood cover will be withdrawn?

Paul Wheelhouse: The Scottish Environment Protection Agency has recently written to all local authorities seeking their permission to share the data that it provides to the Scottish flood defence asset database with wider professionals involved in flood risk management and allied services such as the insurance industry. It would do no harm whatsoever for councils to be open about their future plans with the ABI and, where necessary, individual insurers, to inform them of the progress that Annabelle Ewing has quite rightly identified and to improve the availability and cost of insurance to the community. Without that information, it is entirely reasonable that insurance companies would assess the area as having a

continued level of high risk. Once the proposals are known and are being implemented, it is important that local authorities and all those involved share that information so that people do not face unreasonable premium levels when insuring their properties. As I say, I have a meeting planned with the ABI, which will happen in a matter of weeks, and I guarantee to Annabelle Ewing that I will raise the issue with it.

Employability

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-05276, in the name of Kenneth Gibson, on the Finance Committee's report "Improving employability".

14:23

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North)

(SNP): On behalf of the Finance Committee, I am pleased to open this debate on improving employability. This is the second of three consecutive debates that I will open—these things come along like buses.

I thank fellow committee members, past and present, for their contributions throughout the inquiry; the clerks; all the witnesses from whom we took evidence; and the participants in our workshops, who provided informed and wide-ranging contributions.

The committee recognises the vital importance of improving employability, particularly for those on the margins of regular employment. A period of unemployment creates loss of income for individuals, impacts adversely on families and has a direct effect on Government through a loss of tax revenues and increased benefit payments.

Research cited in our report has shown that at current levels youth unemployment will incur future costs of £2.9 billion per annum for the Exchequer and £6.3 billion in lost economic output. In Scotland, that equates to £0.2 billion and £0.5 billion respectively.

In 2011, 12.2 per cent of 16 to 19-year-olds were not in employment, education or training. Scottish Government figures show that the figure ranged between 29,000 and 36,000 between 2004 and 2011, which indicates that the problem did not begin with the financial crash.

The committee focused on how public spending is and should be directed to improve the employability of and create sustainable employment for the people who are furthest from the labour market. Our attention was particularly although not exclusively drawn to people between 16 and 24, given the high level of unemployment in that age group.

In assessing the efficacy of initiatives that are intended to improve employability, several witnesses expressed the view that some programmes elude the reach of some disadvantaged individuals. Service users, third sector organisations and businesses said that the problem is exacerbated by the complexity of the skills and employment initiatives landscape. We recognise that the problem stems partly from the

fact that various layers of government are involved in supporting employability initiatives.

It is important that access to initiatives is clear and understood. A number of witnesses said that one-to-one support is crucial in assisting into work people who are furthest from employment. The committee welcomes Skills Development Scotland's introduction of work coaching and seeks assurances that the programme will be properly funded, available to all who require it, and monitored and evaluated, to ensure that it meets the needs of the people at whom it is targeted.

An issue that emerged among employers and prospective employers is the barriers that people in rural communities face. Such barriers include inadequate access to public transport, particularly for people who work unsociable hours, and the sometimes prohibitive cost of transport. Minerva People said in its submission:

"In rural areas with mainly Micro/SME businesses, it is difficult finding employers willing to take young people on as some of the work is seasonal, transport difficulties arise if working unusual hours eg—hospitality and releasing staff for training."

Highlands and Islands Enterprise said:

"The issue of small and microbusinesses is even more acute in rural areas, and some of those areas are challenged by underemployment. People might be employed, but the employment might not be using their skills fully. People in rural areas often have two or three part-time jobs to make up a full-time job."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 23 May 2012; c 1231.]

Annual funding is another concern, which members and the Government will recall the Finance Committee raising in relation to its work on preventative spend. The committee was impressed by the efforts of third sector organisations, which provide vital training and employability support to disadvantaged individuals. However, the reliance on annual funding creates insecurity and uncertainty about the services that such organisations can provide over the medium term. Barnardo's Scotland said:

"there are complex funding arrangements for employability services. It is difficult for third sector organisations to develop, sustain and strategically build services and employability when there is no guarantee of funding beyond 12 months."

A lot of creativity is involved in making funding work, but if we want strategic progress, we need better funding arrangements for services that are shown to work."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 16 May 2012; c 1185.]

The issue was also raised during our external workshops. We therefore welcome the Scottish Government's steps to encourage public sector bodies to provide funding to third sector organisations over three years and we invite ministers to consider further implementation of three-year funding, where possible.

The committee sought to understand how successful interventions support disadvantaged people into sustainable employment. A key message was the need to invest time and resources in people. The International Labour Organization told the committee:

"It is necessary to keep in mind that people's needs and learning styles are very different, depending on their disadvantage ... The package of services changes slightly, but the important thing is the training part of it and how to focus it on the needs of disadvantaged people without seeing them as a homogenous group."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 26 September 2012; c 1602.]

Who Cares? Scotland said:

"employability cannot be viewed in isolation for those young people, the most vulnerable of whom are looked-after young people and care leavers, because they require a package of support. There must be consideration of transitions and whatever else is going on in their lives to ensure that they can engage with whatever courses or opportunities we put out there.

For us, the solution is not to fit the young person to the programme but to fit the programme to the young person."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 16 May 2012; c 1157.]

In keeping with the recommendations of the Christie commission on the future delivery of public services, we noted the importance of ensuring that national and local strategies provide for a co-ordinated, joined-up approach, while reflecting the need to assist individuals into work. The committee welcomes the Scottish Government's continuing emphasis on improving co-ordination through local employability partnerships, including the co-location of services, and we welcome the Government's commitment to a person-centred approach. Nevertheless, as those furthest from the labour market are not a homogenous group, those providing support should also consider needs such as an individual's health, their housing situation and the family and community environment in which they live.

The committee was less clear about the extent to which the individuals who are most in need of such targeted, multi-faceted, seamless and continuous support receive it in practice. We concluded that further steps should be taken to ensure that vulnerable individuals do not simply fall through the net.

I referred earlier to annual funding. I want to talk more about that and about the need for long-term investment. As witnesses pointed out,

"targeted programmes providing a package of support will inevitably cost money".

Such an approach would provide more support than standard learners would receive, albeit that it would be more expensive.

Scotland's Colleges said that

"The challenge is that the funding methodologies exist to support the average learner. We reckon that the cost of the support that we are discussing is roughly double the cost for a normal learner. That includes staffing and the additional support that is needed."

Who Cares? Scotland agreed that

"a bigger investment is required",

while a representative of Social Enterprise Scotland noted:

"Regrettably, such programmes are expensive"

but added:

"We have to get the right resources: I emphasise that the programme should fit the individual rather than the individual being made to fit the programme."

The Scottish Trades Union Congress emphasised that the United Kingdom

"spends much less on this area than the best-functioning labour markets in the world do"

and that

"Successful economies invest heavily over a period of time in the type of active labour market interventions that we are talking about."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 16 May 2012; c 1159, 1165, 1162, 1170.]

The committee notes that the cost of supporting individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds into employment is likely to be higher than for the average learner—the cost is potentially double. However, the economic costs of inaction—the costs to the public purse, the wider economy, society and the individual—may be far greater. The committee concludes that it is crucial to consider the long-term impact of ineffective interventions as well as effective ones.

Specific, targeted funding, distinct from funding for mainstream employment and employability initiatives, is necessary to support such individuals. That may require a pooling of resources from other portfolio areas, which the committee believes the Scottish Government should facilitate.

We recognise that resources are finite, particularly at this time, but that makes it even more crucial that labour market initiatives, including employability and skills programmes, demonstrate value for money.

Many labour market initiatives are measured by their success in assisting individuals to reach a positive destination such as education, training or employment. However, that can lead to the perception that reaching one or other of those targets is an end to the process in itself, rather than ensuring that the individual ultimately finds and remains in sustainable employment. Only by measuring that can we be satisfied that such programmes and initiatives are effective.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I could not agree with the member more. Does he think that the Government should produce sustainable outcome statistics alongside its positive destination statistics so that the difference can be looked at?

Kenneth Gibson: I have no argument with that. If we are to track the success of the initiatives that we are implementing, the more information that we have, the better.

The Scottish local authorities economic development group said:

“Quality, sustainable employment should be the outcome of all skills and employment measures, so we need to work back from wherever a young person starts on the journey and be more realistic about funding it. If a young person spends three weeks on this, four weeks on that and 13 weeks on something else, they will not build towards sustainable, quality employment.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 16 May 2012; c 1183.]

The need to engage the private sector more was a topic that participants from the business community and the third sector commented on at committee meetings and at our employability workshops. We sought to understand how the public sector works with businesses on employability and skills initiatives and programmes and how public money is directed to support that.

Comments were made about the range of initiatives and services that are available from different providers, which may be difficult to navigate for those at whom they are targeted. SMEs face particular challenges. In its written submission to the committee, Skills Development Scotland pointed out that there is a real issue for employers in knowing what is available, how they can access it and when changes have been made. For example, an employer might think that a recruitment incentive is suitable for them but when they apply for it they find that it has been withdrawn for whatever reason.

The Federation of Small Businesses said in its written submission:

“Small businesses are wary of national schemes as they suspect them of being overly bureaucratic, involving a high administrative burden, requiring significant compromise and cost for the business.”

The committee welcomes the steps that are being taken by the Scottish Government to provide clarity of information to employers on such schemes. We also seek confirmation that regular evaluation and monitoring are carried out.

We welcome the Scottish Government's £15 million funding for SMEs to support the creation of 10,000 job opportunities, although we seek clarity on how that incentive will work in practice and on what criteria will be used for selection of SMEs, as

well as on issues around age eligibility and evaluation.

The private sector made clear the importance of consulting and engaging business nationally and locally when designing employability and labour market initiatives. Often, employers are approached only after initiatives have been designed, resulting in some initiatives not addressing their requirements. That disconnect could mean that initiatives may not help either the employers or the job seekers whom they are intended to support. The FSB believed that too much emphasis is placed on financial rewards for companies recruiting additional staff when they should be focused on getting the right person for a particular job. In its written submission, it referred to the then employer incentive initiative and stated, in relation to evaluation:

“While we support the principle of investment to engage employers, we are not aware of any evaluation of these initiatives' effectiveness—how much of an incentive do they really provide?”

The committee took evidence from Lord Smith on the Smith group's recommendations on youth employment. One of its recommendations was that the Scottish Government

“should ensure that a strategy is in place that clearly defines expectations of and outcomes for local authorities in employer engagement. This would allow consistency in delivery across 32 local authorities. We feel strongly that the starting point for the strategy should first reflect the imperatives of the young person and employer, followed by local authorities and training providers.”

Having discussed the private sector, I will briefly mention the public sector's role in providing employment opportunities to those who are furthest from the labour market. Who Cares? Scotland said:

“the fact is that the public sector, which includes the national health service and local authorities, is this country's biggest employer and I believe that we should look at ourselves and the things we control, because we can do quite a lot in our own system to create opportunities for vulnerable young people.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 16 May 2012; c 1178.]

Skills Development Scotland referred to a programme of work with the public sector on taking on more trainees. It said:

“The Scottish Government, for example, has engaged with the get ready for work programme and the NHS is desperately keen to be involved in modern apprenticeships. However, there are balances to be struck and, at a time when the public sector is looking to slim down, taking on new staff will be a challenge. Of course, the public sector can address this issue not only in its recruitment practices but in its procurement practices, with contracts that promote opportunities for young people.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 30 May 2012; c 1269.]

During the course of our inquiry, we wrote to all local authorities and national health service boards seeking information on the steps that they were

taking to offer employment opportunities to disadvantaged people. The responses varied substantially. We recognise that the public sector is absorbing budgetary and workforce reductions. However, we recommend that each local authority and NHS board report to the Scottish Government regularly on the actions that it is taking to offer employment opportunities to those who are furthest from the labour market.

I stated at the outset that the committee recognises that improving employability is vital, not only because of the benefits that can be provided to those who are furthest from the labour market, but because of the need to minimise the detrimental impact on sustainable economic growth, the public purse, individuals and communities. The committee is clear in its approval of several of the steps that have already been taken with that goal in mind, although there is a need for on-going evaluation to ensure their continuing efficacy. We are also clear on a number of recommendations that relate to the actions that are necessary to further address the barriers that are faced both by disadvantaged individuals and by the employers who we hope will offer them employment opportunities.

I wish everyone the best in 2013, and I move,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations in the Finance Committee's 8th Report, 2012 (Session 4): Improving employability (SP Paper 226).

14:38

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth (John Swinney): I thank the members of the Finance Committee and those who contributed to the inquiry for the detailed consideration that has been given to the issue of improving employability. It is an issue that resonates with the Government's agenda. Focus on the subject is essential as we move towards economic recovery and the delivery of a more prosperous future for all the people of Scotland. In the coming weeks, the Government will consider carefully the recommendations that the committee made at the end of its inquiry and will respond formally in the normal way. I will reflect on some of the key issues in the committee's report and on the Scottish Government's position on some of those issues.

I begin with an important point on which the convener concentrated in his speech. I should say at the outset that, in principle, the Government finds the committee's report a helpful contribution to the development of the issue. That is why I want to ensure that we take all possible care in responding fully and adequately to the committee's conclusions. The convener made the important point—which should be reiterated, as the public sector is often not good at focusing on

it—that the programmes that are available should be designed not to ensure that people contribute whether they are prepared to contribute or not, but to fit the needs of the individuals concerned. That is what I referred to in my evidence to the committee's inquiry as a person-centred approach, in which we take into account the different circumstances and requirements of any individual who requires some support in relation to employability. For some individuals, the support will be relatively modest. For others, it may be particularly complex and, although it may not readily relate to an employability programme, it will be an essential building block in ensuring that that individual can realise their full potential and contribute to the labour market.

I accept entirely the convener's strategic point, which is that we should not operate on the basis that young people—or any individual—must fit a programme. The programmes, and our approach, must be designed to meet the needs of the individuals concerned and therefore to fulfil the Government's intention to take a person-centred approach.

Kezia Dugdale: Like the cabinet secretary, I support a person-centred approach. However, I struggle to see how that fits with the my world of work website that the Minister for Youth Employment introduced in December, which is a generic website for all young people. How can a website be person centred?

John Swinney: The beauty of the website is that it provides young people with an information resource that enables them to make their own judgments. To me, that is a person-centred approach. It presents, as readily as possible, all the information about work experience, about the practice of getting into employment and about college and areas of employment to enable young people to make decisions for themselves. I cannot understand how that can be in conflict with a person-centred approach. Surely a person-centred approach must reflect the needs and aspirations of every individual. The duty of the my world of work website, the Government and Skills Development Scotland is to present that information in a readily accessible fashion.

Kezia Dugdale: If the cabinet secretary did not understand the point the first time around, let me have another go. The website replaces one-to-one careers advice. It is a money-saving exercise. It is not designed to improve the support that is given to young people.

John Swinney: I do not think that it is me who misunderstands anything; I think that it is Ms Dugdale, who is deliberately trying to talk down what the Government is doing in this area. How on earth can there be resistance to enabling young people, in the 21st century—when young people

have access to all manner of information and data—to make their own judgment?

Ms Dugdale seems to want us to operate a model that might have operated successfully in the 1960s or 1970s, although, as an experienced user of the careers advice service in the 1970s and 1980s, I am not sure that it worked that effectively for me. My world of work is about empowering young people and ensuring that they have access to all the information that they require to enable them to make their choices. In the spirit of new and open thinking in the new year, I encourage Ms Dugdale to replace her tired old record on the issue.

The Government believes that the system must take into account the needs of every individual, whatever their circumstances. A range of individuals must be supported by the services that we put in place. Therefore, at the heart of any system must be greater flexibility and choice, to ensure that individuals can fulfil their potential. With greater flexibility can often come greater complexity. The committee has noted that the better alignment of Scotland's employability services—BASES—project is making a helpful contribution to improving the way in which services are provided to meet the needs of individuals. The committee also welcomed our plans to introduce the employability fund.

Such work is designed to ensure that we streamline in every way possible the services that are available to all individuals, because the worst thing can be the passing from pillar to post of individuals who are looking for support in the system. That is why the BASES project was set up to align services better.

I welcome very much the work that is undertaken by local employability partnerships, which are designed to bring together in every local authority area all the key participants in the provision of local employability services—whether they are local authorities, colleges or private sector bodies—and to ensure that, through working with the Government's agencies and other providers, the most effective support possible is provided in every locality.

That is supported by the work of the Scottish employability forum, which is a joint forum that is convened by the Secretary of State for Scotland, by the relevant Convention of Scottish Local Authorities policy representative, who is Councillor Harry McGuigan, and by me. The forum brings together private, public and third sector representatives to take into account any strategic policy issues that might arise from the fact that different tiers of government are providing different services and different interventions. If any local issues arise that require a policy solution, we can provide timely solutions as effectively as possible.

The forum will meet towards the end of this month. I look forward to contributing constructively to that process, to ensure that any remaining issues are addressed.

The committee concentrated to a large extent on age limits for programmes. The Government has concentrated much of its effort on supporting young people—defined as 16 to 19-year-olds—given the severity of the recession's impact on young people. We took that decision pragmatically, recognising that many people who are over 18 are often mandated to take part in programmes that the United Kingdom Government runs. In the interests of efficiency and simplicity, we have tried to operate in a fashion that respects the programme activities that the United Kingdom Government undertakes while taking forward the programmes that are our responsibility.

There are on-going discussions about elements of our provision that are designed to enhance the situation and particularly about the employer recruitment incentive. We are considering all options for that initiative's scope in relation to the age brackets and age limits that are involved.

The committee raised concern about the ease of access to employability support in rural areas. In the latter part of 2011, the Government set up the rural employability sub-group, which is designed to address particular challenges on transport costs, accessibility, the greater prevalence of seasonal employment and the greater propensity and span of small and microbusinesses. That will ensure that those issues are properly taken into account. Many such points were discussed at the rural employment and skills summit that Argyll and Bute Council hosted in the latter part of last year.

The employability framework in Scotland has a number of component parts. No employability framework will work effectively unless it properly captures the respective contributions that the private, public and third sectors can make. That lies at the heart of the Government's thinking on employability and of the thinking of the Scottish employability forum, to which I referred a moment ago.

Ensuring that our interventions are properly evidenced by input from the private sector and recognising the nature of programmes and how they will meet the private sector's needs are particularly important. The Government and our agencies go to considerable lengths to have adequate and effective dialogue with private sector employers, to ensure that the steps that we take focus on meeting the private sector's needs, because, ultimately, the private sector will create the employment on which economic recovery is based.

As I said at the outset, I welcome the report. The Government will consider the report's recommendations carefully and I will listen with care to the points that members make in this afternoon's debate.

14:50

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I wish the Presiding Officer and all members in the chamber a happy and healthy new year.

I congratulate the Finance Committee on its report. It is not an obvious piece of work for the committee to do, but—as Kenneth Gibson said—it flows from the committee's other work on socioeconomics, deprivation and inequalities, which is of great interest to all members.

As the report comes from the Finance Committee, there is of course a significant focus on the money involved, including whether it is spent in a valuable way and whether the results evidence the amount of cash that is spent. In that sense, the report has already made a valuable contribution to the debate.

My colleagues Michael McMahon and Elaine Murray served on the committee for the duration of its work, and they will contribute to the debate. Like me, Michael McMahon has serious concerns about Skills Development Scotland's approach, and he will speak about those today.

Elaine Murray will focus on the particular challenges that young people in rural areas face. Minerva People gave evidence to the committee that features heavily in the report. I went to Dumfries and met Minerva People and a number of young people who are looking for work in the area. It was perhaps the best reminder of the need for a whole-family approach to youth employment. The issues relate not simply to job creation, skills and employability, but to much wider factors, as Kenneth Gibson mentioned, such as transport costs and a heavy reliance on the need for small and medium-sized enterprises to create jobs for young people in those areas.

Minerva People consistently highlighted the complexity of the employability landscape and the need for a one-stop shop, which is an issue to which I will return. My colleague Malcolm Chisholm will highlight the work of organisations such as Barnardo's, which I have met recently and which does fantastic work throughout the country.

I visited the Barnardo's works project in Edinburgh, and learned that it has no fewer than 14 different one-year funding streams to manage. In fact, it has to employ one dedicated finance officer just to manage the money. We should consider the potential work that the organisation could do in developing and expanding its offer if it

were able to spend less time looking at spreadsheets and getting the abacus out.

Hanzala Malik will speak about college cuts and their impact on the employability landscape. Time and again, I hear complaints and concerns from employers about the complexity of the employability landscape. Employers are clueless about what support is available and how to access it, and, crucially, they are unwilling to spend a huge amount of time navigating the landscape themselves. We need to make it as easy and attractive as possible for businesses to take on young people.

I know that the Government understands the potential that young people have to offer businesses; its own make young people your business initiative demonstrates that. However, it is no use saying to employers, "We have a youth unemployment crisis and it's your moral duty to do your bit." That will tug at the heartstrings of some employers, but it does a huge disservice to young people, who have the amazing potential to help those businesses to diversify.

I will take those two points together and show how making it easy for businesses to take on young people is a completely different ball game.

The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance): Does Kezia Dugdale accept that the whole purpose of the make young people your business campaign is proactively to sell the business and economic case for employing young people? Does she accept that the Government has put in place the forthcoming employer recruitment incentive for small businesses, which—if I recall rightly—she welcomed, along with initiatives such as our skillsforce?

Kezia Dugdale: I very much welcome the employment recruitment incentive, and I hope that we will hear more about the details when we return to the subject of youth unemployment on Thursday.

However, the issue that I am about to raise and the story that I am about to tell relate specifically to the process involved in getting that young person into employment. There is a good story to tell about the minister's work in that regard, if she will let me get to it.

There is a company in Edinburgh called Adcentiv Media, which specialises in signage. It is doing really well despite the adverse economic circumstances, and it has already expanded once. Last year, the company took on a young guy called Calum, who was doing a get ready for work placement in Edinburgh. He thrived in the new environment and got on really well. He demonstrated a real talent for car wrapping. In case members are not familiar with it, car wrapping involves literally wrapping a car in

adverts. It is a growing trend: not many businesses in Scotland are doing it, but there is an increasing demand for it.

Calum had a real skill for car wrapping, and towards the end of his get ready for work placement the employer wanted to take him on because he had such a talent and ability to help the business grow. Several calls were made to different agencies, all of which led to dead ends. The employer phoned Skills Development Scotland and got nowhere—and got really frustrated.

I was visiting the company with the local MP Sheila Gilmore for other reasons and it was only because I recognised Calum—I had met him at the Rathbone centre while he was doing the get ready for work programme—that I asked how he was getting on. I was told the whole story: the company could not get his employment programme continued and he would have to join the dole queue again in a month's time. I wrote to the minister and, to her credit, she intervened to fix Calum's situation. She made the right parts of Skills Development Scotland talk to each other, so Calum now has his modern apprenticeship and is thriving. It should not, however, have taken a Government minister's intervention to get him to that point.

It is crucial that people are able to navigate the system and get from one programme into another and then into a job. The Scottish Government has not shown me that there is a pathway for people from the minute that they leave school until the minute they get into employment.

Falkirk Council does incredible work in that regard. It does not take its eyes off a young person from the minute they leave school until they are in a sustainable job. Too many young people are falling through the net and dropping out of the system. From the visit that we made to the City of Edinburgh Council in December, the minister knows that Edinburgh is doing fantastic work and has great plans to do more. We need such strategies from the Scottish Government's own programmes and it needs to drive the policy across 32 local authorities.

I had a lot more to say, Presiding Officer, but I have run out of time. Perhaps we will come back to the issue on Thursday when we talk about youth employment in more detail.

14:56

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): I, too, begin by thanking the convener of the Finance Committee, fellow committee members, our clerks and, particularly, all those who gave evidence to the committee on what is an extremely important

piece of work and an ultimately fairly creditable report.

We aimed to look at five things in the report: current initiatives; how those initiatives are being evaluated; the relative success of the interventions; the barriers to success; and, finally, the further action that different levels of Government could take to help the employability of those who are the furthest from the labour market. As the convener pointed out, even in the best of economic times such individuals find it difficult to get a job, but in an economic downturn they are almost literally swept aside and find it almost impossible. Our report is therefore a critical piece of work.

I aim to focus my remarks on a couple of elements of the report that have been mentioned already, but they are ones in which there are gaps and weaknesses. I hope that the Government will respond to them today when the minister is summing up but, more important, I hope that it responds to them when it gives the committee its formal written response to the report in a couple of weeks.

The first element is the barriers to success. I and some other committee members were struck by the issue of single-year funding for third sector organisations. The convener touched on that during his remarks and, in the spirit of what the cabinet secretary called new and open thinking for 2013, it is vital that Parliament and the Scottish Government get a good handle on single-year funding for the third sector.

The Government has made all the right noises about the issue during the past couple of years. In evidence to the committee, Mr Swinney said:

"As increasing evidence will show, we have tried for some time now to expand the duration of financial support for third sector organisations."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 31 October 2012; c 1736.]

Again, to his credit and the credit of the Government, there is a joint statement on the third sector from the Scottish Government and partner organisations, which states:

"As a general rule funders will aim to take a 3-year approach to both grant and contract funding."

Most members in the chamber will agree with that principle, but the critical point is whether those good intentions translate to what happens on the ground.

That issue was raised repeatedly with the committee, but usually in private session because individual third sector organisations do not want to get involved with it publicly. That is understandable: they do not want to upset the council or national health service trust that might

be funding them, whether on a single-year basis or longer.

Nevertheless, the issue was raised repeatedly to the extent that at the committee's workshop in Dundee one group stated that it was about to issue its annual notices to staff about the risk of redundancy. That was no exaggeration, and I do not think that anyone in this chamber can feel comfortable about the fact that a great charity doing tremendous work with those who are hardest to reach and have the most difficulty in accessing the labour market has to issue annual notices of potential redundancy.

The Government's intention is absolutely right, but it is not synchronised with the reality on the ground. The general rule in the joint statement appears to be broken almost as much as it is observed.

I note in passing that in the briefing that it passed to all members for this debate the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations states very clearly:

"We would like to note that in our experience three year funding is rare to non-existent between local authorities and third sector organisations..."

SCVO would welcome the Scottish Government examining the reality here and would be keen to work with the Government in any way possible."

The committee took the same view. Although we praised the Government for some of its work, we feel that it is important that it carries out some form of audit or investigation on the extent—or lack—of three-year funding on the ground.

I do not expect a full response from the Government this afternoon but it would be useful to know its initial views on that conclusion and whether it intends to take it forward. It is vital that when it formally reports back to the committee we get a full and detailed response about its intentions—or, if it does not intend to do anything, why not. I have to say that the issue represented the biggest gap between what the Government was saying and what critical third sector organisations were telling us is happening on the ground.

The Government is getting a number of things right. However, in the very short time I have left—and I will return to this issue in my closing speech—I want to highlight the importance of looking at how the various initiatives, some of which seem to be excellent, are evaluated. When money is tight, we must ensure that every single pound is spent as wisely as possible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): We now come to the open debate. I ask for speeches of six minutes, although at this stage there is a little time in hand for interventions.

15:02

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): First of all, I wish everyone in the chamber the best for 2013 and congratulate the Finance Committee on bringing this debate to the chamber.

We are not actually in the bleak midwinter. In my Aberdeenshire West constituency and indeed in the north-east of Scotland, there seem to be far greater employment opportunities than in the rest of Scotland, perhaps because of our thriving energy sector. In saying that, I do not want to take away from tomorrow's debate on oil and gas—I am merely pointing out that the oil and gas and renewables sectors provide opportunities for employment.

That said, the Finance Committee's report contains the realisation that there is a great deal of complexity around the initiatives for our young people to get into employment. The issue has also been recognised in the north-east. I know that there is an £18 million initiative that includes funding for setting up the energy skills academy, but there is a recognition that what young people need is the right choice at the right time.

Indeed, that brings me to Kezia Dugdale's intervention on the cabinet secretary with regard to person-centred approaches. It is quite right that we have such approaches. Let me give the chamber an example.

Mr Swinney said that in the 1960s and 1970s career choices might not always have been geared to the individual. Like many other young people of my age, I signed on when I left school. At the unemployment centre, I was offered an opportunity to get into employment and—a bit like Norman the barking pig in this afternoon's time for reflection—I felt up for the challenge. However, when I was offered a job as a night watchman or as a sign painter for boats in dry dock, I felt that I had to refuse. I felt that such opportunities were beyond even my expectation of the challenge to which I could assign myself. A person-centred approach is about ensuring that young people are informed about what is available to them that they can aspire to and that is within their ability. That is the essence of person-centred approaches.

In the north-east, we are fortunate that the energy skills centre provides opportunities for our young people, but there is a realisation that we need to get to our young people at a much earlier age. As part of its brief, ConstructionSkills Scotland is also looking at trying to ensure that young people are aware of the opportunities in various sectors. For instance, the energy sector is not all about hard hats and overalls; there is a need for project managers, caterers, office cleaners—people who can provide the skills that keep the energy sector afloat.

We also have problems in the north-east, especially in the rural areas. As is mentioned in the committee's report, the cost of transport means that opportunities are not always available for people in rural communities. There can also be a lack of infrastructure, with people unable to connect to the internet so that they can access, for instance, the my world of work website. The infrastructure is not always available in our rural areas, and that is something that needs to be addressed.

Just before Christmas, I spoke to the youth minister—my apologies, the Minister for Youth Employment—about opportunities for all. I said to her that there is a perception—and it is a perception—that the opportunities for all commitment perhaps does not always do what it says on the tin, if I may use the phrase that David Cameron used in the news the other day. The perception among those in Remploy who lost their jobs, for instance, is that Governments sometimes put up barriers. The Scottish Government's opportunities for all policy is sometimes not realised because of the UK Government.

I believe that we need to provide opportunities for all in the greatest sense possible, and I believe that the Scottish Government is trying to do exactly that.

15:08

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate the Finance Committee on another excellent report, whose major theme is the support for those who are most disadvantaged and furthest from the labour market.

The need for such support is not inconsistent with the policies of the existing or previous Government. Indeed, I was pleased to read "Working for Growth: A Refresh of the Employability Framework for Scotland" and the original 2006 document, with which I was associated, as a picture on the front page reminded me. In both documents, there is a strong focus on reaching out and engaging with those most distanced from the labour market as well as an emphasis on local partnership working, person-centred delivery and employer engagement.

Over the years, the context for employability has perhaps changed more than the policy. At the time of the original document in 2006, we had a situation of serious recruitment difficulties. Indeed, employment academies sprang up in Edinburgh for the basic reason that vacancies could not be filled; by contrast, today we have a 146 per cent rise in long-term unemployment, which does not correspond—I say this with due respect to my Conservative colleagues—to a 146 per cent rise in

laziness. While overcoming barriers to work remains at the heart of employability, the sad fact is that there are more external barriers now.

Having said that, I must note that a Joseph Rowntree Foundation study tells us that, even before the full force of the recession, there was no evidence of any step change in support for those who were most disadvantaged in the labour market. The report also makes a more general point, which is echoed in the Finance Committee's report, about the lack of evidence and evaluation of employability policies. I hope that, in summing up, the minister will take up that point and say what the Government will do about the issue, because it is clear that it is of fundamental importance to evaluate not just the short-term effects of policies but their long-term results.

In spite of the good intentions of the policy documents of the current and previous Governments, why have we not succeeded in meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged group? I suppose that the first point is the endemic gap between policy and implementation. That is why I particularly welcome the formation of the employability and tackling poverty learning network. It is through such learning networks that good practice can be spread, and that is probably even more important than writing good policy documents.

The second point is simply that both Government employability framework documents did not have a strong enough focus on the most disadvantaged. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Finance Committee for being focused in the report and for continually emphasising the needs of that particular group.

As it happens, I have a good example of a project in my constituency that focuses effectively on those who are most disadvantaged and furthest from the labour market: Barnardo's works at Granton, to which Kezia Dugdale referred in her opening speech. The national Barnardo's works project provided evidence to the committee, which I think was generally welcomed, but having visited the site at Granton I know about the excellent work that is done there, based on partnership and joined-up working with referrers, support agencies and particularly employers, whose needs the project tries to meet.

From reading about and visiting the project, I have found out about the one-to-one support that is offered and the focus on the most disadvantaged—most recently, the project has taken on a group of care leavers. The scheme gives time to the young individuals, and it is not restricted to the normal 13 to 26-week period. The focus is not just on 16 to 19-year-olds, but on those who are 19 plus and 19 to 24-year-olds in particular. That is a model project but, as Kezia

Dugdale reminded us, it has enormous funding challenges, with many different funding streams and short-term funding provision that must be continually renewed.

A second example, which will be well known to the minister as I think that she has presented certificates to it, is the Port of Leith Housing Association's TOIL—training opportunities in Lothian—project in my constituency, which also focuses on those who leave school without qualifications and provides them with training and work opportunities. Those opportunities are not just in construction related work, as one might expect with a housing association, but in areas such as catering and hospitality. That is another excellent local example in my constituency.

As I said, there are serious external barriers. I have mentioned some of them, but it would be remiss of me not to mention childcare, which is a serious barrier to entering the labour market for many people, particularly women. Notwithstanding yesterday's announcement from the UK Government, which will help some better-off parents, low-income parents now find it more difficult to afford childcare because of changes to tax credits and other changes. The Scottish Government must do all that it can on childcare. I am reminded of the working for families initiative, with which I was associated in the past and which was a good example of how a devolved Government can do effective things to help those who are seeking work by providing childcare support.

Another barrier was raised with me when I visited the violence reduction unit on Friday. I hope that all members know about the excellent work of the unit, which is based in Glasgow. During the conversation, the point came up that one of the many positive attributes of employability is that it is a powerful restrictor of violent behaviour. The concern that the unit's co-directors raised with me was that many people with whom the unit works to get them into employment are ruled out for jobs because of protecting vulnerable groups—PVG—scheme checks and other ways in which employers look into people's backgrounds.

Of course, for some jobs, we need to know what offence has been committed, but I hope that the Government can examine that issue and ensure that the checks are applied only when they are absolutely essential, because it was put to me by those amazing individuals of whom I am sure members have heard—John Carnochan and Karyn McCluskey—that they are a serious barrier to ex-offenders in finding work.

John Carnochan and Karyn McCluskey have now badged up the work as an initiative called redemption. That may have other connotations for some people, but for them it just means that we

need to give people a chance. At the end of the day, that is what employability is all about.

15:15

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I look forward to future generations of historians looking back at the *Official Report* of the debate and wondering what Dennis Robertson was on about when he self-identified as Norman the barking pig. I hope that they will also look at the *Official Report* of today's time for reflection to get an explanation.

It seems obligatory at the start of any speech today to pass on seasonal platitudes, so I wish you, Presiding Officer, and other members a happy new year. I look forward to next year—2014—being an even happier year for Scotland.

This is the third Finance Committee debate in which I have spoken on matters that were largely dealt with before I became a member of the committee. I hope that, before too long, I will get to speak in a debate on a subject that I have been involved in considering in some detail. However, I thank my committee colleagues for the work that they undertook in pulling together the report and for the evidence that they gathered over the inquiry.

The debate is welcome because it is always important for the Parliament to consider how better to support employability. However, it is particularly important in a time of economic difficulty.

It is important to consider the current situation to place the debate in a little context. The latest labour market statistics show that the Scottish unemployment rate decreased by 0.6 per cent from August to October, which was the largest fall since March to May 2008. They also show that we have a lower unemployment rate than the UK. If we look at youth unemployment in particular, we see that it fell by 4.3 per cent during the same period, although, at 21.1 per cent, it is still only marginally lower than the figure for the UK as a whole.

It is positive that the figures are moving in the right direction, but they indicate that we need to consider what can be done to make further improvements. However, it is also important to acknowledge some of the work that the Scottish Government is undertaking.

In the draft budget, £18 million was announced for skills training. That, of course, will go towards the energy skills academy. I will leave that subject to my north-east colleagues, because they will want to speak about it in more detail.

The money will also go towards a national employer recruitment initiative, which will create up to 10,000 opportunities for small and medium-

sized enterprises to recruit young people. That was one of the issues that came through in the inquiry.

In its briefing for the debate, FSB Scotland makes the point that

“Employment in small firms is the most important route to employment for the unemployed and economically inactive”

and it sets out that a

“UK Labour Force Survey analysis of movements from unemployment into private sector employment between 2008-2011”

shows that

“88% find work in SMEs ... compared to 12% in large businesses.”

However, at the same time, although 33 per cent of those who responded

“to an FSB survey felt that their businesses generated enough work to need extra help ... only 28% were thinking of recruiting”,

so the funding from the Scottish Government could not be better timed.

In the 2012-13 budget, we saw £18 million of investment on a number of specific employability initiatives, including the £6 million for community jobs Scotland—which was delivered by the SCVO and Social Enterprise Scotland—and the £2.5 million for a challenge fund to support the third sector. We should acknowledge the issues that have been raised with year-on-year funding for the third sector, but it is clear that the Scottish Government supports the sector.

The Scottish Government also gave £9 million to local authorities with particular youth unemployment challenges. I welcomed that very much because North Lanarkshire Council was a beneficiary to the tune of £1.8 million. I was happy to join the Minister for Youth Employment at Cumbernauld airport in my constituency to publicise and highlight that funding. We heard that day that the funding is very important to companies such as Cumbernauld Airport Ltd and other bodies that are looking for assistance with taking on young people. It is clear that the Scottish Government is doing what it can, and it is taking forward a range of measures to better support and improve employability.

I want to focus a little on the issue of supporting those who are particularly vulnerable back into employment. In its briefing, the National Union of Students Scotland highlighted issues around those who are coming out of care. I think that we all appreciate and accept that that group faces particular challenges. For example, NUS Scotland pointed out that

“in 2009-10 just 1% of care leavers went on to higher education, compared with 36% of all school leavers”

and that it

“supports the view of the committee that those individuals may require more tailored support to benefit from ‘mainstream’ employability initiatives”.

I am sure that we are all concerned about that group of people. It would be useful to know how the Scottish Government might respond to that particular challenge.

Like Malcolm Chisholm, I think that we need to reflect on those who struggle with childcare. Just before recess, I was very happy to host an event here at the Scottish Parliament with Save the Children. A number of parents from across the country were there to tell the MSPs who came to the event of the challenges that they face. The difficulties that my wife and I face in securing childcare are nothing compared to the difficulties faced by those individuals. NUS Scotland and I certainly welcome the work that the Scottish Government is undertaking to improve childcare, and it would be useful to know what more might be done.

I welcome this debate and I look forward to hearing what the Government has to say.

15:22

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): We hear quite a lot about the links between deprivation and ill health and indeed, just this morning, the Health and Sport Committee heard about the links between deprivation and teenage pregnancy. Even so, I was shocked by the evidence referenced by the Christie commission that at age 15, the educational gap between the top and bottom 20 per cent of the Scottish population is five years, which is the widest in developed Europe. That should be a statistic of shame for all of us who are involved in policy making in Scotland.

Many of the educationally disadvantaged will suffer cyclical periods of unemployment and underemployment and will struggle to lift themselves and their families out of the cycle of deprivation. In addition to the loss of income and opportunity to the individuals and their families, that comprises a loss of potential and productivity to the country as abilities go unrecognised and ambition goes unfulfilled.

Recession is hitting young people particularly hard. Almost one in four young people aged between 16 and 25 were registered unemployed in the last recorded quarter for 2012, which is nearly three times as many as in the same period four years ago. Of course, those figures do not include all those young people who are underemployed in part-time jobs, some of which can have zero or very little in the way of guaranteed hours of work. Those arrangements may suit employers but they

offer very little financial stability or opportunity for progression for the young people concerned.

The Finance Committee inquiry revealed a plethora of initiatives and funding streams that are aimed at tackling youth unemployment in particular. However, there are questions about how successful many of those initiatives have been in practice and whether they address the problems faced by those who are furthest from employment. Of course, there are also issues about if and how the success of the various initiatives is evaluated. According to Who Cares? Scotland and Barnardo's Scotland, many programmes are too short to sustain personal development and some people require support even to get to the stage at which those programmes might be of assistance to them.

Kenneth Gibson referred to Minerva People, which is a very successful company in my constituency. It described its experience whereby its one-to-one work with young people who were hard to place helped them to identify their skills and talents. Minerva told us that

"the results have been amazing."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 23 May 2012; c 1211.]

Kezia Dugdale brought up the criticism of the SDS internet-based programme, my world of work. The issue is not really one of just having a go at the Government. The problem is that SDS estimates that only about 3,000 to 3,500 young people will require additional assistance. That is only about 3 per cent of the young people in the 16 to 25 age group who require help—who are actually unemployed.

Many of those young people will be internet literate, of course, but my question is whether more of them might need a bit of personal support as well as initial internet-based support. Dennis Robertson made a very good point about the lack of internet access in some rural areas and more remote parts of Scotland.

Angela Constance: To pick up on the point about the reform of the careers service, enabling our very skilled careers guidance staff to work intensively on a one-to-one basis with young people who are furthest removed from the labour market and young people who are most disadvantaged is at the heart of the reforms.

Elaine Murray: Indeed, but there are other young people who require a degree of support. They may not need intensive support, but they may require a degree of guidance and support to get themselves on the correct programme.

I want to say a bit about rural communities in which employment is dominated by micro and small businesses. On the positive side, those businesses are often more likely to employ young

people with fewer formal qualifications if their personal attributes and motivation suit the business. In its evidence, the FSB pointed out that small businesses represent 93 per cent of the Scottish private sector and that individuals without degree-level qualifications are significantly more likely to gain employment with small businesses than with larger enterprises. However, as the convener of the Finance Committee has already said and Minerva People pointed out, there are particular difficulties in rural areas to do with seasonal work and unusual hours. One of my constituents from Upper Nithsdale was offered a job in Annan, which he could access by train, but with the loss of his benefits and the cost of the train fares, he would be only £8 a week better off, so he did not take it. Particular issues were flagged up to us in the Dumfries session around childcare and transport difficulties in rural areas, particularly if people might have to work on weekends or do shift work. Particular issues need to be looked at.

I was struck by the difference in perceptions regarding the efficacy of initiatives and joint working in the public, private and third sectors. I think that the private and third sectors did not feel as included as the public sector thought that they were. For example, the committee noted that the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises need to be better accommodated in the programmes if we expect them to provide training and support and employment opportunities.

Third sector agencies that attended the Dumfries session also felt that they could contribute more to the design of support packages. That was particularly true of support for people who are very far from the labour market and need specialist support, such as ex-prisoners or people with addiction problems.

The major problem for anyone who is particularly disadvantaged with regard to gaining employment must be the level of competition that they currently face. Employers are less likely to take on someone who requires an input of resources to sustain them in employment if they have a large range of other applicants from which to choose. The Finance Committee report flags up a number of issues and suggests a number of actions, but we also have to look at the demand side and how we can stimulate employment, because we need to create more jobs in Scotland as well as help people to get into them.

15:28

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): All members have their own experiences with regard to improving employability in the modern workplace and how training and developing skills impact on achieving employment.

I welcome the Finance Committee's emphasis on improving employability for individuals, particularly from areas of deprivation. As other members have stated, the inquiry looked at important areas of employability and current initiatives, including modern apprenticeships, the evaluation of such key initiatives, and the scrutiny of whether such initiatives and interventions are successful.

There are good current examples of improving employability. There is the partnership between Whitehill secondary school and Milnbank Housing Association in Dennistoun, for example. That project has existed for a number of years and has latterly taken a more formal approach. Milnbank Housing Association has been funded from the housing association wider role funding that the Scottish Government has provided.

On the detailed responses to the examination of employability issues, a significant amount of committee time clearly centred on the need for creating sustainable employment. I was heartened that the Finance Committee's scrutiny was not strictly confined to young people, although youth employment is and should be a serious concern for everyone. In its evidence to the committee, Scotland's Colleges quite properly highlighted its unease about 29 per cent of people aged over 24 having no qualifications.

The Finance Committee's report highlights the elements of success for employability and the factors that do not assist disadvantaged individuals. Some people might say that a higher element of public support and intervention should be required for older people. The report highlighted the issue of the accessibility of certain programmes, with

"even those aged over 20, being excluded."

The Finance Committee states that it would welcome clarification from the Government on how decisions were reached on the age limits for the opportunities for all scheme and the reason why the community jobs Scotland scheme is open only to 16 to 19-year-olds. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employability and Sustainable Growth alluded earlier to some reasons why that decision was made. I hope that we can examine that in more detail and look at whether UK Government programmes are addressing the serious employability issues of those aged over 19.

In terms of developing the Scottish Government's commitment to a person-centred approach, the landscape is complex and, as the report states, that is in no small part

"due to the split of responsibilities between the UK and the Scottish Government."

The Finance Committee notes in its report the number of different programmes and strategies.

The Scottish Government hopes to address the matter through better alignment of Scotland's employability services. However, I feel that some of the language used to describe the various strategies and programmes is not useful and could be said not to develop public awareness or a sense of public ownership. The Finance Committee considers it crucial that investment in assisting individuals into employment is made with a long-term commitment.

With regard to its evidence-gathering sessions, the committee not unsurprisingly referred to the number of young people not in education, employment or training. The report notes that the estimated figure of 31,000 16 to 19-year-olds not in education, employment or training has remained static for more than 10 years.

Some of the issues surrounding employment are outwith any Government's control. In that regard, we have only to look at the growth in zero-hours and part-time contracts in the private sector, particularly the retail sector. I am aware that in the lead-up to Christmas, a number of retailers were recruiting young workers not through Jobcentre Plus but through Twitter and other accounts, and offering zero-hours or five-hour contracts. That is not a welcome sign for young people's experience of employment. We must ensure that the employment that is offered is meaningful and that it does not lead to individuals finding themselves in in-work poverty. We must ensure that employers take full responsibility for ensuring that those they employ do not find themselves worse off through working. In that regard, Elaine Murray referred earlier to workers in rural areas who would be worse off if they took certain jobs.

A number of my constituents in the Central Scotland region, which has multiple areas of deprivation, are not in sustainable employment and may face the prospect of in-work poverty or finding themselves out of work. Constituents who are over 50 do not find that there is a particularly friendly climate for finding employment in the modern working environment. A number of constituents who have approached me about their concerns in that regard find it difficult to get work and feel that they have been left on the scrapheap after working for 20 or 30 years. As I have stated before, youth employment is important, but tackling it should not be done to the detriment of those who are looking for opportunities to reskill and retool themselves for employment in our communities.

I welcome the Finance Committee's "Improving employability" report and have found the opportunity to debate it thought provoking. We need to ensure that we have a robust mechanism to evaluate current skills and employment initiatives so that they are up to date and

meaningful for the people of Scotland and for the many people who are trying to find employment in this modern society.

15:34

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): I congratulate Kenneth Gibson and the Finance Committee on tackling a vital and increasingly complex issue.

As we know from the latest labour market statistics for the August to October period, although unemployment and claimant count numbers throughout Scotland may be significantly down, regrettably the number of those in jobs has also declined. As we know from Professor David Bell's research, which was referred to in *The Scotsman* yesterday, part-time working continues to rise.

Increasing numbers of people are in part-time work because of a lack of a full-time alternative. In terms of assessing employability, that highlights the fact that there may be a substantial financial shortfall, not only to those individuals in part-time employment and their families, but also to the economy as a whole in lost tax revenue. Is that the shape of things to come? I hope not, but it underlines the complexity of the issue. What is clear from that shortfall, and the high levels of unemployment among our young folk and from the evidence of the increasing numbers of 55 to 64 year-olds staying in work, is that there are substantial competing pressures across the board affecting employability.

There is a continuing contrast between areas such as my constituency and other parts of Fife, such as Kirkcaldy, with substantially differing numbers of claimants and unemployed people, but let us consider the differences between other parts of Scotland, too. We heard earlier from Dennis Robertson on the situation in Aberdeenshire, so the position is complex.

Much more important than statistics are the real people behind them. Ordinary men and women, including a large number of young people, recent school leavers with standard grades or highs, students with skills and qualifications from college or degrees from university, and people with all levels of qualifications and skills, as well as people with no qualifications or skills at all, are finding it extremely difficult to find work. As the Scottish Government strategy for youth employment identifies, the human costs of that challenge are damaged self-esteem, the heightened risk of offending, and the prospect of long-term unemployment and the intergenerational social problems that can accompany it.

There may not be one silver bullet to tackle the problems, but what seems clear is that there may

be too many agencies involved or, at the very least, that there is a potential for unnecessary duplication of effort between Scottish, UK, local and other agencies, although, as the committee has said, it has not undertaken detailed scrutiny of the issue.

Dennis Robertson: Does the member accept that stereotyping is a barrier to employment in certain areas—whether it is in energy or in construction—and certainly in skills, and that women are not given the opportunity through education to look at those as potential areas for future employment?

Roderick Campbell: I agree—Dennis Robertson makes a sensible point.

It is clear that the Scottish Government recognises the need to ensure that UK and Scottish employability programmes fit together and, in particular, to strengthen local partnerships, especially those between colleges and the third and private sectors.

Inevitably, there is always pressure to establish priorities, but given the academic research of Brynner and Parsons on the experiences of men who, in their late teens, had not been in employment, education or training, the Scottish Government is right to focus, in its opportunities for all programme, on the 16 to 19-year-old age group. However, we should not forget that there are substantial needs in the post-20 age group—the committee has taken on board that point. Other issues, such as the difficulties for employers in providing jobs in rural communities, should also not be forgotten, as other members have mentioned.

Although I agree entirely with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth's comments about the need to set parameters for initiatives and a necessity to balance focus and breadth for each scheme, surely something further could be done to consider the needs of those in the post-20 age group. I note what the committee said about community jobs Scotland, but anything further that the Scottish Government can say beyond the comments that were made earlier by John Swinney on the post-20 age group would be helpful.

With regard to tackling unemployment, although internet-based support, such as the my world of work website, is to be applauded, let us not forget that for many in the employment market who have been out of work longest, their internet skills are not great and access is not necessarily easy. If we are to make significant progress in tackling disadvantage, we must ensure that the needs of the most disadvantaged are not neglected in favour of those for whom a little bit of extra help

may be sufficient to assist them in the labour market.

On the financing of employment initiatives, the committee report makes it clear that it is widely accepted that such targeted initiatives are expensive. I am sure that we all agree that, in times of economic crisis, every penny spent needs to be justified. However, we need to bear in mind that, as the STUC said,

“the costs of inaction are higher.”

I have no doubt that that is the case. Such schemes can certainly be regarded as a form of preventative spend.

The Parliament needs to consider how best to evaluate the success of schemes. The committee rightly said:

“there needs to be robust, independent evaluation of these initiatives to establish the extent to which they support individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds into sustainable employment.”

Notwithstanding those points, let us not forget that in Scotland we have a dedicated Minister for Youth Employment and that the Government is firmly committed to its modern apprenticeships programme and to using £25 million of European structural funding to support young people into jobs. The Government is also committed to better alignment of Scotland’s employability services, which would be made much easier if there were full devolution of employment services, let alone independence.

There is no doubt that improving employability is vital for Scotland. We need constantly to review progress so that we understand and build on what works most effectively. As members said, we should never lose sight of the need to consider employability in the overall context of deprivation.

15:41

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am grateful to the Finance Committee for its report and for its recommendations, which I read with great interest. There is an overlap between some of the committee’s work and some of the work of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, which tomorrow starts taking evidence in our inquiry into underemployment in Scotland. We will hear from Professor David Bell, whose remarks were reported in *The Scotsman* yesterday, as Roderick Campbell said. Much of what is in the Finance Committee’s report will be helpful in providing a base for some of the work that the EETC will do.

It was interesting to see how much overlap there has been between the Finance Committee’s work and some of the EETC’s past work. I was taken with the section on soft skills, which is a constant

refrain for members of the EETC. Employers tell us that people—particularly young people—come into the jobs market with the technical skills for a job but lacking the soft skills that they are looking for. By “soft skills”, I mean the ability to communicate and to relate to other people in the workforce, a proper work ethic, so that the person can turn up on time, present well and dress appropriately, and other things that people who have been in the workforce for a long time might take for granted.

It is fair to say that much of the evidence in that regard is anecdotal and that the issue might be overstated. Nevertheless, it is something that we hear from employers and a similar refrain seemed to emerge in the evidence to the Finance Committee from companies such as Asda, Social Enterprise Scotland and Cruden Building & Renewals. The message came through quite loud and clear to the Finance Committee that there is an issue to do with a lack of confidence among young people, in particular. That is one of the soft skills that it is difficult to teach; the issue needs to be worked on to a much greater extent.

A little over a year ago, when the EETC took evidence on the tourism industry, we dug into the issue in some detail. It is an interesting and sometimes quite worrying aspect of the tourism sector in Scotland that many of the people who are working in our tourist establishments are not Scots but come from eastern Europe. When we ask people in the industry why that is the case, they say that they cannot get youngsters in Scotland interested in jobs in the sector or that the youngsters who come forward do not have the soft skills that they are looking for, which is sad, and that they can find more enthusiasm and willingness to work among people from elsewhere in Europe or perhaps Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. There are excellent Scottish companies that employ people from within Scotland, but it is clear that the issue to do with soft skills must be more vigorously addressed. I was interested to see that that point was made in the Finance Committee’s report.

The only way that someone can get the skills that they need for the workforce is by gaining experience, which is why workplace schemes are so important. Much good work is going on in that regard. I was interested to learn about the new property plus project in Perth and Kinross, which is aimed at getting 16 to 24-year-olds into work. Through the project, disadvantaged youngsters who have been through a community payback scheme enter into a paid work programme of 13 weeks, during which they help to repair void council houses, upgrading the properties so that they are ready to take new tenants.

The scheme provides a group of youngsters with employment and training, under supervision. It gives them all the things that they need to help them to get back into the workforce and it provides the council with an asset that it would not have had otherwise, in the form of a property that is available to re-let. There are currently 15 youngsters in Perth and Kinross taking part in that project, with another 15 due to join it this month. The project is being run by the council in partnership with the charity Action for Children. It is a worthwhile project and, if it is a success, similar projects should be rolled out elsewhere in the country.

We need to do more to develop work experience in schools. We have come a long way as a country—when I was in school many years ago, no work experience was available. It is now routinely available for youngsters in secondary 4 upwards but there are barriers. We need to do much more to remove some of the red tape.

In previous years I have offered work experience, as many other members do, to youngsters from a local school. That offer has been taken up and some good young people have come forward to work in my office. However, I remember a few years ago, as part of that, being sent a health and safety form to fill in by the local council that ran to a large number of pages—I cannot remember how many, but it seemed like 20 pages. It was all so completely irrelevant that I refused to fill in the form. I phoned up the council and said that I was happy to take a youngster but that I was not taking two hours out of my life to fill in the form. The council was understanding and, because of the workplace environment, it said that that was fine and I did not need to complete the form.

Imagine somebody with a small business, a joiner or a small builder or someone with a car workshop, who is faced with that problem—they might well say that it was not worth their while filling in that form and as a result that opportunity would be lost. There is an issue around some of the bureaucracy and paperwork. That is not to say that health and safety is not important, but we need to be proportionate in how we approach some of the issues.

We need to look at the question of graduate employability. The University of Melbourne has employability built into every degree. It has a programme whereby students are taught how to market their skills. All universities and colleges need to look at better employer-student relations, mandatory CV-writing seminars and interview preparation tutorials, and inbuilt employability modules such as work experience within degrees. A lot of good work is already going on in places such as the universities of Sussex, Newcastle and

Lancaster, which are working with the private sector to develop courses so that those who are coming out are perhaps more ready for the workforce than would otherwise be the case.

Dennis Robertson: Does the member therefore welcome the work that is being done in the north-east by the universities and colleges to set up the energy skills academy?

Murdo Fraser: The energy skills academy is a welcome initiative and I am interested to see how that develops in the coming months and years.

This is a valuable report and I hope that—unlike, perhaps, some of our parliamentary committee reports in the past—it will be acted on and not just left on a shelf to gather dust.

15:48

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate the Finance Committee on its report. It is important to remind ourselves, as the STUC reminded the committee, of the simple fact that unemployment is caused by lack of jobs. As the National Union of Students puts it, the UK Government's austerity policies have been particularly damaging and are responsible for increasing unemployment, and the NUS would like to see the UK mount concerted action to create jobs. I would go further than that, because I believe that the people of Scotland are the best people to make all those decisions and we need the full powers of independence to tackle the scourge of unemployment.

There has been a lot of talk about person-centred approaches and it is important to remember that that is exactly what we are doing in Scotland in our education sector, including in our schools, where the child-centred curriculum for excellence prepares our young people for not only employment, but life. I will concentrate on the role of education with regard to employability, which I am sure the whole chamber will agree is crucial.

I welcome the budget announcement of an extra £18 million for skills training in 2013-14. That is over and above the existing commitment to modern apprenticeships and opportunities for all. I am delighted that the Scottish Government has doubled the number of modern apprenticeship starts since 2007 and exceeded its own 25,000 target last year, giving starts to 26,427 modern apprentices.

However, it is keeping education free for all that we must not take for granted in improving employability for graduates and right across the economy. Our universities are among the best in the world and have a research record far ahead of our population. They are an economic engine as well as an intellectual one, and it is vital that they

continue to get the support that they have received from the Scottish Government to date.

Free access to higher education means that Scotland is bucking the UK trend. More than 50,000 fewer people across the UK started higher education courses this autumn than did so last year, except in Scotland where university uptake is up, highlighting the benefit of free access. In England, where fees have trebled to £9,000 a year, there has been a drastic 6.6 per cent drop in the number of people taking up university places, whereas in Scotland the number of students has risen by 0.3 per cent. Those figures show that Scotland is delivering far more successful policies and outcomes with the degree of independence that the Scottish Parliament already has. With the full powers of an independent Scotland, we could do the same in all areas that are currently reserved to Westminster, including employability.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Joan McAlpine: No. I want to make progress.

A 6.6 per cent drop in student starts shows just how much damage the UK Government's socially exclusive policy is doing south of the border.

In Scotland, student debt levels are the lowest in the UK. Figures from the Student Loans Company show that the average student loan debt was £6,480 in Scotland compared to £17,140 in England, £13,650 in Wales and £15,800 in Northern Ireland.

Our success applies not just to universities. I am delighted that the SNP is protecting 26,300 college students from tuition fees. The Conservatives have been critical of the situation in colleges in Scotland, but I ask them to look south of the border where college students are paying up to £9,000 for full-time degree courses. In 2013, the average student at a further education college south of the border will pay an estimated £6,200 according to the Office for Fair Access.

I am pleased to see that the budget is investing further in colleges, helping to support students and protect numbers. We are also investing in the college estate. Through our non-profit-distributing programme, there will be £200 million to build a new City of Glasgow College and £100 million for new colleges in Inverness and Kilmarnock. We have also provided substantial capital investment for colleges in Anniesland, Coatbridge, Dundee and Alloa.

It is important to remind ourselves that we face unprecedented cuts to our budget in Scotland. Given that fact, the Minister for Youth Employment is to be congratulated on the fall in youth unemployment by 4.3 per cent to 21 per cent in the period from August to October. I am sure that

she would be the first to agree that there is no room for complacency, but given the restrictions on the Parliament's powers over employability, tax, welfare and the economy, any improvement is a considerable achievement.

15:53

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill)

(Lab): I join colleagues in thanking the Finance Committee clerks for their hard work in facilitating the inquiry and producing the report that we are debating today. I also thank everyone who gave evidence to the committee and made the inquiry such an enjoyable experience.

In particular, the event that I attended in Ardrossan along with the convener was very informative and thought provoking. Coming from Lanarkshire, I was keen to see whether the employment initiatives and the skills and training environment in Ayrshire compared more or less favourably with those of the area that I represent. Perhaps not surprisingly, I found that there were many general areas of similarity, even where local circumstances may make the specifics quite distinct. It confirmed to me that the overall conclusions of the committee's report are applicable across Scotland.

What struck me most and confirmed my prior experience was that the expectations of the private sector are far too often at odds with the structures for the employment programmes that are designed and run by public sector agencies such as Jobcentre Plus and Skills Development Scotland. That is why it is right that the report calls for the earliest possible private sector involvement, so that employment initiatives have the best possible chance to succeed in meeting the needs of the business sectors that we will rely on to provide the sustainable economic growth that we all desire.

A recent meeting that I held with a youth training group in my area highlighted one of the main points raised with us in Ardrossan, which was that public agencies are so intent on delivering numbers of people through the system that too often they lose focus on matching the needs of employers with the skills and abilities of those who are looking to find work, especially those who are furthest away from the job market.

A number of participants in Ardrossan commented that they would rather have fewer trainees with longer periods in training than lots of people going through schemes in short bursts, only to find themselves devoid of the employability skills needed to make their transition into the workplace more viable and sustainable. That chimed with what I was told in Lanarkshire, where there is genuine concern that SDS is so focused

on inputting large numbers of jobseekers that it is not effectively and sustainably delivering people into the workplace.

Too often, it would appear that SDS identifies the outcome that it wants and then tries to fit round small and medium-sized enterprise pegs into square training place holes that it has designed to meet its targets, rather than the needs of the business community.

That is why it is important to emphasise another conclusion of the committee's report. There has to be much more robust, independent evaluation of current Scottish Government skills and employment initiatives. Evidence has to be produced to show how employment programmes, rather than simply counting the number of people who go through the system, actually support people into sustainable, valuable and worthwhile employment.

We often hear that businesses and Government are under intense pressure to become more strategic about developing and assessing employability initiatives and the skills sets that need to be created to meet current and envisaged skills shortages. Business groups claim to be linking strategic planning more directly with training, development and recruitment, while our education and skills system claims to be moving toward skills-based outcomes. Those messages were delivered repeatedly throughout the inquiry.

Government agencies were identified as being keen on certifying learners' employability skills—be they modern apprenticeships, Scottish vocational qualifications or other vocational courses—as a means of indicating that people have been enabled to negotiate their transition to the world of work. What is missing is robust evidence that that is being achieved.

The committee's inquiry shows that while employers and educators know that the development of skills is essential to Scotland's competitiveness and growth in highly competitive global markets, they find it difficult to take effective, concerted action to establish programmes for delivering those skills.

Whether or not it disagrees with that opinion, SDS appears to be unclear about what employability skills are, how they are connected to one another and how to approach the process of developing them. The early problems in relation to the my world of work website are clear evidence of that. I would not make a general point of attacking the website—I want good initiatives to be introduced and information technology can be used to enhance young people's learning experiences. However, careers advisers in SDS have told me of their concern that, although the my world of work website can be a useful tool,

there is now a lack of personal contact. They fear that, metaphorically speaking, careers advisers will be left standing at the school gate, hoping to catch the students with whom they used to engage one-to-one before they disappear down the road, never to be brought back into the advisory service again.

There are problems and it is not good enough just to say that the my world of work website is a great idea. It may well be, but if problems are being identified, they must be addressed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Angela Constance. Briefly, please.

Angela Constance: I will be brief, Presiding Officer. I wonder whether Michael McMahon would acknowledge that Skills Development Scotland works hard with employers to ensure that a career guidance service gives young people advice about where jobs are today and tomorrow. SDS has also developed, in partnership with employers and based on employers' needs, the our skillsforce web service, which is very much about encompassing early identification of things such as skills shortages.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McMahon, please draw to a close.

Michael McMahon: I do not dispute at all what the minister said, but my point is that, throughout our inquiry, the point was repeatedly made that the connection with the tools that SDS uses is not being made. There is no evidence that the outcomes are being delivered in the way that we would hope.

From the evidence that I heard during the inquiry, I think that longer-term strategic thinking and planning on sustainable, long-term and deliverable outcomes has been sacrificed on the altar of short-term target-driven results. The inquiry should teach us that lesson and the debate should help to convey that message further. We need to emphasise that message more—we need quality training over quantity being put through the system with too little or too limited effect.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should close, please.

Michael McMahon: It remains to be seen whether the Scottish Government will hear the message that the Finance Committee heard and create the space to deliver the long-term strategy that the inquiry strongly suggests that we need. I hope that the Scottish Government will do that.

16:00

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Like other members, I congratulate the committee members and thank them for their

considerable efforts. The report focuses mainly on preparing potential employees for work and in particular on those who are most distant from the prospect of early employment. There are perhaps two other factors that affect prospects. One is having control over all aspects of our economy, and the other is a bit more subtle—it is an aspect that we could do something about and it relates to employers.

I have just gone through a recruitment exercise for my constituency office. It did not involve people whom I would describe as hard to employ, but it illustrated something that is quite important. We had a good-quality group of applicants, all of whom were sourced through the website that I run. We brought in five applicants for an interview, before which we had a 30-minute practical test. The interview picked up on things from that test.

That process was not quite as straightforward as members might think, because it turned out that three of the five people whom we brought in could not commence the skills test, as they had neither pen nor pencil in their pocket. That told me something about me as an employer as much as it told me something about the potential employees. We are moving to an electronic world; as an employer, am I still stuck in the old world when I assess candidates' qualities? As others have—properly—said, when we take on new people, we bring in new attitudes and new skills, which will be enormously valuable.

The committee has not neglected that issue. At paragraph 184, it says:

“The Committee ... considers it crucial that SMEs”—

which are large recruiters—

“receive appropriate support to enable them to offer sustainable employment opportunities to those furthest from the labour market.”

That picks up on Minerva People's point that few SME businesses have a human resources department or a specialist with the necessary skills and experience in recruitment and selection. I am glad that the cabinet secretary's response to that point was that it is necessary to look at a bit of management training for small companies.

We must look at the recruitment process. A successful recruitment process is not simply about ensuring continuity for the enterprise concerned, but about getting new skills and attitudes into companies and ensuring that they benefit from the process—that means not just filling a chair but filling minds with new ideas.

As she did in December, Kezia Dugdale has raised today the issue of the my world of work website. I took the opportunity to see whether I am suitable for anything and I found that, at my age and with my skills set, there are limited

opportunities for me—thank goodness I got lucky and I got here.

We are absolutely underplaying the role of computers in training and educating people. It is clear that Kezia Dugdale will not be flying in the near future. The majority of the first revenue flights of the A380 Airbus—the latest aircraft into the fleet—are undertaken by pilots who have never flown that aircraft type before those first revenue flights. That is because, nowadays, the computers and simulators do the whole job.

We are moving towards a position in which computers can, by drawing on the skills and knowledge of a wide range of people and delivering them through a single access point, genuinely provide a set of skills that are much greater than those that can be delivered one on one. However, that does not remove the need for one-on-one interaction, which remains important too.

The committee looked at the my world of work website, and SDS made the point that an individual who wants to speak to an adviser can do so. However, the website personalises the computer experience based on the input from the people who use it. To imagine that using a computer involves the loss of personalisation is to fail to understand how modern computer systems should and do work. SDS also said that work coaches will work with and case manage young people, so it is a hybrid system—and properly so—that involves computers and other aspects.

People will have to change. Employers—such as me in my constituency office—and employees will be very different. The world will probably see very few people using pens and pencils in 10, 20 or 30 years' time. I do not know when exactly that will be, but the evidence shows that it is happening already. That is the world for which we must ensure that people are equipped.

To adapt what St Thomas Aquinas said—I think that it was him; I am never quite sure—“Oh Lord, give me change, but let it not change anything.” That is often the way that people feel about things.

One point that we have not mentioned so far concerns a disadvantaged sector that it might be worth making a further effort to look at: we need to get people who have suffered from mental ill health back into work. That is a significant problem in our society, and it is a difficult area. People who have suffered from mental ill health particularly benefit from getting back into work, and from the social interaction as well as the financial benefits.

16:07

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Good afternoon, Presiding Officer, and a happy new year to all.

There can be no pride in the fact that the proportion of our young people who are not in employment, education or training has stagnated since 1996. I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate on improving employability. The Finance Committee's report focuses on youth employability and mentions those who are experiencing high levels of multiple deprivation. However, there is a great deal of diversity within that group and one size does not fit all: it never has and never will.

I whole-heartedly agree with the report that there is a need for a support package that is flexible enough to deal with the variety of needs that young people face. One issue that should be recognised is the large impact of youth unemployment among ethnic minority young people, as the unemployment rate is approximately twice that of the indigenous community. Modern apprenticeships are a good first step towards combating that, but Skills Development Scotland figures show that visible ethnic minority communities have only 1.2 per cent of young people in modern apprenticeships, which is very sad.

We in Scotland need to get our act together and work to reduce unemployment. The Government needs to get out there and find companies that would be interested in investing in Scotland and in giving our skilled, willing and hard-working workforce an opportunity to prove themselves. Businessmen such as Willie Haughey, and Glasgow City Council, have supported the modern apprenticeship scheme.

Those efforts are very welcome and they are to be encouraged right across Scotland. Time and again, we fail to recognise the important role that industry can play. We fail to recognise and understand the contribution that is made by many businesspeople. We have never gone out of our way to encourage them or to congratulate them on the efforts that they make on our behalf.

I also ask the cabinet secretary whether the youth employment policy has been equality impact assessed. It would be interesting to see the findings of such an assessment. Many of the schemes that are mentioned in the report are focused on school leavers, colleges, and people who are dropping out of higher education. However, the report does not address many issues in other communities that still have young people who have left their first-time employment and have not been able to get re-employment in jobs that they are trained to do.

I remind the cabinet secretary about the cuts that have been made to college funding. I know that it is a sore point, but it is an important one. It has been recognised that there was a shortfall in funding and the First Minister had to apologise for that. Although I do not wish to ask the First Minister these questions, I have absolutely no hesitation in asking the minister and the cabinet secretary what they are going to do about that. The shortfall was recognised. Will they reinvest that amount in our colleges? Will they add that amount to next year's college budget? Let the First Minister's apology not be a hollow one; let us put things right.

Our colleges do a wonderful job; no one has questioned that. Our colleges have done much, so it was quite sad when the cabinet secretary suggested that some courses were perhaps not worthy of support. I do not believe that there is any college course that is not worthy of support. People talk about flower arranging not being important but, believe me, they soon find out how important it is when they try to get someone to put together a bouquet for them.

No training course should be undermined. We insult our young people when we do that. Not everybody will be a rocket scientist, but everybody is part of the community, they are part of our responsibility, and they are part and parcel of the structure of Scotland. They must be supported. If they want to go to college and do such courses, that is exactly what should happen.

As a nation, we have proven ourselves time and again. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind or, I am sure, in anyone else's, that, given the opportunity, our young people can produce, perform and outdo anyone else. That is a matter of record. I am not boasting just because I am Scottish. It is down in black and white and it is part of history. We can do it if we are given the opportunity. Let us do that.

16:13

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

I welcome the debate. I was a member of the Finance Committee for a large part of the inquiry, although that was some months ago. The committee's inquiry and the debate are timely and I congratulate past and present committee members who have put the work into the report that we are discussing today. I also extend the greetings of the season and wish everyone a very happy 2013.

One of the things that comes across from the report and the discussions that the committee had when I was a member is that the key to the approach is partnership. No one sector has a monopoly of wisdom on, or responsibility for,

delivering better outcomes and improving employability within Scotland, or for improving opportunities for young people who find it difficult to get into employment. All sectors and all organisations need to look at what they are doing—and at what they can do—to deliver better outcomes. I will focus on that theme during my speech.

Last year, I had the great pleasure of attending the inaugural discover opportunities awards at the West Park Centre in Dundee, which celebrated the work that the Dundee Partnership does to help to get people into sustainable employment. At the ceremony, a number of people were given awards for the work that they have done, both as employers and as employees, as a result of the schemes that have been set up in the area. The Dundee Partnership has done good work and should be looked at as a model that could be replicated elsewhere.

We can also look at models in other areas. I note that the written submission from Scotland's Colleges mentions Dundee College's pupil access to college and employability—PACE—programme and the successes there. The programme offers

“a full-time programme for pupils in their last 6 months of school and a part-time programme for pupils in their last 12 months.”

It often re-engages

“young people who have a range of complex needs and who have disengaged from mainstream educational provision.”

It provides

“48 full-time places and 32 part-time places”

and is open to

“young people who are affected by family circumstances; health or disability; social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or the learning environment.”

There is a crucial element to that—which I will come back to—in that it looks beyond the skills sets that we provide people with, to the lives and lifestyles that people lead. We need to consider that when we are looking at employability and at improving pathways to employment.

In that regard, I also highlight the example of Aberdeen Foyer, with which, I know, both the cabinet secretary and the minister are familiar and which does a fantastic amount of good work. My colleague Dennis Robertson's comments about the buoyant economy of the north-east of Scotland are certainly true in the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire context, but within that buoyant economy there are still pockets of deprivation, problems and individuals who find it difficult to access employment. That is why the work that Aberdeen Foyer does is so important. Its learning houses, which are based in Peterhead and

Fraserburgh in Mr Stevenson's constituency, offer training and support to people who might otherwise not be able to access such resources. It also has in place a Prince's Trust team that provides a programme of individual challenges and teamwork in the community, thereby giving young people aged 16 to 25 an opportunity that enables them to develop their confidence, motivation and skills.

Aberdeen Foyer also has a get ready for work programme, which is designed to assist young people who may need additional support to make the transition beyond school into the world of work. The programme lasts for up to 26 weeks, although individuals do not have to stay for the entire 26 weeks, and some will not require to stay for that time. All those programmes demonstrate that good work is being done out there; we should be looking at that good work to see whether it can be replicated elsewhere.

We should also consider the role that community partnerships can play. In that regard, I commend the Aberdeenshire employability strategy, which has been produced by a range of organisations, including Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen Foyer and others. It includes a number of outcomes that the organisations want to achieve. I was interested to see that one of the outcomes is a reduction in homelessness, which they see as being crucial to dealing with employability.

That brings me back to the point that the issue is not just about skills sets; it is also about lifestyles. Who Cares? Scotland made that point in relation to care leavers. If someone's background and lifestyle behind the world of work are chaotic or problematic and there are issues within it, that will affect not just their ability to access employment or to be suitable for employment, but their ability to sustain employment. We need to bear that in mind as part of the debate. As members have mentioned, it is important not just to get people to the stage at which they can turn up for interview and succeed in getting a job, but to ensure that they have the ability and confidence to sustain that employment. That is why I believe that, if we were to look at the issue as being only about development of skills, we would miss the point. A much wider societal approach needs to be taken to ensure that people have balanced lifestyles, which will help them to sustain employment once they find it.

16:19

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Although I am a member of the Finance Committee now, I was not a member when I heard evidence on employability. However, as other members have attested to, employability ties

in with many other issues across our constituencies—not the least of which is multiple deprivation.

Some people may think that areas of multiple deprivation are located only in urban areas and that regions such as the Highlands and Islands are somewhat immune from its worst effects. That could not be further from the truth. As the Government's Scottish index of multiple deprivation shows, Caithness, Ross-shire, Inverness, the Western Isles, Argyll and Bute and Orkney—to name but a few—all contain data zones that have been identified as being among the most deprived parts of Scotland. That becomes more alarming when we consider that the data zones in rural Scotland often cover very large areas that perhaps mask even more acute problems in certain towns and villages. Although the Government has produced its own SIMD data map, which is useful for examining the issue, *Holyrood* magazine recently highlighted a Google map that had been overlaid with the SIMD data and which provides an easier snapshot of deprivation. I cannot recommend it highly enough to colleagues.

A key message that came out of the evidence sessions, and for which I have much sympathy, is that it is important to place employability in the wider context. As others have emphasised in today's debate, employability is not about getting people into just any job, but is about finding the right job for the right person and helping to make it as easy as possible for long-term benefits to be accrued by, and confidence to be instilled in, people who may have been looking for a job for some time. In my opinion, that must mean a strong focus on the small and medium-sized enterprise sector. In my experience—both as an employee of small businesses and as an employer—the trust, responsibility and camaraderie that are gained through working for a small business can be worth their weight in gold to employees.

I believe that Highlands and Islands Enterprise was right to point to its work with Nigg Skills Academy and the Social Enterprise Academy in helping to establish learning and employment opportunities in the Highlands and Islands, as well as to its work on supporting the region's small businesses that hope to grow. Employment can take on many different guises—it is not always the direct Monday-to-Friday, 9-to-5 route—and it is vital that we support those from every possible angle.

However, I acknowledge the issues that have been raised by the Federation of Small Businesses, whose evidence pointed out that small businesses often recruit on an informal or personal basis rather than as part of any national scheme. In addition, many employers in my region

employ seasonally, which adds another layer of complexity to the debate. The FSB has also recently provided further evidence on the barriers that small businesses in the Highlands and Islands face. It is an extraordinarily good read that highlights some of the problems that we face in overcoming such barriers.

In conclusion, I thank every organisation that gave evidence on employability to the committee last year, and I thank the then members of the committee for their work. It is vital that Parliament continue to examine issues that affect communities across the country where, through our actions and attention, we can bring about the necessary change.

I will add a final comment on Hanzala Malik's criticism of the Government for challenging the colleges. We cannot have change without change. From evidence that I have received, I can say that young people have been let down by those self-same colleges, so we have to investigate that and make change happen. That is part of what we need to achieve here; I hope that we do it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. I call Gavin Brown, to whom I give a generous six minutes.

16:24

Gavin Brown: We have had a useful debate on the Finance Committee's report. Weight has been added to that report by members who do not serve on the committee but who have brought to the chamber their individual experiences. I hope that that will help the Government to reflect on its formal response to the committee.

The importance of the issue cannot be overstated. Elaine Murray captured the spirit well when she quoted evidence to the Christie commission from the Improvement Service on the educational gap between the bottom 20 per cent and the top 20 per cent. She referred to what I think is the terrifying statistic that

"the bottom 20% at age 15"

are

"performing as if they have 5 years less schooling than the top 20%".

That sends out the message loud and clear to all political parties in Parliament that much needs to be done. With such a large gap, an enormous amount of effort and time will be needed to achieve meaningful change, which is why the tone of today's debate is extremely important. The solutions that we put in place will have to outlive the political cycle and, probably, several sessions of Parliament, if they are to make any meaningful difference.

I want to return briefly to single-year funding for the third sector, on which I focused in my opening remarks. Since I spoke, the Government has not had a chance to respond to my points, but I repeat that I hope that the Government gives serious consideration to the committee's requests on that, and to what the SCVO said in its briefing for the debate.

Because of the removal of ring fencing in local authorities—a measure with which I agree—it is difficult for the Government to demand action, but it could make a big difference in outcomes by simply shining a light on the issue and by taking a confidential approach so that individual third sector organisations can speak up. I encourage the Government to do that as soon as possible. Many organisations signed up to the joint third sector statement, so the Government is perfectly entitled to ask why they are not living up to the ideals of that statement.

Another fundamental issue that was touched on in the debate and the report is how initiatives are evaluated. Again, the Government has made the right noises on that. At the Finance Committee on 31 October, Mr Swinney said:

“Underpinning all those efforts is an emphasis on getting the best possible value from the range of investments that we make.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 31 October 2012; c 1731.]

Evaluation is key, although I accept that a balance needs to be struck, because putting effort and resources into evaluation takes time and resource away from the front line. We do not want to overevaluate because that can hamper what we are doing, but based on evidence to the committee, evaluation is at present simply not taking place. Again, in evidence to the committee, Mr Swinney said:

“The Government has not undertaken a self-standing independent evaluation of all those programmes to then decide whether to continue funding.”—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 31 October 2012; c 1735.]

Malcolm Chisholm touched on a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation from 2010, which is entitled “The impact of devolution: employment and employability”. It is worth dwelling on a quotation on evaluation from that report. It states:

“At present, in relation to employment and employability, we can document much action, but little strong evidence of resulting improved access to jobs, earnings and progression in work”

when compared with a control group. The report implores the Government to look seriously at evaluation and to invest heavily in it, and the committee has reiterated that.

We need robust and independent evaluation of initiatives. Money is tight, so it is important that we get best value—not just good value—from the

money that is spent. Many of the other issues that the committee considered depend on robust evaluation. Without serious evaluation, it is difficult to consider the relative successes of interventions, the barriers to success and what further action can be taken.

The final issue on which I will touch, which has been mentioned in a number of speeches, is how to improve business engagement. Improvements have been made in dealing with businesses over the past couple of years. There are some outstanding examples of businesses throughout Scotland getting involved in a number of initiatives, but there is a slight gap or weakness in engagement with smaller businesses. That gap is not only the Government's fault; it is more difficult for such businesses to engage because the same person may have several roles in addition to trying to engage with young people. However, as Jamie Hepburn mentioned, the FSB said in its report that more businesses could take on young people who are furthest from the labour market. The gap may have been only 5 or 6 per cent but, because of the difference that that 5 or 6 per cent could make, it would be well worth the effort and investment.

I see that my time is at an end, so I shall leave it there.

16:30

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I join other members in wishing everyone in the chamber all the best for 2013.

The debate is an important one with which to start the year. I found the committee's report to be extremely useful. I hope that it will add to our knowledge and understanding of this important topic.

The report rightly points out the cost to Government of unemployment through increased benefits payments and loss of tax revenues. It also talks about the cost to the economy of lost productivity. We are also told that unemployment causes permanent scars and impacts on people's future life chances.

For me, the greatest cost is the cost to the individual. The health impact of unemployment is the same as smoking 200 cigarettes a day, and the impacts on mental health and self-esteem are immeasurable. Therefore, we should not demonise those who are unemployed because doing so simply makes matters worse. We need to consider ways of improving employability and finding solutions for them. Indeed, if we tackle the problem, we could probably also make huge inroads into health inequalities in Scotland—a problem that has been stubborn for a number of years.

The report rightly considers those who are distant from the labour market. I will touch on looked-after children. Looked-after children need support beyond their teens. Many young people have family support throughout their lives, and we need to replicate that for people for whom the state is the parent. Support needs to be individually targeted.

In its written submission, Barnardo's said that

"intervention periods of 13 or 26 weeks often are not long enough"

and Scotland's Colleges talked about needing to work with care leavers for two years. However, support for looked-after children must go on until they are settled into sustainable jobs and are able to continue self-sufficiently.

A number of members, including Kezia Dugdale, made the point that Scottish Government support stops at the age of 19. Among young people aged 20 to 24, unemployment is rising, so we need to consider how to support young people beyond the age of 19. We especially need to ensure that those who are looked after receive support.

Other members talked about access to childcare, the costs of which are far too high. Those who have families often lean on family support for childcare, but again, people who have been looked-after as children have none of that support and are often driven out of work if they go on to have families. Young people who do not have the support of their own families often start to have families earlier in order to have that family affiliation around them. We need to try to support them through that and to understand why it happens.

We also need to provide one-to-one support. It is not about quantity; we need quality individual support to deal with complex problems. Many members mentioned problems such as generational unemployment. If nobody in a young person's family has worked, how can they possibly aspire to work? Other problems include drug and alcohol abuse or having a criminal record. Elaine Murray also mentioned the stark impact that poor education has on 15-year-olds. What chance do they have if they are already five years behind?

Hanzala Malik mentioned the needs of ethnic minorities, which are often ignored. Mark McDonald mentioned homelessness, which is a problem for looked-after children and for anyone who is facing unemployability, as homeless people do not have an address or the secure lifestyle that is needed to get into work.

All those things need to be tackled, as do soft skills, such as being able to turn up to work, knowing how to interact with the colleagues with

whom a person works and making those relationships work for the person.

A lot of people mentioned good examples in their areas; I will mention one in Inverness. Artysans is a social enterprise cafe that takes on people who are hard to place and are distant from the labour market, and prepares them for work. It gives them skills, including many soft skills such as how to turn up for work dressed properly, and to be in a position from which they can begin work. The people from Artysans told me that although they sometimes put in years of work making somebody ready for employment, there is nowhere for those people to move on to and there is real difficulty in creating new places for others coming after them.

That is why I truly believe that the public sector has a role to play. At a point when—as has been mentioned in the debate—there are so many people unemployed who have had career paths and who have confidence and qualifications, how can people with special needs possibly compete with them at interview or, indeed, at the job-application stage? We need to consider ring fencing of certain jobs in the public sector, and the Scottish Government could lead the way. Local government, the health service and agencies need to consider ring fencing jobs in order specifically to set them aside for people with special needs, which will give those people the chance to have good and gainful employment.

A number of members talked about colleges, which have a role in reaching hard-to-reach people. It is very disappointing that at this point, when we really need that input, budgets are being cut. The impact of that will be that colleges will prioritise that for which they get the better return for their money, which will push the more hard-to-reach people out of the picture. Our having those people compete with people who have more opportunities does not allow us to help them.

I am aware that I may be running out of time, but I will touch on online assistance. A lot of people mentioned the my world of work website. People who live in areas of deprivation might also have no access to IT or online support. We need to ensure that areas of deprivation are not replicated by Government policy, through there being too much available online and not enough being accessible to people regardless of where their community is and whether they have access to broadband.

We need to take steps to make sure that we do not have a further lost generation. If anything, this debate surely tells us of the impact that the situation has had in the past. We cannot allow it to continue into the future; we need to find solutions now.

16:38

John Swinney: This has been an important, informative and helpful debate. I do not want to put thoughts into Gavin Brown's mind, but at my evidence session during the committee's consideration of this issue I think I rather surprised him with my response to his question. He asked:

"If the committee concluded"

that a different approach had to be taken,

"would the Government take that seriously?"

I said in response:

"It goes without saying that I will consider carefully the committee's conclusions in its inquiry."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 31 October 2012; c 1748.]

That is the tone that I take in this debate and I thank members genuinely for their contributions.

I would characterise our approach to employability by saying that we are part-way through a journey. We are undertaking reforms and changes because, frankly, we think that they need to be undertaken. That involves difficult transitions and changes and it means that, in some cases, things are not done in the way that they have been done in the past. We will defend our approach to that.

I also want to say to Parliament that the Finance Committee has contributed handsomely to thinking about how we can best take forward some of the challenges that we face at this time.

I will try to cover as much ground as I can today, but obviously we will give substantive thought to all the recommendations in the Finance Committee's report and consider how we can best advance them.

I come on to specific points that colleagues have made, and begin with Mr Malik's point about whether the youth employment strategy has been equality impact assessed. It has, as all the Government's budget work has been, of course. A thorough process is undertaken to assess the equality impact of the budget. In preparing the budget, I put a lot of time into that with the equalities budget action group, and I am obviously held to account by the Equal Opportunities Committee in Parliament. As members will observe, the Government takes that part of the budget process enormously seriously.

On Mr Malik's point about whether there can be greater participation in employability programmes by individuals from our ethnic minorities, the Minister for Youth Employment would be only too happy to meet him to discuss such questions if he would like to pursue that approach.

Let me deal with some of the other more general points that members have made.

Hanzala Malik: I welcome the opportunity to discuss possible ways forward. That is a very positive move.

The cabinet secretary suggested that an assessment has been done, but that is not reflected in the figures. That is the point that I tried to make. Perhaps the discussions with him on how we can improve matters will make a difference.

John Swinney: In a sense, my first point in the debate was that we are on a journey. We must achieve a number of different outcomes, some of which will relate to the participation of individuals from our ethnic minorities. For that reason, we are very happy to have that discussion.

Mr Gavin Brown concentrated on the issue of single-year funding, and I have enormous sympathy with that. I said to the committee that I did not consider it to be particularly legitimate—perhaps I did not use those words, but I have used them today—if I gave a three-year budget and people were not prepared to give three-year funding clarity to relevant participating organisations. Obviously, I will look at whether there is more that we can do.

Mr Brown made a point about the removal of ring fencing. That removes a certain amount of control, but I think that all of us would agree that I could not find a sustainable argument that would say that giving an organisation three-year funding is not a better position that clarifies the organisation's funding arrangements and which could somehow be outclassed by giving it one-year funding. Common sense tells us what is the better approach in that respect.

There has been a lot of discussion about engagement with business. My colleague Jamie Hepburn made a number of points in that respect, as did Michael McMahon. I cited to the committee my experience of dealing with a company at a national economic forum meeting. It said to us rather bluntly, "We don't have time to keep up with all of what you lot are on about; we're running a business." That is a fair point. Therefore, we have tried to ensure that the work that is undertaken in the Scottish employability forum and in trying to simplify and make more cohesive and person-centred employment programmes takes into account that private sector feedback. I am grateful to Mr Brown for his acknowledgement that the position is getting better. I would not stand here and say that I think that it is perfect, but improvement is being undertaken, and I assure members that it will remain a significant part of our focus.

Mr McMahon raised the issue of training provision. I think that he said that the focus must be more on quality than quantity. I accept that. In a sense, that is part of my response to Mr Malik's

point about some of the college courses. The Government has sustained full-time equivalent college provision, because we have concentrated on developing the more entrenched programmes exactly in the fashion that Mr McMahon talks about. Those approaches give individuals a better chance of getting into the labour market if they develop a more deeply set skills base. So, there is a clear linkage between the employability debate and the college reform that the Government is undertaking, because we are shifting the emphasis of college provision to ensure that we take forward and realise the objectives on quality as distinct from quantity.

Michael McMahon: I thank the cabinet secretary for responding so positively to that point. Yes, it was in part in relation to college places, but it was also based on evidence that we heard, particularly in Ardrossan, from workplace training providers, who felt that they were being restricted by having to get numbers through workplaces rather than being allowed to work with young people for a longer time so that they were more able to retain those people in the workplace.

John Swinney: There is clearly an area in relation to training provision that we need to examine more fully if we are to fulfil the challenge that I have set of taking a person-centred approach that delivers better outcomes for individuals. There may well be a case for looking at some of the issues that Mr McMahon raises, which of course I undertake to do as part of the response to the debate.

The question of evaluation has also been prevalent. I have said that the Government will undertake evaluation work in this respect. Of course, in public finance terms, we are obliged to undertake evaluation work to ensure that the approaches are effective, and we will endeavour to do so and report relevantly to Parliament. We will of course be mindful of Mr Brown's caveat about the sensible balance to be struck between evaluation and burdening programmes with bureaucracy.

Malcolm Chisholm made a very interesting contribution in which he cited the example of the Barnardo's works programme, which perhaps makes my point about some of the effective approaches that can be taken. That programme is an example of an approach that is anchored in the third sector but dependent on strong private sector connections into the bargain. It symbolises the type of approach that the Government is trying to encourage to provide long-term continuity and substantive support.

A number of points have been made about how different organisations contribute to the agenda of employability, which is a complex area of policy. My colleagues Joan McAlpine and Roderick

Campbell made points about the fact that constitutional responsibility for such areas of policy is currently divided, which is absolutely a correct assessment of the situation. What the Government tries to do in that context is to work collaboratively with local authorities and the UK Government. We are of course dealing with a set of programmes that are formulated at UK level. In my opinion, there are strong arguments—I think that this was reflected in the debate—for our tailoring those propositions to suit the needs of people in Scotland. Of course, we must have the constitutional responsibility to enable us to do that.

Another helpful aspect of the process would be for us to be able to establish linkages between benefits, taxation and employment policies that would allow us to complete some of the approaches that are necessary to support the journey into employment for individuals. The Government is under no illusion: the journey into employment for a number of individuals in our society will need a significant amount of support that will need to be tailored to their requirements. Dennis Robertson enlightened the debate with a vivid illustration of why ignoring that factor does not lead us to particularly good outcomes.

I give Parliament the assurance today that the Government is determined to do all that it can to improve the employability outcomes for individuals and that we will work effectively in reflecting on the Finance Committee's report to ensure that we make the correct judgments about programmes. I can assure Parliament that the constructive tone of today's debate will form a helpful contribution to refining the Government's approach, which it is in all our interests to get correct. If we do get it correct, we will support many of our fellow citizens back into employment and contribute to the economic recovery of the Scottish economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Mason to wind up the debate on behalf of the Finance Committee. Mr Mason, you have until 5 o'clock.

16:49

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer—you become more generous every time I stand up to speak.

It gives me pleasure to close the debate on behalf of the committee. I thank all the members who have studied the report and spoken today, especially those who had to look at the report fresh and who do not sit on the committee.

One thing that strikes me about the debate is the wide recognition of some of the problems and challenges that we, as a society, face, and the tone of the debate has been extremely healthy from that point of view. I welcome, too, the fact

that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth has promised a formal response to the committee on the many points raised in the report.

Later on I would like to touch on some of the points that members have raised, but I particularly want to speak in more detail about three things that have been mentioned. First is the complexity of the landscape, which was mentioned by a number of members, including Kezia Dugdale and Dennis Robertson, and was touched upon by Kenneth Gibson, the committee convener, in his opening speech.

As we acknowledged in our report, part of the problem is that having various strands of Government involved at UK, Scottish and local levels leads to complexity. The number of strategies and schemes is considerable, and we identify a number of them in our report. For example, from the Scottish Government, there are the Skills for Scotland skills strategy—I find that a bit of a mouthful—opportunities for all and its overarching economic strategy.

The report notes that Skills Development Scotland is refreshing its get ready for work programme and is working with employers' groups and others over its design, content and so on. I am not exactly sure who all those others are, but a point made in the committee's external employability workshops was whether businesses and the third sector were being fully engaged by the public sector. That is an area that we want to focus on in developing and rolling out the strategies.

A point made across the three workshops that a number of Finance Committee members attended, which was in relation to the various training schemes available, was that there seemed to be unnecessary duplication of effort and too many funding streams, initiatives and evaluation processes. As one participant put it, the various schemes are

"knocking on the doors of employers, which is causing confusion."

Another point made was that there was sometimes an assumption that, when new money becomes available, the public sector will retain it to deliver the service and not look closely enough at getting the private sector involved. A similar point made at the Ardrossan workshop was that businesses should be allowed to get funding to provide training directly, rather than funding being allocated to the employment agencies to provide training that is sometimes not suitable.

In its evidence, the Federation of Small Businesses said:

"Small businesses do not have time to look around for opportunities to support young people into employment."

The importance of small business has been made a number of times this afternoon, including by Jamie Hepburn. The FSB also said:

"Small businesses are wary of national schemes as they suspect them of being overly bureaucratic, involving a high administrative burden, requiring significant compromise and cost for the business."

Even larger businesses, including Asda, have recognised that. It said:

"We view the current skills and work-support landscape as complex, and we have people in place to deal with it. I understand the problems that small businesses have in that regard."

That point was reinforced by David Comerford of Menzies Hotels, who said:

"Since January, I have received 20 or more calls from different types of organisations, funding bodies and so on and, as was said earlier, it is really difficult to deal with them all. A company usually has only one person to do that work—and in my company that person is me."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 23 May 2012; c 1202 and 1211.]

It has to be said that that comment is from a reasonably-sized hotel group.

The committee recognises that the complexity of the landscape is, in part, due to the split of responsibilities between the UK and the Scottish Governments. However, we note that, even at a Scottish level, there are a significant number of different initiatives, programmes and strategies. We welcome the action that the Scottish Government is taking to provide clarity of information to employers, and we seek confirmation that the initiatives will be regularly monitored and evaluated. We have also invited the Scottish Government to consider whether fewer programmes encompassing greater flexibility and efficiency might be a way forward.

Before I leave that issue, I highlight a point that came up during our external workshops, which is mentioned in our report. In Dumfries, the point was made that it must be worth while for an employer to take on a person for a six-month placement, for example. In Ardrossan the point was made that the Department for Work and Pensions is not keen on long-term placements, because the focus is on getting individuals into paid employment. Participants at the Dundee workshop suggested that the optimum period for work with individuals who are furthest from the labour market is six to 12 months and that continuity of contact is extremely important.

Members touched on age limits for programmes. The accessibility of certain programmes, specifically in the context of age, was discussed during the inquiry. It was suggested that current employment initiatives are too focused on the 16 to 19 age group, which often means that older individuals are excluded.

The committee noted the cabinet secretary's comments about the need for employment initiatives to have parameters and his well-made point about the need for programmes to strike a balance between breadth and focus. However, the committee also noted:

"a number of the Scottish Government programmes which are likely to be of most relevance to those furthest from the labour market are focused on the 16 to 19 year old age group rather than all 16 to 24 year olds"

and therefore exclude people aged 20 and over. The excluded group is likely to include many lone parents who are returning to work. We seek clarification on how decisions were reached on age limits for get ready for work and opportunities for all and on the reason why community jobs Scotland is open only to 16 to 19-year-olds, although it was previously aimed at 18 to 24-year-olds.

The committee noted that the new employer recruitment incentive will come under the auspices of opportunities for all, which suggests that only job seekers aged 16 to 19 might benefit from the scheme. John Wilson and Rod Campbell mentioned the issue, and I welcome the cabinet secretary's commitment to consider the matter in more detail.

In our three workshops, participants said that building and developing confidence and soft or core skills is a challenge. Murdo Fraser talked about that. At one of our round-table evidence sessions, Tricia Hunter of Minerva People said:

"when we have worked one to one with hard-to-place people to find their skills and talents and nurture just one small bit of what they can do, the results have been amazing."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 23 May 2012; c 1211.]

In our debate on the committee's draft budget report before Christmas, I mentioned our session with the David Hume Institute and our discussion about Scotland's human capital. Although much of the focus was on students and the graduates who emerge from the higher and further education systems, there is a relevant parallel to be drawn. Stephen Boyle, of Royal Bank of Scotland, said:

"The human capital challenge emerges not with more highly skilled people but with those who do jobs requiring lower levels of skills and qualifications. If I wanted to worry about something in the human capital sphere in Scotland, it would be that."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 3 October 2012; c 1656.]

That was a useful point. Of course, the focus of our inquiry was the people who might lack such skills or qualifications. I wanted to draw attention to comments at our workshops in that regard, but time is a little tight so I will skip over some of that. Members mentioned some of the useful points that were made, but one or two points have not had the attention that they deserved to have.

Hanzala Malik talked about college cuts, which we have heard about before. A challenge that the Finance Committee presents to all other committees is that if they want more money for an area, they must tell us where the money should come from. If the universities or whoever must receive less money, let us hear about it.

Murdo Fraser talked about work experience, which is vital. The issue came up a lot in the committee and I will talk about it more if I get the opportunity to speak in Thursday's debate on action to support youth employment. My niece is at the University of Sussex, which Murdo Fraser mentioned. I think that students at the university often have at least one year of intense work experience during their degree courses, and my niece certainly seems to be benefiting from the approach. Just yesterday, someone came to do a health and safety assessment for my office, which took about 25 minutes—I hope that that was worth while for the youngster who is coming to us next week.

I very much welcome the fact that the cabinet secretary is open to new thinking and methods and to getting a balance of quantity and quality. The inquiry was useful and I hope that the evidence that was provided, the discussions that we had and the report that the committee produced make a useful contribution to improving opportunities for people who are furthest from the jobs market.

I support the motion in the name of the Finance Committee's convener.

Decision Time

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. The question is, that motion S4M-05276, in the name of Kenneth Gibson, on the Finance Committee's report on improving employability, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations in the Finance Committee's 8th Report, 2012 (Session 4): Improving employability (SP Paper 226).

Addiction

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-05128, in the name of Kenneth Gibson, on the origins of addiction. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament highlights the Adverse Childhood Experience study, The Origins of Addictions, which bridges a relationship between adverse childhood experiences, including childhood sexual abuse, and the development of addiction problems in later life; understands that the American study analysed 17,000 adults and discovered that the compulsive use of nicotine, alcohol and injected street drugs increases proportionally to the intensity of adverse life experiences during childhood, whereby the risk of becoming an injected drug user increased as much as 46-fold when compared with no exposure to adverse experiences; notes the significance of the Addictions Psychology Audit by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which found that 49% of patients receiving counselling had suffered from childhood sexual abuse; acknowledges the dependency of addictions for survivors of childhood sexual abuse in which resorting to drugs or alcohol often allows survivors to escape from the horrific and traumatic memories and flashbacks, and believes that addiction services and psychological support would treat addiction more effectively as an experience-dependent and not just a substance-dependent condition.

17:02

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I thank the MSPs from all parties who signed my motion to enable this debate to take place. I also thank Anne Macdonald, the Scottish Association for Mental Health, Health in Mind and colleagues from the cross-party group on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, who have assisted my preparation and were keen to highlight an issue never before debated in the Scottish Parliament. I am pleased that CPG members are in the gallery and that MSP CPG colleagues will take part in the debate.

The Scottish Government estimate of the number of people aged 15 to 64 years old with problem drug abuse in Scotland in 2009-10 was 59,600. That may be an underestimate as it is difficult to evaluate an often hidden population. The national health service also estimates that around 9 per cent of men and 4 per cent of women show signs of alcohol dependence and with nearly one in four Scots smoking cigarettes, addiction is a chronic problem for many.

Addictions can be defined as persistent, compulsive dependence towards a behaviour or substance. They are often beyond an addict's self-control and he or she may be unable to distinguish between want of a substance and the need for it. Often addicts are portrayed as people whose bad

life choices have led them into addiction and on some occasions that is indeed the case. There is a sense that problems are self-inflicted and there is a lack of sympathy towards individuals who are perceived as being responsible for their own addiction. However, addictions have many causes: biological, social or psychological.

The direct cause has not yet been definitively discovered; if it had been, perhaps many in Scotland would not now face a battle against drugs, alcohol and tobacco. Biological factors such as the brain's orbital-frontal cortex, which can differ between addict and non-addict, and predisposed genetic components are recognised. For example, seven genes have been identified as predisposing an individual to smoking, including variants in nicotine receptor genes, which also predict the success of nicotine replacement therapies. Social causes include addictive substance availability, peer and family pressure when those people have addictions, and social deprivation.

Psychological and physiological dependency, leading to addiction, can take myriad forms—from gambling to drug abuse. Strong evidence supports the predisposition of adverse experiences to drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge that addiction is often an experience-dependent condition rather than just substance dependent. That should underpin the treatment approach and, ultimately, improve the likelihood of recovery.

Psychological causes involving the experience-dependent aspect of addictions often include traumatic adverse experiences in childhood leading to an increased likelihood of someone developing addictions in later life. A major component of such adversity is childhood sexual abuse. A study that was published in the French journal *Annales Médico-psychologiques* highlighted the connection between people being the victims of rape or sexual abuse in childhood and their developing addictions. The study explained that rape is a risk factor for post-traumatic stress disorders and addictive behaviours including alcohol abuse, drug use, repeated suicide attempts and eating disorders. Another study that was published in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* in 2003 found victims of rape to be 13.4 times more likely to develop two or more alcohol-related problems and 26 times more likely to have two or more serious drug-related problems. Those results strengthen the connection between adverse experiences and addictive behaviours.

According to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, nearly 18,000 sexual crimes against children under 16 were recorded in England in 2010-11, which is almost

certainly an underestimate due to underreporting. There is no reason to suggest that, as a proportion of the population, Scottish figures would be very different. The NSPCC also published a report in 2011, "Child abuse and neglect in the UK today", for which more than 6,000 children, young adults and parents were interviewed. The shocking findings were that one in six children aged 11 to 17 had experienced sexual abuse and that 34 per cent of victims did not report the abuse to anyone.

The severe trauma that is suffered by survivors of childhood sexual abuse makes them vulnerable to addictions, and teenagers with alcohol and drug problems are 18 to 21 times more likely to have been sexually abused. Dean X, a survivor, said that to blot out "stuff from my past",

"Every day of my life ... I was taking drugs ... drinking every day from when I woke in the morning ... I took cocaine to work; valium to bring myself back down and I was drinking".

Gordon Y used alcohol to blank out the memory of abuse, too. He said:

"I was alcoholic ... every time people asked I would run a mile, wouldn't even speak to them. I didn't associate it with what happened in the past. I just ... felt that I couldn't understand the different feelings going on, telling myself I wouldn't trust anyone else, the toll it was taking on my body".

Anger, promiscuity and dissociation from emotions such as love and empathy are also symptomatic in many addicted survivors.

The links between adverse experiences and the development of addictions must be understood in order to recognise and manage effectively an addict's condition. It is imperative to investigate the source of an individual's addictions including, in far too many cases, sexual abuse when young—abuse that has damaged their self-esteem and self-confidence and that has led them to believe that addictive and destructive behaviour can help them to escape past nightmares. The link between childhood adversity and addiction must be acknowledged by prevention initiatives. It is important to consider the two components that are involved in the patient's condition: the adverse experience and the addiction. Treatment should integrate the two components, as treatment for the addiction can be effective only when the underpinning experience that caused the addiction is treated. That approach will greatly improve the chance of recovery.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a branch of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, proposes two models to adopt in treating survivors of child abuse and neglect for their addictions. The integrated model addresses dual diagnosis whereby both substance abuse and childhood abuse are treated simultaneously within the same programme. The concurrent model involves

substance abuse treatment with appropriate referrals being made to mental health services for treatment of the childhood abuse. In both models, teamwork between the counsellor who is delivering addiction support and the mental health practitioner who is supplying physiotherapy for the childhood abuse is essential for a successful outcome.

Addiction and counselling services in Scotland offer a very high standard of care to patients. Nevertheless, it is important for services to recognise addictions as experience-dependent conditions and to adapt treatment appropriately. A recent audit of the addictions psychology caseload by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde found that 49 per cent of patients who were receiving counselling had suffered childhood sexual abuse. Improved links with the British Psychological Society Scotland and psychologists working with survivors of childhood sexual abuse were made as a direct result of the study.

Treatment for the survivors of childhood sexual abuse with addictions is very complex, and identifying the link is essential to ensuring appropriate treatment. Services in Scotland need to develop a more trauma-informed service, as neglecting addiction as an experience-dependent condition will impair the success of any treatment. I ask the minister, in responding to the debate, to advise the chamber what progress has been made so far and what steps will be taken to ensure that traumatic experiences are properly taken into account in the treatment of addictions.

17:09

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Kenneth Gibson on securing this important debate. The adverse childhood experiences study, "The Origins of Addiction", confirms the correlation between addictions in adulthood and adverse childhood experiences, including childhood sexual abuse.

Those of us who are members of the cross-party group on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse are only too aware that drink and drug addiction resulting from the trauma of childhood sexual abuse and the impetus to drown or block post-traumatic symptoms such as flashbacks and nightmares have been a huge issue for many years. Despite that, it has been hard to get those individuals recognised centrally on the drug and alcohol agenda. Many of those addicts are parents who have been abused, which not only causes general problems with parenting but means that they tend to be locked in addiction, and fail, time after time, to stay off their addiction. In turn, that raises child protection issues.

Meanwhile, there is a continuous and escalating financial cost to the state and voluntary sector of providing services in an attempt to cope with males and females with those problems. In some respects, we are merely throwing good money after bad because many front-line public services are not geared to deal with childhood sexual abuse. The motion highlights why. Quite simply, addiction would be treated more effectively if addiction services and psychological support treated it

"as an experience-dependent and not just a substance-dependent condition."

In other words, the approach recognises that the root cause of some addictions is an unconscious but compulsive use of materials such as drugs and alcohol in an effort to block out adverse prior life experiences, the majority of which have been concealed by the individual as a result of shame, secrecy or social taboo.

In effect, in the absence of other alternatives for help with and respite from their trauma, survivors of childhood sexual abuse self-medicate using alcohol, tobacco and drugs in order to seek short-term relief to enable them to escape from their horrific and traumatic memories and flashbacks.

In 2009, the Equal Opportunities Committee inquiry report on female offenders in the criminal justice system revealed a significant correlation between childhood abuse leading to substance abuse and offending in adult life. Open Secret in Falkirk, a community-based organisation that provides support services for survivors and their families, has done some excellent work with offenders. The provision of the right services for childhood sexual abuse survivors, delivered in the right way, at the right time, has positive outcomes: it reduces the demand on other services and it is a significant contributor to lowering adult recidivism and offending, including violent offending, in Scotland. That is why Stop It Now! Scotland, the national programme for the prevention of child sexual abuse, delivers basic information on child sexual abuse and existing services throughout the prison population in Scotland.

Most childhood sexual abuse cases remain unreported and undetected because prevention has not been prioritised. Being serious about tackling the root causes of the alcohol and drug addiction of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse not only shows a longer term and informed determination to create a positive lasting change but is an excellent example of where targeted preventative spend can make a huge difference.

Again, I congratulate Kenneth Gibson on bringing the motion to the chamber this evening. I hope the minister, in responding, takes on board

the points raised, particularly about preventative spend.

17:14

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I congratulate Kenneth Gibson on securing this members' business debate on the extremely important issue of the causes of addiction and our attitudes to it. The Scottish Government has introduced a number of key initiatives, including the road to recovery programme, which is the country's first cohesive approach to tackling drug misuse, but addiction remains a huge problem in Scotland. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's addiction services alone are responsible for delivering addiction treatment and care services for 12,000 clients, and delivering such services costs the NHS millions of pounds a year.

For too long, the common response from the public in Glasgow to the public health challenges that are faced in relation to addiction and its accompanying costs to individuals, their friends and families has been to say that that is just the Glasgow way and is part of who we are as Glaswegians, with our sick man of Europe tag. The approach has been more or less to leave it at that, deal with the issue as it arises and not look at the root causes. It remains the case that for many of Glasgow's public health issues the silver bullet is to tackle the underlying deprivation and poverty, but that is a debate for another day.

That is why I was very interested in the work that Mr Gibson's motion mentions on the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and addiction. The study in question took place over two years and involved 17,000 participants. Each participant completed a confidential survey that contained questions about childhood maltreatment and family dysfunction, and gave details of their current health status and behaviours. The survey covered experiences such as emotional, physical or sexual abuse, emotional or physical neglect and growing up in a household where someone was an alcoholic, a drug user, mentally ill or suicidal, where the mother was treated violently or of which a member was imprisoned during the patient's childhood.

Information on any adverse childhood experiences was combined with the result of the patient's physical examination to form the baseline data. Less than a third of the participants reported zero ACEs. When ACEs were reported, the link between them and addiction was found. As the number of ACE conditions increases, so do the chances of being a user of street drugs or of having problems with tobacco or alcohol abuse.

The research found an interesting parallel with the problem of addiction being the solution to a

much deeper problem—that is, one of the ACE conditions. That is why it is far more detrimental to addicts' recovery to believe that their behaviour and subsequent addiction are always the result of poor life choices rather than what they often are—a mask to cover underlying issues.

The masking link was further explored in research that was conducted by Sarah Nelson of the centre for research on families and relationships at the University of Edinburgh and supported by Health in Mind. For that research, a number of interviews were conducted with male survivors of childhood sexual assault. More than half the survivor group became addicted to drink or drugs in their teens and a quarter were addicted before they reached their teens. Half the group also experienced another addiction, such as a gambling addiction, compulsive eating, sexual addiction, compulsive self-harm or workaholism.

One young ex-prisoner used drugs

"to get rid of my problems"—

other members have described that—and

"to make my problems go away. They never did, they just disappeared for ten, fifteen minutes, half an hour, an hour, a day."

Another person said:

"I know I used to drink ... to forget it all".

In talking about his addiction to food and his sexual addiction, one person said:

"I think subliminally I wanted to make myself unattractive ... And then because I felt fat and ugly and horrible because I was putting on weight, I would think, right, I'll go out and try and test anybody to see if they'll have sex with me or not."

All the participants talked about their troubled and addictive relationships with alcohol, drugs, sex, food or work. The common theme is that such relationships are a mask to stop them thinking about what happened to them as children, which is where the origins of their addiction lie.

Not everyone who has an addiction has had a traumatic experience in their childhood, but having an adverse childhood experience substantially increases the likelihood of addiction in later life. For that reason, we must continue to work to ensure that our children are safer than ever before from avoidable harm. If children grow up with a parent in prison, they must be given support from a young age to help them to deal with that in a less destructive way. Safe spaces must be provided for children where they can bring issues of emotional, physical or sexual assault to people who will be able to help them. We must continue to champion the work that is done in the third sector across Scotland by organisations such as Children 1st and the NSPCC.

As well as trying to prevent an ACE from manifesting itself as an addiction in adulthood, it is important to change how we view addiction, so that we move to a system where we empathise with a person's experience and do not just judge them for the choices that they have made without considering what the underlying causes of their choices might have been.

17:19

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): I join other members in congratulating Kenny Gibson on securing a debate that is incredibly important in bringing a number of highly significant issues to the Parliament's attention.

I have listened with great interest to those who have participated in the debate. As those members will be aware, "The Origins of Addiction" report raises a number of very complex issues. Ultimately, it shows that there is a clear link between early childhood experience and negative outcomes in adulthood. I am sure that we all share the goal of finding better ways to address those issues. In doing so, we must treat the problems that come about as a result of early childhood experiences more effectively, but we must also—as several members have said—focus on prevention, so that those problems do not occur in the first place. The early years of a child's development are one of the most important times at which to start that prevention process.

As a Government, we have made it clear that we have a simple but ambitious aspiration for Scotland to be the best place in the world for children to grow up. For our children to become the successful, confident and effective individuals our nation needs, we must nurture every element of their wellbeing.

We know that early childhood experiences have lifelong effects on cognitive and emotional development and that chronic, unrelenting stress in early childhood, whether caused by neglect or repeated abuse, can be toxic to the development of a child's brain. We also know that children are more likely to experience some form of mistreatment between birth and three years of age—16 out of every 1,000 children experience that. I am sure that all members would agree that that should not be tolerated.

Our children have the right to be cared for and protected from harm and to grow up in a safe environment in which their needs are addressed quickly and effectively. Their wellbeing and safety are key priorities for this Government. To ensure that that is the case, we must support the practitioners who work in the field to address such issues and to provide a safe environment.

I will give a few examples of the work that we are doing to support that work. The "National Framework for Child Protection Learning and Development in Scotland 2012", which was published in November, sets out the necessary skills for all staff and volunteers who come into contact with children to keep them safe. We have published Scotland's first national risk assessment toolkit for child protection, which will help professionals to better identify concerns among vulnerable children. In addition, we are taking action to ensure that child sexual exploitation in Scotland is detected, dealt with and ultimately prevented.

We also have stronger arrangements for preventing children from being exposed to individuals who perpetrate such offences. The Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007, which came into force in 2011, introduced a new membership scheme for people who work with vulnerable groups that allows Disclosure Scotland to act much more promptly when new information is received that indicates that someone might pose a risk to vulnerable groups.

Looking to the future, we recently consulted on proposals for the children and young people bill, which aims to provide real and sustained long-term benefits to children and their families. The bill will seek to embed partnership working in our services to ensure that the design and delivery of services are centred on a child's whole wellbeing and that, ultimately—in the context of this evening's debate—services are better able to prevent the horrors of sexual abuse and to act more quickly to identify and support victims when it occurs.

We must also continue to work with the whole of society as it is right now. As part of our commitment to the health and wellbeing of adult survivors of childhood abuse, we launched Survivor Scotland, our national strategy for childhood abuse, in 2005. We have raised awareness of childhood abuse, supported training for front-line staff and provided services for survivors with an investment of £5 million since 2007. We have also agreed to extend the time to be heard model since its successful pilot in 2010 to all institutional care residents through a national confidential forum. We consulted on proposals for the forum and will take those forward this year through the provisions of the proposed victims and witnesses bill. That will offer survivors an opportunity to talk about their experiences as children in care and have those experiences acknowledged.

We also need to ensure better support for individuals who are addicted to alcohol or drugs. Through our national drugs strategy, the road to recovery, we aim to tackle drug use by focusing on

recovery, acknowledging that individuals have a range of needs to be addressed, including the underlying causes to which members have referred tonight, and ensuring that individuals have a say in their treatment and their path to long-term sustained recovery, whether it be clinical or psychological.

However, recovery only starts with the ambition for a better life. When an individual reaches out for help, it is crucial that they get the right help at the right time, because it is a crucial milestone in their life. Addiction services in Scotland are undergoing redesign to focus on the whole person and their journey to recovery. To support that, we have invested a record £30 million via NHS boards in alcohol and drug partnerships, to provide front-line drug services and offer support to those who require it. We have also provided £39 million to ADPs to deliver local alcohol strategies in line with local need and priorities. We also reduced treatment waiting times to a maximum of three weeks for more than 90 per cent of the people who started drug and alcohol treatment within the period of referral between July and September 2012.

Alongside that, we created a network of alcohol and drug partnerships to deliver appropriate health and social care services at a local level, taking account of local needs and individual circumstances.

All that will support individuals to become contributing members of society once again.

In drawing my remarks to a close, I emphasise the importance of this very complex issue. I fully acknowledge the link between early childhood experience and the negative outcomes in adulthood that are clearly highlighted in "The Origins of Addiction" report. I firmly believe that addiction can be treated more effectively as an experience-dependent condition, not just as a substance-dependent condition. We can do more in this area, and we are determined to do more to stop people being damaged by substance misuse.

I am grateful to Kenny Gibson for bringing this debate before Parliament. Knowing Mr Gibson, I know that he will continue to pursue the issues outwith the chamber.

Meeting closed at 17:28.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

Available in e-format only. Printed Scottish Parliament documentation is published in Edinburgh by APS Group Scotland.

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

For details of documents available to
order in hard copy format, please contact:
APS Scottish Parliament Publications on 0131 629 9941.

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78307-089-3

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78307-101-2

Printed in Scotland by APS Group Scotland
