



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 5 June 2013

Session 4

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**Wednesday 5 June 2013**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Col.</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME</b> .....	20697
<b>JUSTICE AND THE LAW OFFICERS</b> .....	20697
Police Scotland (Community Planning Partnerships) .....	20697
Access to Justice (Rural Areas) .....	20698
Scottish Court Service (Review) .....	20700
Illegal Transportation of People (Scottish Airports) .....	20701
Fines and Penalties (Collection) .....	20702
People with Autism (Engagement with Legal System) .....	20704
Police Control Rooms .....	20705
<b>RURAL AFFAIRS AND THE ENVIRONMENT</b> .....	20706
Regional Parks (Financial Model) .....	20706
Protected Sites .....	20707
Biodiversity .....	20708
Land Reform Review Group .....	20709
Red Meat Levy .....	20711
Report on Proposals and Policies .....	20712
Forestry Commission Scotland (Social Enterprises) .....	20713
Greylag Geese (North and South Uist) .....	20713
<b>LAND REFORM</b> .....	20715
<i>Motion moved—[Claire Baker].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Paul Wheelhouse].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Alex Fergusson].</i>	
Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab) .....	20715
The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse) .....	20719
Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con) .....	20722
Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP) .....	20725
Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab) .....	20726
Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP) .....	20728
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab) .....	20730
Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP) .....	20731
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green) .....	20733
Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP) .....	20734
Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con) .....	20736
Paul Wheelhouse .....	20737
Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab) .....	20740
<b>STUDENT SUPPORT</b> .....	20744
<i>Motion moved—[Hugh Henry].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Michael Russell].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Murdo Fraser].</i>	
Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab) .....	20744
The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell) .....	20747
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	20750
Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP) .....	20753
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab) .....	20754
Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP) .....	20756
Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab) .....	20757
Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP) .....	20759
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD) .....	20760
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP) .....	20762
Murdo Fraser .....	20763
Michael Russell .....	20765
Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab) .....	20767
<b>BUSINESS MOTIONS</b> .....	20771
<i>Motions moved—[Joe FitzPatrick]—and agreed to.</i>	

<b>PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS</b> .....	20773
<i>Motions moved—[Joe FitzPatrick].</i>	
<b>DECISION TIME</b> .....	20774
<b>BANKS (BRANCH CLOSURES)</b> .....	20785
<i>Motion debated—[John Mason].</i>	
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP).....	20785
Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab) .....	20788
Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP).....	20789
Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab) .....	20790
Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP) .....	20791
The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing) .....	20793

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 5 June 2013

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Justice and the Law Officers

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** In order to get in as many members as possible, I would prefer short and succinct questions and answers, please.

#### Police Scotland (Community Planning Partnerships)

**1. Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Government what role Police Scotland plays in community planning partnerships. (S4O-02195)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** Police Scotland is a key partner in all 32 community planning partnerships. Local policing is the bedrock of the new service, and the chief constable has a statutory duty to participate in community planning. That function is delegated to local commanders who, working closely with local partners, are responsible for developing and delivering local policing plans, which contribute directly to the local outcomes that are identified through community planning.

**Jean Urquhart:** The public have rightly been outraged by the actions of the Metropolitan Police, which removed sleeping bags, food and other personal belongings from homeless people in London, and justified those acts by saying:

"The public rely on police to reduce the negative impact of rough sleepers."

What assurances can the Scottish Government give that Scotland's justice system will not follow the Metropolitan Police's callous approach but, rather, will work with other public sector partners to address issues to do with homelessness constructively and humanely?

**Kenny MacAskill:** Yet again, we have a tale of two jurisdictions. As with police numbers, which are rising here while they are plummeting south of the border, such matters are dealt with differently. I can give the member an assurance that the values and the ethos to which she refers are not, have not been and will not be in the future the values or the ethos of Police Scotland. I say that on the basis of meetings that I have had with the chief constable earlier this week and a meeting that I had this morning with the police

investigations and review commissioner. That view will no doubt be echoed when I meet George Graham, Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary, and Calum Steele, the general secretary of the Scottish Police Federation. That is not how we treat rough sleepers or those who are homeless in Scotland, whether as a Government or as a police service.

#### Access to Justice (Rural Areas)

**2. Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will safeguard local access to the justice system in rural areas. (S4O-02196)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** The recommendations in the Scottish Court Service consultation, "Shaping Scotland's Court Services", were drawn up in the light of the principles for provision of access to justice that were agreed among the Lord President, the Lord Justice Clerk and the sheriffs principal, which included the principle that the Scottish Court Service should ensure that most people will be able to travel to their local court by public transport so as to arrive at the start of the case in which they are concerned and be able to return home by public transport on the same day. That local court should, as a minimum, be able to hear and determine summary criminal cases and lower-value or more straightforward civil matters.

The recommendations on future court structures adhere to that principle, and local access to justice in rural areas will thus be safeguarded.

**Jim Hume:** The cabinet secretary has stated that

"the people in Peebles ... are entitled to a court on their doorstep",

and that

"We need to recognise the importance to the community of retaining the sheriff court in Peebles."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 2002; c 10277-8.]

Those are his words from 2002.

In my region, four courts are earmarked for closure: those at Haddington, Duns, Kirkcudbright and Peebles. The removal of those courts will present particular transport challenges for my constituents. Is it not time that the cabinet secretary admits that the Government has got it badly wrong, stands by his words of 2002, and pledges to protect our valuable local courts and to put the Scottish National Party members of the Justice Committee out of their misery?

**Kenny MacAskill:** Those were my words in 2002, but the world moves on. I must look at the volume of business at Peebles sheriff court in 2012, when the average number of trials per week was 0.1. In 2012, there were just seven trials at

summary level in which evidence was led, and five proofs in which evidence was led.

There comes a time when, as we have seen south of the border—we have quotes about this from United Kingdom Government ministers who share the same party affiliation as Mr Hume—things have to be done. I have no doubt that he will make similar complaints about the closure of courts in Alnwick, Cockermouth and Penrith that his party is inflicting south of the border, where courts are being closed to a much greater extent than we are requiring to do here. Our closures are coming about because of the financial cuts that his colleagues down in London have imposed.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Rod Campbell MSP told *The Courier*:

“To people in North and East Fife, local justice means attending court in North and East Fife, not Dundee.”

Does the cabinet secretary agree with that remark, particularly as the movement of business from Cupar to Dundee will mean that it is moved from the Fife and Forth Valley community justice authority area into an entirely separate area, which has huge implications for managing offenders?

**Kenny MacAskill:** Rod Campbell is an outstanding constituency MSP. He has met me and, correctly, put forward the position as he sees it on behalf of his constituents. Equally, I have to take on board the view and position that have been put forward by the Lord President, who is our most senior judge, and his staff, led by the chief executive of the Scottish Court Service.

In many instances, people require to go back to their area having been dealt with in a court that is in a different CJA area. That happens routinely—members in Ms Baker’s party will confirm the situation in Glasgow, where people come in from Rutherglen and other places. It is perfectly possible to deal with such situations, not simply through the good offices of the Scottish Court Service but through local authorities and the Association of Directors of Social Work, who are charged with dealing with those aspects.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary review the resources that are available in rural areas for tackling wildlife crime to ensure that species such as the freshwater pearl mussel are given far better protection than they have at present?

**Kenny MacAskill:** I am happy to say that tomorrow I will meet Deputy Chief Constable Rose Fitzpatrick, who is in charge of local policing in Scotland. I will be happy to raise that matter with her and get back to Mary Scanlon on it. I do not have the particular briefing to hand but, as I said, I will be happy to ensure that I feed back to Mary Scanlon on the matter.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Christine Grahame. Please be brief.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will be very brief.

Is the cabinet secretary aware that, in 2002, the Labour and Liberal Executive was hell-bent on closing Peebles sheriff court—and that was in the good times, before Danny Alexander got his hands on the purse strings?

**Kenny MacAskill:** Absolutely. As well as selective memories, people have myopia when they refuse to look at what is being done south of the border.

### Scottish Court Service (Review)

**3. Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what considerations informed the Scottish Court Service’s review of court services. (S4O-02197)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** The context of the Scottish Court Service’s consultation “Shaping Scotland’s Court Services” is that the network of courts that we have inherited reflects more the social and economic needs of the Victorian age. Many court houses date from those times and the facilities do not always fully meet the standards that are expected of a modern court.

Moreover, the Scottish Court Service is not immune to the financial constraints that the Westminster Government has imposed, and it is required to meet challenges as we move to providing a modern system within a reduced budget. Against the backdrop of unprecedented cuts to the Scottish budget from Westminster, the Scottish Court Service is seeking to save £4.5 million from its revenue budget and £6.4 million from its capital budget in the period 2011-12 to 2014-15. I fully understand and sympathise with the challenges that the Lord President is facing. They have been forced on us because we are not in charge of our own financial destiny.

**Chic Brodie:** As the cabinet secretary will know, an independent forensic accounting analysis was carried out by those who are against the closure of the Haddington court. That has caused some confusion about the reliability of the figures that have been produced by both sets of protagonists. Will the cabinet secretary request that both sides now sit down together to validate the details of their analyses so that the decision to close the court is substantiated on the basis of the facts?

**Kenny MacAskill:** The matter is fundamentally one for the Scottish Court Service. The Parliament unanimously passed the Judiciary and Courts

(Scotland) Act 2008 and the Lord President is in charge of the Scottish Court Service, which is separate from Government.

However, I see no reason for such a meeting. As I mentioned yesterday at the Justice Committee, I do not believe that the headline figure that was put forward in the forensic report deals with matters appropriately. In Edinburgh, costs will remain the same and will not increase. I have full confidence in the position that has been taken by the Lord President and the Scottish Court Service.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** What consideration did the cabinet secretary give to the safety of victims and witnesses, who should not have to travel to court with the accused? That was highlighted in particular by Ross-shire Women's Aid, which is concerned about people who suffer from domestic abuse. What steps will he take to ensure their safety?

**Kenny MacAskill:** That matter is given the highest regard, not simply by the Government and the Scottish Court Service but particularly by the Crown, which is responsible for the citation of Crown witnesses, and Police Scotland. It has been raised with me both in committee and privately by John Finnie.

I am aware of the views and concerns of Ross-shire Women's Aid. It is right and understandable for it to raise such matters. However, as with the position put forward by the Scottish Court Service, we can give an assurance that the Scottish police and indeed the Crown will take all such matters into account. Such circumstances and challenges are faced everywhere in Scotland, not always simply in rural areas but quite often in the peripheral housing schemes that exist in urban Scotland. They are treated most seriously, and victims and witnesses will be protected and provided for by the Crown and by Police Scotland.

#### **Illegal Transportation of People (Scottish Airports)**

**4. Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will use the criminal justice system to establish whether people have been transported illegally through Scottish airports and discourage it from happening again. (S4O-02198)

**The Lord Advocate (Frank Mulholland):** The use of torture cannot be condoned. It is against international law and contrary to the common law of Scotland.

As the member will be aware, a police inquiry was conducted into allegations of extraordinary rendition at Scottish airports in 2007-08. Following the inquiry, the police concluded that there was

insufficient credible and reliable information to enable them to commence a criminal investigation.

I am aware of the information that was provided by the rendition project involving researchers at the University of Kent and Kingston University. I consider that that information—and any other information that is additional to that considered by the police in 2007—should be the subject of police consideration. I will therefore ask Police Scotland to give consideration to that information.

**Margo MacDonald:** I thank the Lord Advocate for his full reply. It is a better quality of reply than we have had on the issue up until now. However, as he is aware of the recent research, he will realise that allegations persist that such flights came through Scotland. I ask him to not dilly-dally and wait for someone to tell him that there should be an inquiry, because the evidence is there in front of his eyes and the will is there too, I imagine, from this Government, because the present minister said—in, I think, 2007—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Briefly.

**Margo MacDonald:** —that it comes down to political will. Fundamentally, that is what is lacking from the Executive. The Government, as the Executive, must stand up for the values to which the people of Scotland adhere and maintain the laws that we have held dear for centuries. I appreciate that that is not in the Lord Advocate's domain, but perhaps he could tell the minister that that is what we all believe.

**The Lord Advocate:** I thank Margo MacDonald for her supplementary question. It is very important that there should be no dilly-dallying on this matter. I am confident that the police will conduct a thorough inquiry, which is always important in such matters.

However, it should be recognised that in order for criminal proceedings to be raised, it must be proved that a crime that is known to the law of Scotland has been committed; that an identified individual or individuals have committed or aided and abetted that crime within this jurisdiction; and that the individuals have the necessary mens rea—that is, knowledge that their actions are furthering the commission of the crime, and intent. Importantly, speculation, conjecture, innuendo and belief are insufficient. What we need is hard evidence—sufficient evidence that meets the requisite high standard of proof is required. However, I am confident that the police will do their duty and will conduct a thorough inquiry in accordance with Police Scotland principles.

#### **Fines and Penalties (Collection)**

**5. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking to ensure that court fines and

police antisocial behaviour penalties are collected. (S4O-02199)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** Since the Scottish Court Service took over responsibility in 2008, the overall collection of fines and penalties has improved considerably and is now at consistently high levels. In some cases, people who are finding it difficult to pay their fine can agree an alternative repayment plan with the fines enforcement officers.

For people who decide not to pay, enhanced tracing facilities are making it easier to track them down and apply the full range of enforcement actions, including deducting benefits, freezing bank accounts, arresting wages and seizing cars. Sheriff officers are also helping to target persistent defaulters who ignore payment demands. Ultimately, fine defaulters can be brought before the courts to explain why they have not paid and to receive an order of the court.

**Alex Johnstone:** I take this opportunity to heap lavish praise on the minister for his initiative in contacting the Department for Work and Pensions earlier in the year to ensure that there is a full and proper flow of information from the DWP to the Scottish justice department so that fines can be collected. Can he say exactly how effective that close working relationship with Iain Duncan Smith has been and how many fines have been collected as a direct result?

**Kenny MacAskill:** I am not able to give precise details, but we were communicating with Mr Duncan Smith and his predecessors for some time. I welcome the fact that the information and powers are now available, and these matters will be worked through by the DWP and the Scottish Court Service. Much of the work involves enabling the SCS to obtain access to certain information in order to find out where people are and to access their employment data and national insurance details to find out where they are working. Previously, the SCS was unable to access that information easily.

I am happy to brief Alex Johnstone—or to get a briefing for him from the SCS chief executive—on where we are right now. There is work in progress, and Mr Johnstone is right to give Iain Duncan Smith credit as we are grateful for his work with us. We are at the start of a journey, but the SCS welcomes that.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** Does the minister agree that, to avoid fines and penalties, those who act aggressively in an antisocial manner towards innocent bystanders should apologise—preferably in person—reflect on their future behaviour and consider the impression that it gives to those who are caught up in the antisocial act?

**Kenny MacAskill:** I have a great deal of sympathy with and support for restorative justice, but it is not suitable for some vulnerable witnesses. It is best left to the police and the Crown to exercise their discretion. Neil Findlay makes a valid point, and where restorative justice is appropriate it can benefit both the perpetrator and the victim. However, we must ensure that we leave such matters to the authorities that are charged with that responsibility to discuss with the victim and the perpetrator.

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary will be aware that half the money that is collected in fines goes to the Treasury in London. In 2007, £113,000 went to the Treasury rather than being kept in Scotland. Does he agree that that money could go a long way in helping victims and bringing the perpetrators of crime to justice if it was kept here in Scotland?

**Kenny MacAskill:** Absolutely. I was gobsmacked yesterday to hear the Labour justice spokesman say that the difficulties and financial challenges that the Scottish Court Service is facing as a result of the cuts, which were ultimately caused by the actions of the coalition Government in Westminster, could all be dealt with through better enforcement of the payment of fines. If only that were the case. The overwhelming majority of fines income in fact goes directly to the Treasury that is imposing those self-same cuts. As with other aspects, people should take a long hard look at the facts and consider whether they have their information right.

#### **People with Autism (Engagement with Legal System)**

**6. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what support is available for people with autism when engaging with the legal system. (S4O-02200)

**The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Roseanna Cunningham):** The National Autistic Society maintains a list of law firms that have experience of advising and representing people with autism. People can search the database on the Law Society's website for legal services in their area.

The Crown Office is committed to ensuring that the correct support is put in place for victims and witnesses and that it takes into account their individual needs. It has specific guidance on autism, including publications such as "Autism: a guide for criminal justice professionals", which is produced by the National Autistic Society, and a guide entitled "People with Learning Disabilities and the Criminal Justice System".

**George Adam:** I am aware of the Law Society's work in raising awareness of such conditions with



its members. Can the minister comment on any further help that is available?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** The “People with Learning Disabilities and the Criminal Justice System” guide was produced by the Scottish Government in 2011 in collaboration with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, the Scottish Court Service, the Scottish Prison Service and NHS Scotland. It provides information on the Scottish criminal justice system to people with learning disabilities.

In addition, autism alert cards have been developed to improve outcomes from interactions with members of the emergency services and others. The cards can be carried by people with autism and used in difficult situations in which those people may find communication difficult. The card has been developed by the National Autistic Society and has been launched in the Highlands, Lothian and the Borders, Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles, central Scotland and Strathclyde. The autism spectrum disorder reference group has discussed national implementation of the card, and it is considering how to roll out the scheme across Scotland. Recommendations will be made to my ministerial colleague Michael Matheson for consideration later in the year.

### Police Control Rooms

**7. Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the chief constable regarding the number and location of control rooms required by Police Scotland. (S4O-02201)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill):** That is an operational matter and no discussions have taken place with the chief constable. However, I am aware that Police Scotland is undertaking work to ensure that the contact, command and control division is as effective as possible in looking to provide the best service to communities.

**Elaine Murray:** There are 45 civilian staff and 12 police officers in the control room in Dumfries. Can the cabinet secretary impress on the chief constable the need to consult and communicate with those staff in advance of the final decision being made?

**Kenny MacAskill:** I will be happy to do that when I meet senior officers tomorrow. I can give the member the assurance that I discussed the matter with Unison earlier this week, when Gerry Crawley and other staff representatives came to see me. I am aware of the concerns, but there need to be changes to ensure that we get the appropriate protection for our communities. I think that it is accepted by all that having 10 control

rooms is no longer suitable or appropriate, but what the final number will be and where they will be located will be for Police Scotland and union representatives.

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** Can the cabinet secretary tell us how the new Police Scotland will help in the policing of common riding events across southern Scotland? Can he confirm my understanding that there is no charge for policing such community events?

**Kenny MacAskill:** My understanding is that the police have participated greatly in those because they see the benefits to the community and many of them live in the communities in which they serve. I think that the member will find that Police Scotland will make no changes there. The police are there to serve and not to operate as a business. That is a matter that we have always made clear in Scotland.

### Rural Affairs and the Environment

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 1 has not been lodged and an explanation has been provided by Jenny Marra.

### Regional Parks (Financial Model)

**2. Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether consideration has been given to using a financial model for regional parks based on that used for national parks. (S4O-02206)

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** Especially in this year of natural Scotland, our three regional parks and two national parks have an important role to play in encouraging people to enjoy the outdoors.

Our regional parks are important areas of countryside in a regional context because they provide opportunities for outdoor recreation alongside farming and other land uses and they are easy to reach from Scotland's urban areas. Our two national parks, on the other hand, have been designated by Parliament as areas of the highest national value for their landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage, and they are internationally recognised visitor destinations. The national park authorities are accountable to Scottish ministers, and the collective management of the national parks contributes directly to the achievement of Scottish Government outcomes.

The Government has no plans to use a financial model for regional parks based on that used for national parks. I refer Mr Keir to an answer that I provided on 30 January 2013, when I confirmed that the Government has no plans to redesignate regional parks as national parks.

**Colin Keir:** Given the financial pressures on local authorities to maintain and manage regional parks, will the Scottish Government consider investigating the possibility of a more sustainable form of management and financial governance, with a view to easing pressure on local authorities and park management teams?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** As I am sure the member will acknowledge, Scottish Government finances are also under pressure as a consequence of the United Kingdom Government's spending decisions.

I sympathise with Colin Keir's clear desire to support the regional parks, but in 2013-14 the Scottish Government is providing local government in Scotland with more than £10.3 billion of support. The vast majority of that funding, including the funding for regional parks, is provided by means of a block grant. Following the concordat, Scottish Natural Heritage funding that was previously provided to local authorities in respect of regional parks is now rolled into the block grant. Therefore, it is now the responsibility of each local authority to allocate the total financial resources available to it on the basis of local needs and priorities, having first fulfilled its statutory obligations and the jointly agreed set of national and local priorities, including the Scottish Government's key strategic objectives.

### Protected Sites

**3. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many of the country's protected sites are in favourable condition. (S4O-02207)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):** Some 78.1 per cent of protected features on Scotland's designated nature sites are in favourable condition, as published on the Scotland performs website on 17 May.

**Mike MacKenzie:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, which it is encouraging to note. Clearly, overgrazing and invasive species are the main challenges to conditions improving from unfavourable to favourable. Native and non-native invasive species can have a detrimental effect on important habitats and can ultimately change the ecology of the habitat. What action can the Scottish Government take to ensure that the proportion of natural features that are in favourable condition continues to rise?

**Richard Lochhead:** Mike MacKenzie is right that the most significant causes of unfavourable condition are overgrazing by sheep and deer, and invasive species such as various plant species. The member might be aware that, as part of the Scotland rural development programme, we have

a number of instruments that provide funding to land managers to try to tackle some of those issues. The SRDP is certainly the major funding stream to support work to keep sites in favourable condition and to help with their management. Also, a range of legislation is in place with regard to non-native species and other matters. We keep a close eye on the issue but, as the member welcomed, the trend in the number of sites in favourable condition is going in the right direction, and we will continue to try to push it upwards.

### Biodiversity

**4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the "State of Nature" report and the challenges it contains to prevent further loss of biodiversity. (S4O-02208)

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** As I stated when I spoke at the Edinburgh launch, we welcome the "State of Nature" report, which provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of the environment. It is clear from the report that we have success stories to tell, such as Scotland being home to almost 60 per cent of all known European species of mosses and liverworts, including the Scottish beard moss, a species that is found nowhere else on earth except the permanently wet rocks of the mountains of western Scotland.

The report also highlights warnings for us to heed, such as the decline in five out of 12 of our seabird species. Our biodiversity is under threat from climate change, loss of habitats and change in land management practices. We recognise the importance of protecting and enhancing our natural environment and we are committed to working with our partners, including environmental non-governmental organisations, to that end.

**Kenneth Gibson:** I have a unique species in my constituency—the Catacol whitebeam, on the Isle of Arran. According to the "State of Nature" report, the reasons for the decline of animal and plant species are "many and varied". Clearly, we all have to play our part in stemming the decline in Scotland's wildlife. What is the Scottish Government doing to encourage the public to take practical action to protect wildlife through conscientious gardening and land management?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** The Scottish Government is keen to support individuals and communities to garden in ways that benefit biodiversity. Last week, I visited the gardening Scotland show, which is Scotland's biggest gardening show, with about 40,000 visitors. The Scottish Government supports a living garden area at the show, and the theme of this year's garden was the year of natural Scotland. Thanks to the hard work of Sheila Filsell

and some of the students from Elmwood College, which is part of SRUC—Scotland's rural college—the area not only won a silver medal but was successful in attracting visitors into the area, where Scottish Natural Heritage and environmental charities had stalls and information ready to encourage them to undertake wildlife-friendly gardening. SNH also supports the garden for life forum, which provides a variety of information for gardeners. Information is available on its website at [www.gardenforlife.org.uk](http://www.gardenforlife.org.uk).

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The report highlights the decline in seabird species such as the Arctic skua nesting in Scotland. What specific action can ministers take on seabirds?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** As part of the marine protected areas network, we are considering covering areas that provide sand eels to seabird populations. As I am sure the member is aware, there are difficulties with trying to pinpoint areas that benefit specific species of seabirds. We are, for example, trying to look after black guillemots. We are also trying to protect habitats for sand eels, which are a key food source for our seabirds.

#### Land Reform Review Group

**5. John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the work of the land reform review group. (S4O-02209)

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** The land reform review group's interim report was given to ministers on 10 May and published on 20 May, which concluded phase 1 of the group's work. A phase 2 planning meeting was held on 28 May, which identified a range of workstreams to take forward in phase 2. The review group is due to make its final report to ministers in April 2014, at the end of phase 3. The chair of the review group, Alison Elliot, will speak to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee on 26 June.

**John Finnie:** The day after the publication of the land reform review group's interim report, the group's chair, Dr Alison Elliot, addressed the annual general meeting of Scottish Land & Estates—the lairds. Professor Jim Hunter says that Scotland retains the

"most concentrated, most inequitable, most unreformed and most undemocratic land ownership system in the entire developed world",

while Scottish Land & Estates tells us that it remains

"disappointed at the persisting view that the pattern of land ownership in Scotland is unfair and unjust".

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question.

**John Finnie:** When tenant farmers still have no right to buy their farms and are reluctant to speak out for fear of repercussions from the very lairds to whom I referred, what can the Scottish Government do quickly to show the country that it has not abandoned its historical campaigning zeal on another important issue?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I assure the member that, in the course of today's debate, I will set out more clearly our intentions regarding the on-going work of the land reform review group and our continued ambition for bold and radical land reform.

The land reform review group has made a number of recommendations that aim to rectify some of the difficulties that we face in terms of existing community right-to-buy provisions, which, as I am sure that the member is aware, do not operate fully satisfactorily in many cases. Indeed, through the community empowerment and renewal bill, we will seek to extend the provisions in respect of urban right to buy.

I will, hopefully, provide the member with more detail later today.

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** Can the minister assure me that my constituents in crofting communities, many of whom are frustrated hereditary tenant farmers, will see housing land, new-start farms and crofts benefiting from the work of the review group in the final phase, which comes around next spring? They want to see many more people being able to live on the land, and that seems to be the best route forward in that regard.

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I share the member's concerns. We need to be able to demonstrate to communities that the land reform agenda will help to deliver their economic and social aspirations and will help to sustain some of the most fragile communities that we have in Scotland.

As I said, I hope this afternoon to be able to set out clearly our sense of the direction of travel in that regard.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Does the minister agree with Jim Hunter that the Government should be directly involved in the work of the review group? Will he consider increasing the number of members of the group from the current three in order to address the concern that the group has insufficient expertise to address some of the most complex issues?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Phase 2 of the review will involve a lot of detailed work, and will take forward in greater depth work on the issues that have been covered in phase 1. We commit to resourcing the group to be able to provide the advice that we seek on these areas. Later this afternoon I will set

out in more detail exactly what we are doing in response to the land reform review group's major work programme. I hope that that will satisfy the member.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 has been withdrawn and an explanation has been provided.

### **Red Meat Levy**

**7. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government on repatriating red meat levy income. (S4O-02211)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):** I most recently raised that issue with the UK Government's Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at a ministerial meeting on 20 May, when I once again set out the case for the repatriation of more than £1.4 million a year of red meat levy income.

Despite wide support from many sections of Scottish agriculture, the UK Government continues to ignore our well-reasoned case and instead protects the interests of its own red meat sector at Scotland's expense. However, I will continue to press Scotland's case and seek a resolution to this long-running injustice.

**Nigel Don:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his response, although not for its content.

Scotland can rightly claim to have the best red meat production in the world. However, the short-changing of this country by the UK Government plainly reduces the marketing opportunities for the final product. Does the cabinet secretary see any short-term resolution of this impasse?

**Richard Lochhead:** I guess that it depends on the definition of "short-term". I recommend that all livestock producers vote yes in next year's referendum. That will, perhaps, provide the quickest resolution to the issue, because it will guarantee that all the red meat levy that is raised in Scotland thereafter will stay in Scotland, which is the outcome that I believe all red meat producers in this country want.

In the meantime, I understand that UK ministers are attending the Royal Highland Show later this month. I urge them to bring with them some good news for Scotland's livestock producers and to say that they recognise the very strong case that has been put by our livestock producers that the levy that is paid on an animal that is born and reared in this country should promote Scottish produce, and not produce from other parts of the UK. That would be the only fair and reasonable solution to the dispute. I hope that the ministers will, when

they attend the show later this month, bring the good news that they acknowledge the case, and that the levy that is raised in Scotland will stay in Scotland.

### **Report on Proposals and Policies**

**8. John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it will publish its final second report on proposals and policies. (S4O-02212)

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** The precise timetable for publication has not yet been confirmed, but it is our aim to lay the final report prior to the summer recess, if a suitable parliamentary slot can be found.

**John Pentland:** Industry, non-governmental organisations and the public would like to know whether the final version will move from the wishful thinking of proposals to a proper plan that is based on policies, adequate funding, appropriate timescales for action, and incentives to achieve the transformational change, particularly in housing and transport sectors, that was identified by the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee.

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I recognise the concern that has been expressed by stakeholders about the residential and transport sectors, as John Pentland said. We do not have specific sector targets in RPP2 as it is currently structured—as the member is no doubt aware—and there is no requirement in statute for us to have them.

However, we do try to address particular themes across RPP2. All sectors of the economy are expected to make a contribution. The Government is keen to ensure that, across areas such as sustainable travel and transport, we do as much as we can. I know that Keith Brown, my colleague and Minister for Transport and Veterans, has been having discussions with groups about cycling and other matters in order to take forward plans for low-carbon transport.

I hope that Mr Pentland will, when the document is published, be happy that we have improved its clarity, which I know was a concern that many people had, and that we have done as much as we can to indicate with a great deal of confidence that the trajectory that we are on is a good one.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** To what extent will it be possible to identify streams of work that need to be done in research in order to implement policies for the future that are related to the challenges that we face from climate change?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I certainly recognise that this is an important issue. At committee, we discussed some technical areas that are related

specifically to land use and peatlands. We expect that the peatland plan will help to inform our understanding of exactly how far and how fast we can achieve what is currently a proposal in RPP2, which is to deliver 21,000 hectares of peatland per annum. That is just one example, but I take Claudia Beamish's point, and we will see what we can do to give confidence on that.

### **Forestry Commission Scotland (Social Enterprises)**

**9. Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what mechanisms are available to the Forestry Commission Scotland for the support of social enterprises. (S4O-02213)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):** In addition to providing advice on forestry-related matters, the Forestry Commission Scotland is able to support social enterprises that contribute to implementation of the Scottish forestry strategy through its forestry development programme, through the delivery of programmes on the national forest estate, and through the sale or lease of land to communities, under the national forest land scheme.

**Fiona McLeod:** I thank the minister for his answer; it was really interesting.

Will he give me more detailed information, perhaps in writing, so that I can help my constituents in Lennox town, led by the redoubtable Susan Murray, who are looking to develop Lennox forest, in particular to run an aparthotel as a social enterprise to go along with the cycling development that the group is considering?

**Richard Lochhead:** As I said, the Forestry Commission is always keen to help social enterprises that want to promote health, wellbeing and community benefits. If Fiona McLeod feels that the project in her constituency—which sounds very interesting, so I am keen to learn more about it—fits the bill, I am sure that we can send her details and set up a meeting between the Forestry Commission Scotland and representatives of the project to which she refers.

### **Greylag Geese (North and South Uist)**

**10. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it plans to take to control the population of greylag geese in the Uists. (S4O-02214)

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** The Scottish Government and Scottish Natural Heritage support crofters and farmers on the Uists in minimising the impact of greylag geese through a number of

schemes and initiatives, as well as through direct practical assistance. That includes the introduction of a pilot project on the Uists to develop adaptive management methods for the control of resident greylag geese, supported by £37,000 of funding over three years. Scottish Natural Heritage is also examining ways in which it can use powers that are available to it to permit the limited sale under licence of wild goose carcasses arising from the pilots. In those ways, we are seeking to achieve a balance between our conservation obligations and the needs of sustainable agriculture.

**Rhoda Grant:** The minister will be aware that the numbers of geese are extremely large and that if the shooting is to have any impact, it will have to be carried out professionally. Has he given consideration to any other means that might hamper breeding and control numbers?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** We are certainly trying, through the national goose management group, to identify ways in which we can be as effective as possible in managing pressure points where balances have to be struck between conservation and the needs of agriculture. I would certainly be interested to hear any ideas that Rhoda Grant has on measures that might, based on local knowledge, work in the Uists. We are trying to work with our stakeholders, including RSPB Scotland, to identify non-lethal methods to control the numbers where possible, but unfortunately some cases have had to involve adaptive management, which is the approach that we are taking in the Uists at this stage.

## Land Reform

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-06845, in the name of Claire Baker, on land reform.

14:40

### **Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):**

I am pleased to open this debate on land reform, which has been brought forward by Scottish Labour.

Under devolution, a Labour-led Executive introduced the first truly reforming land legislation in Scotland. Public access, national parks, farming tenancies, the crofting right to buy and the extension of rights to community ownership were covered. The aims behind the policies were to modernise land laws, encourage the diversification of ownership and create opportunities. The Scottish Parliament supported those aims, and I would like the Parliament to regain those ambitions.

Scottish Labour is prepared to listen to radical and innovative solutions and to progress policies that will make a difference and move forward the land reform agenda. We know that 432 individuals own half the land and that a mere 16 people own 10 per cent of Scotland. Some might argue, "What is wrong with that? Why should we be concerned about ownership, when what matters is what happens on the land?" However, the two aspects are inextricably linked. We cannot create a more socially just Scotland without tackling land ownership. In our aim to create a fairer use of land that provides more opportunities for more people and in which public subsidy is used for the greatest possible public benefit, we will support bold solutions with the aim of promoting greater equality and ownership, as we recognise the economic and social benefits that that can bring.

The Scottish Government launched the land reform review group with a wide remit, which was to

"Generate, support, promote, and deliver new relationships between land, people, economy and environment in Scotland".

That suggested that the Scottish Government shared that ambition. When the First Minister announced the LRRG's establishment in July last year, he said:

"I want this review to deliver radical change for both rural and urban areas, developing new ideas which will improve current legislation as well as generating even more innovative proposals."

We support the establishment of an expert group. Delivering on land reform will never be

easy. The experience with the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, elements of which are still being challenged, shows that that is often not an easy path for politicians to tread. It generates strong emotions and challenges vested interests. An expert independent group can provide expertise and knowledge to make recommendations and push the agenda forward.

However, the interim report has been met largely with disappointment and criticism from land reformists because of the group's lack of expertise in many key areas, the decision that it took to narrow the remit and the dearth of radical proposals or options for further development. Community Land Scotland welcomed aspects of the report, but it had significant concerns about the direction of travel. For example, it said:

"We have concerns that the interim report's description of more people having a 'stake' in the land is limited almost exclusively to communities having a greater say in land use, not the economic 'stake' in the land we think is vital in developing more resilient and sustainable communities."

Yesterday, there was a powerful statement from Professor Jim Hunter, who was an original member of the LRRG. He said:

"If the Scottish Government are serious about land reform, Ministers and the government machine more generally must be involved directly in the work of the group ... As it is, we're now six years into an SNP Government which has so far done absolutely nothing legislatively about the fact that Scotland continues to be stuck with the most concentrated, most inequitable, most unreformed and most undemocratic land ownership system in the entire developed world."

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** I hope that our respective parties can stay united on the need for further land reform, as we will otherwise play into the hands of those who resist change. Notwithstanding that, will the member remind us why her party could not build into the 2003 act the measures that she now calls on the Scottish National Party Government to enact?

**Claire Baker:** To be honest, I am disappointed by that intervention, because I thought that we agreed on the need for radical land reform. The member will know how difficult it is to make progress on that. I am saying today that we will work with the Government on the issue. We are prepared to look at radical solutions, and there is time in this Parliament to deliver on them.

Perhaps the strongest criticism this week came from the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association, whose chairman, Christopher Nicholson, said:

"I fail to understand how this review of land reform can take place without considering land tenure ... An opportunity is being missed for the LRRG to highlight to the Government the need to address best land use and tenure in Scotland in the next decade and beyond ... There is now a strong and justifiable mood of cynicism amongst tenant

farmers that they have been sidelined and an opportunity is being missed to provide vision and direction for this neglected rural community of Scotland."

In response to the group's report, the minister, Paul Wheelhouse, looked to be supporting the group's decision, because he said:

"I now very much look forward to the next stage as the LRRG move into the second phase of its work looking at radical options for community land ownership before the final report in 2014."

It is right that the minister recognises the group's work, but does the Government share our disappointment at the narrowing of its remit? The group will no longer look at farming tenancies, the Crown Estate, common good land or land value taxation.

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Does the member accept that considerable work is going on, particularly through the tenant farming forum, to look at land tenancy issues? Does she accept that progress is being made on this very sensitive area and that the deliberations of yet another outside group on the issues would not exactly be helpful, given the current stage of the talks that are taking place?

**Claire Baker:** I do not accept that, and I will comment on the forum. Until the publication of the report last week, tenant farming was to be part of the review. However, the group announced that it was passing that buck to the tenant farming forum. Caught on the back foot, the cabinet secretary proposed another review, which raises the question why the group was pursuing the issue of farming tenancies if there were other plans for the debate.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):** Will the member give way?

**Claire Baker:** I am sorry, but I am really pushed for time and I want to make a few further points.

The review that the Scottish Government proposes looks pretty narrow: it is about passing proposed legislation and scrutinising it, and not much else. Perhaps the Government wants to give more detail today about who will conduct the review, what it will look at, what the timescale is for action and whether it will deliver on the reform for which there is an appetite. There is clear recognition of the need for additional tenancies and for better, more secure and longer tenancy terms than at present.

The interim report recognises that that aspect of rural Scotland is clearly problematic and requires sensitive and expert attention, then passes the debate to the tenant farming forum. The forum has its uses, but it is a place where nothing is done without consensus. Given that the balance of power is so skewed, I would argue that

compromise cannot deliver the change that is needed. When the Agricultural Holdings (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill went through Parliament, even though the committee involved recognised the merit in extending succession rights, the debate was shut down because of concerns about the need to maintain confidence and consensus in the rent review group. However, once that reported, tenant farmers were left again with significant concerns.

On the big questions, the forum is therefore going round in circles. Landowners hold most of the cards, but we know that the world can be changed, as it was at the beginning of the previous century, and that the tide is turning that way. Do the current arrangements, dominated by private owners of estates, serve the long-term interests of the country by enabling a vibrant agricultural sector? That is one of the big questions that need to be answered. The LRRG's narrow remit and the restrictive debate of the tenant farming forum are not allowing the debate to happen. Tenant farming should be part of the wider land reform debate, and it would benefit from a more holistic approach.

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

**Claire Baker:** I apologise, but I am really pushed for time in this short debate.

The Government's amendment highlights the group's independence. However, although it is independent, the LRRG was established by the Scottish Government, which appointed its members. With only one original member left and the group now losing the confidence of stakeholders, the Government needs to be clear about how it plans to retrieve the project, how seriously it takes the group and what the expectations are.

We can compare the LRRG with the Sewel group that was established in 1997, which had 10 members, a heavyweight group of experts, clear objectives and political direction. In contrast, the LRRG has lacked political direction and the group's experience and knowledge have narrowed since it was established. There has also been a degree of naivety in the group's approach: the number of visits to estates has not gone unnoticed. There has been an active campaign by landowners, who often see any discussion of land reform as a threat.

Of course, landowners are entitled to contribute to the debate, and I welcome their contribution, but it is not the group's job to hear those who shout loudest or who are best resourced. A lot of consultations are going on at once, and the

narrowing of the focus raises concerns about cohesion on the land reform agenda.

I acknowledge the group's work. The decision to focus on community land issues is an opportunity, and Labour urges the group to be bold and to make proposals to expand community ownership options, including the right to buy in cases when there is not a willing seller but acquiring the land can be shown to be in the public interest. I know that the First Minister is to address Community Land Scotland's annual general meeting soon. If the Parliament agrees to the motion, what better demonstration of radical and bold policy could there be than if the First Minister were to support the policy, so that progress can be made in Parliament?

We need to move the debate forward. We need a refocused LRRG and clear political direction. We have the powers to make the change. I hope that the Parliament will today affirm a commitment to radical and bold reform and that we will start to demonstrate that commitment.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the publication of the Land Reform Review Group's interim report; recognises that the Land Reform Review Group was appointed by the Scottish Government to offer a "radical review of land reform"; believes that ownership of land is an economic and social issue; recognises that the Scottish Government has the power to deliver further land reform now; supports greater diversification of land ownership in Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to demonstrate a commitment to radical and bold land reform.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I inform members that we are tight for time and that the allocated speaking times must be adhered to.

14:51

**The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse):** I am delighted to lead in the debate for the Scottish Government and I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss such an important subject. As Claire Baker said, the motion offers an opportunity to affirm a consensus in the Parliament that supports the Scottish Government's continuing commitment to a radical and innovative approach to land reform. As she said, people have strong feelings on the issue, and the subject has a strong emotional pull. If we look back over the long history of the struggle for land reform, from the 18th century clearances to the crofting acts of the 19th century and to the 21st century Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, we can see the pain and heartache that that struggle has cost, and I am sure that those feelings will be reflected in the debate.

I hope that the debate will demonstrate that there is a settled will or consensus that land reform is needed, even if the detail still needs

further discussion and scrutiny. Land reform is important to our future as a nation and to the future of our communities, and it has also, in many ways, defined the history of the Scottish Parliament.

Communities should be in charge of their own destiny—from established projects such as Assynt, Gigha and Eigg to the newest successful buyouts, such as the welcome purchase by the Mull of Galloway Trust just last month.

We must recognise that land reform is a process, not an event. The good work of the previous Administration brought us far, and my party lent its support to that good work, but there remains much more to do.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** Does the minister agree that, although community ownership is important, a land reform agenda cannot be limited to community ownership?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I will be happy to address that point later in my speech, and I certainly agree with Patrick Harvie that the land reform agenda should not be constrained.

As I said, my party lent its support to the good work of the previous Administration, but there remains much more to do, and unintended consequences of existing laws inevitably emerge in the delivery. We need to consider how to move the agenda forward in the best possible way, and I would warmly welcome the opportunity to work in partnership—if we could—to harness the wisdom of all, inside and outside the chamber, to a noble purpose.

Our desire for a mature discussion with civic Scotland is a key reason why we set up an independent land reform review group and my amendment emphasises that simple fact. However, we intend to respect the broad thrust of Labour's motion which, with our minor amendment, we intend to support. In that spirit of consensus, I trust that Labour can, in turn, support our amendment.

When the First Minister last year announced the formation of the group, chaired by Alison Elliot, he set out his desire for the review

"to deliver radical change for both rural and urban areas"

of Scotland. The group is independent and has a clear remit set by the Government. I know that all members here today will join me in thanking Alison Elliot for her work and that of her colleagues in reviewing a wealth of submissions and for their commitment to taking forward the next stage of the review. I also thank Sarah Skerratt and Jim Hunter for their much-valued contributions to the group's work.



The group has travelled the country and met a wide variety of individuals and business representatives, who contributed their views. It has consulted on the key issues and collected 484 responses—I understand that that is the updated figure. That high response level from individuals and organisations shows the interest in land reform, and the responses will form a rich resource for all our work—including that on agricultural tenancies, to pick up on Patrick Harvie's point.

As the motion acknowledges, the group published its interim report last month, and what stands out is that the issue is far from simple and that there is no one-size-fits-all panacea for all the challenges that we face. The group is planning the review's next phase, with the final report due next April. It will look at the community right to buy in the Highlands and learn from the application of the absolute right to buy in the crofting areas in order to make recommendations for the whole country. I reiterate that we want community ownership to be expanded across the whole of Scotland, and the group will seek to set out what needs to happen to facilitate that.

A key theme will be land reform in urban Scotland. As that is closely associated with the developing community empowerment and renewal bill, we will ensure that that bill takes on the review group's ideas in furthering the Scottish Government's desire to empower urban and rural communities and in resolving problems identified with current legislation.

The proposed land agency is another key consideration and I am intrigued by the possibilities that it might deliver. The group will look at community engagement with landowners and community energy projects and at how we ensure that the right support and advice are in place for community landowners. It will recommend how the community right-to-buy legislation, which currently makes life unnecessarily difficult for communities in a number of respects, can be simplified and amended to be more accessible, and further work will be commissioned on common good land, taxation, public interest issues and issues with regard to the Crown Estate.

That vital work will require further resource, and I can announce today that I have agreed with the chair of the group that it can be expanded from its original three members to five. We have already appointed Ian Cooke, a director with Development Trusts Association Scotland, as vice-chair to ensure that there is expertise on the community sector, and I can also announce that we have appointed John Watt as the second vice-chair. As a recent director of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Mr Watt has a wealth of experience on

state aid and public sector support for communities, and he is already an adviser to the group.

Two additional appointments will be announced in due course to complete the expanded group, but I should inform the Parliament that Richard Heggie and Malcolm Combe have been appointed as additional group advisers and will provide invaluable advice in the next phase. Those moves will ensure that the group is fully resourced to carry out phase 2 of its review, and the additional expertise available will allow it to come up with clear, informed and workable proposals in its final report.

**Claire Baker:** I welcome the minister's announcement of the group's expanded membership. However, I note that it has agreed quite a narrow remit. Will there be a chance to have another look at that?

**Paul Wheelhouse:** There is no change per se to the group's remit, but the work that it carried out in phase 1 identified the areas that it feels it necessary to pursue in greater detail in phase 2.

The Scottish Government is committed to land reform. We set up the land reform review group; we committed £6 million to the Scottish land fund; and, as the cabinet secretary announced last week and as we made clear in the farming manifesto that we launched in 2011 for the Scottish Parliament elections, we will review agricultural tenancies. We have presided over nearly 70 per cent of the total of community right-to-buy approvals; we have helped places such as Machrihanish to deliver successful buyouts and we hope to support many more; and we have used our assets imaginatively by, for example, developing new types of tenancy on our forest estate.

The review group's final report will help us to deliver the next stages of our commitment and I look forward to the next chapter of the land reform story.

I move amendment S4M-06845.2, to insert after first "Scottish Government":

"as an advisory group independent of Scottish ministers."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Alex Fergusson, who has five minutes.

14:58

**Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** As it is often insinuated that we Conservatives are simply against land reform, I take this opportunity to say that nothing could be further from the truth. By way of endorsement, I refer anyone interested to the blog of one Andy Wightman, who is well known in the field of land

reform. On Mr Wightman's site, Professor Jim Hunter, a former member of the land reform review group and not exactly a well-known supporter of the Conservative Party, said only yesterday:

"the first land reforming legislation in Scotland in modern times ... was the Transfer of Crofting Estates Act 1997—very much the personal work of then Tory Secretary of State, Michael Forsyth. So the land reforming credentials of the Conservative Party are way, way ahead of those of the SNP which has so far introduced no land reform legislation of any kind whatsoever."

As in land reform, so in so many other areas.

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Fergusson:** I am afraid that I have only five minutes, so the minister will have to forgive me that cheap jibe.

On a slightly more important note, the same Professor Jim Hunter said in an article in yesterday's *Herald* that was very critical of the LRRG's interim report that the Government had been directly involved in the group's work. I look forward to hearing how the minister defends his amendment in the wake of that statement.

That aside, I am more than happy to take part in the debate, although I am a little mystified about Labour's intentions in bringing the motion to the chamber. I have to say that I do not really understand its logic. It asks us to recognise that the review group was set up by the Scottish Government to

"offer a 'radical review of land reform'"

and then asks us to call on the Scottish Government to

"demonstrate a commitment to radical and bold land reform."

Far be it from me to speak for the Government but, if I were to do so, I would argue—probably quite strongly—that setting up a review group to look at a radical review of land reform demonstrates a fair commitment to that cause.

**Claire Baker:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Alex Fergusson:** I just do not have time—I really am sorry. You chose to have a short debate, so I cannot help you.

Furthermore, we are asked to recognise that

"the Scottish Government has the power to deliver further land reform now",

presumably with the expectation that it should do so. Given that the Scottish Government has a majority in the Parliament, it could deliver free Mars bars to everybody daily if it wanted to do so, but I am sure that Labour would—rightly—be the first to object if the Government suddenly

introduced land reform legislation halfway through a widespread consultation on radical land reform. The position simply does not make sense.

I will concentrate on three aspects of the interim report that are not mentioned in the motion. When I met Alison Elliot and Sarah Skerrat in the early days of the work, I said that I had three main concerns. The first was that the community right to buy should be proactively promoted across the south of Scotland, because the perception was that it was really a Highlands and Islands initiative. I am delighted to have been proved wrong on that by the on-going success of the Mull of Galloway Trust in my constituency, which the minister mentioned. It has recently received a grant of more than £300,000 towards the purchase of the most southerly point of Scotland. That said, I still think that there is a misconception about the community right to buy and that there is scope for many more such purchases across the south of Scotland.

The second concern that I highlighted, which is of much more concern from our perspective, is about the apparent willingness—keenness, even—to consider community purchase even when the land or property owner is not a willing participant. Apparently that willingness is shared by the land reform review group, the Labour Party, the SNP and others, I expect, but to the Conservatives it is simply a step too far. We cannot and will not accept such compulsion. Any project that results in community ownership—be it of land or a building—must be undertaken with mutual consent, because we genuinely believe that only with mutual consent can the real benefits of community ownership be achieved for all.

The final item that I put to the LRRG was my strong view, which I still hold, that the group should not be tempted to get involved in the agricultural landlord and tenancy debate, because—as I said in my intervention on Claire Baker—it is already being looked at in considerable depth by the tenant farming forum, which was making and continues to make slow but steady progress. I am delighted that the LRRG has seen the sense in that position and I commend it for not getting involved in that highly sensitive policy area, despite the pressure on it. Progress is being made, and that progress would not be helped in any way by the involvement of yet another outside group, which could only further complicate the issue.

We will not be able to support the motion at decision time. It implies that the LRRG has not delivered, and I do not understand how it could have been expected to deliver in what is, after all, just an interim report. I do not support all its findings, but I am willing to give it the benefit of the doubt.

I move amendment S4M-06845.1, to leave out from second "Land Reform Review Group" to end and insert:

"independent group is looking at the future of land ownership and management in Scotland with a view to enabling communities to benefit from further land reform; understands that the report simply ends phase one of the process and that much work still remains to be done; agrees that, while community ownership is to be encouraged, a willing buyer and willing seller are paramount, and welcomes the group's decision not to examine land tenancy issues, which are currently being scrutinised by the Tenant Farming Forum."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind all members that they must speak through the chair, please.

15:03

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** In his chapter on the proper use of land in "Small Is Beautiful", E F Schumacher says:

"Among material resources, the greatest, unquestionably, is that land. Study how a society uses its land, and you can come to pretty reliable conclusions as to what its future will be."

That is at the heart of the debate and should be at the heart of the land reform review group's progress on the issues.

As has been said, land reform is a process, like constitutional reform, and the background to the current inquiry must be understood so that other members can have the chance to comment.

Clarity on the issues was not helped by Johann Lamont telling the Scottish Labour spring conference in Inverness in April that a compulsory right to buy should become available to urban and rural communities if they so wished. Those were fiery words, but there was not one single detail to allow that to be taken seriously.

**Claire Baker:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Rob Gibson:** I have no time for interventions—I am sorry.

The pace of land reform is quickening, not slackening, under the SNP Government. The tenant farming forum is under notice to get tenancies let or, next year, sterner measures will follow. The land reform review group has been given a wide remit and has been beset by large numbers of vested interests. Its first priority concerns land laws that were passed in 2003, which needed some years to bed in. Ten years on, that post-legislative scrutiny is under way under the Scottish Government's plans.

As the convener of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, I am leading the parliamentary scrutiny of that progress and the

content of the land reform review group's work. The evidence is clear that the land reform measures that were passed under the Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive need to be simplified and amended, as has been said, to make them fit for purpose. The group points to that in its interim report.

The 2003 community right to buy has performed less than perfectly. The rules defy some applicants. The Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act 2003 has, in part, required the Lord Advocate to appeal to the United Kingdom Supreme Court on the *Salvesen v Riddell* case. The judgment found in favour of the landlord, following a vain attempt in 2003 by the then minister, Ross Finnie, to stop notices to quit in the case of limited partnership tenancies issued during the passage of the bill that became the 2003 act. Such matters will have to be addressed within the next year, because of that judgment. Land reform must therefore be taken forward.

I wonder whether Labour is interested in addressing a subject that it has not yet discussed: the way in which the Crown Estate operates. Will we look at that? We have heard nothing from Labour about taking control of the Crown Estate.

The Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive introduced the Cairngorms National Park Boundary Bill, which excluded north Perthshire. Could it not stomach having an SNP-led Perth and Kinross Council in the set-up? It took the minority SNP Government in 2007 to put that right, without opposition. I am sure that Labour could work with the SNP and other parties to address the core issues if it wished to do so.

To further that work, the European convention on human rights is key. It must be used to challenge on the basis of the public interest—a challenge that can be made only if we speak together with a united voice. That could help Scots to gain ownership of, access to and use of our land resources. Meanwhile, arbitrary bouts of platform rhetoric must be tempered by reasoned policy development, which must be the central Government approach. I ask others to engage to make that united voice heard.

15:07

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Four hundred and thirty-two people own half of Scotland. Nowhere else in the European Union or, indeed, the rest of the world is land ownership so skewed to benefit so few.

Land ownership is an economic lever that can make a huge difference in the hands of the community. We have seen buyouts that have transformed communities such as those of Gigha, Uist, Harris and many more. They are not without

their problems and squabbles, but they promote economic and social development.

Distant landowners can be a dead hand over communities. Many tenants and crofters do not know who their landlord is—it is just some faceless company. The Land Registration etc (Scotland) Bill provided an opportunity to register beneficial ownership but the Scottish Government squandered it. The UK Parliament's Scottish Affairs Committee is taking up the challenge with the support of the UK Government, which was given in an answer to Ian Davidson MP recently. The Scottish Affairs Committee also led the charge on the ownership of lands by the Crown Estate—a fact that Rob Gibson did not acknowledge. We must ensure that landlords are accountable and work with communities. Where they do not, the community must be able to buy.

Alex Fergusson asked about our motion. The Scottish Government's rhetoric suggests that it believes in land reform, but its actions say something entirely different. It set up a land reform review group, but I understand that that has now become the community ownership review group. It says that it is no longer looking at the issues of tenant farmers, the Crown Estate, inheritance and a load of other issues that impact on our communities. That appears to be at odds with what the minister said earlier.

What is the direction of travel? We have had an interim report that lacks detail and direction. If the Scottish Government is committed to the issue, it must take responsibility. Jim Hunter, who was previously a member of the group, said this week that the cabinet secretary should be leading on that work.

I had hoped that the interim report would produce proposals and a clear and radical agenda. Let us take, for example, community buyouts. Everyone knows that legislative changes are needed to make hostile buyouts possible. Pairc estate in Lewis has shown that the legislation does not work. A solution to that could have been in the interim report. That would have been a great start, but nothing was forthcoming. The minister says that the issue will be looked at in phase 2, but surely it should have been in the first report.

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Rhoda Grant:** I am short of time and I want to make another couple of points.

The commitment to extend community right to buy in urban areas should have been in the report, too, because ownership of economic drivers would have a similar impact on those communities as it has had on rural areas. Empowering marginalised

communities could lead to their sustainable growth.

Extending the right to buy to tenant farmers and giving them the same security of tenure as crofters would also have been a very welcome step. That group in particular is so oppressed that tenant farmers dare not even speak out. Farms that have been in families for more than 100 years are being repossessed and the evictions smack of the Highland clearances, and yet the review group has washed its hands of them. What will the minister do?

Following the interim report of the land reform review group, a number of people are asking just how serious the Scottish Government is about land reform and how radical it is prepared to be—hence our motion. Jim Hunter's stinging rebuke this week shows how much the Government has neglected land reform when it could have been powering ahead on the matter. Is that another example of Scotland on pause and a Government afraid to annoy the vested interests ahead of the referendum? If that is the case, the Government is mistaken; the Scottish people will not stand for that.

15:11

**Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):**

I welcome the debate secured by Claire Baker. Like others before me, I wish that Mrs Baker had waited for the independent group looking at the future of land ownership and management in Scotland to publish its final report before calling on the Scottish Government to interfere with the process. That would also have given me more time to prepare for the debate. The final report of the land reform review group will come at the end of phase 2. As has been said, the report published last month is only an interim report.

There is consensus in the chamber because we all agree to build on the achievements of the Scottish Parliament on land reform. I noticed with interest that last year three significant land reform acts were passed: the Agricultural Holdings (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2012, the Long Leases (Scotland) Act 2012 and the Land Registration etc (Scotland) Act 2012. As the minister said, the commitment to land reform is a process, not an event. The Parliament and the Scottish Government have clearly demonstrated their will to build on the community right to buy landmark achievement.

What has impressed me most in the debate is how the land reform review group was established independent from Government and how it has engaged with many stakeholders. I remember last year participating in the Scottish Government community empowerment and renewal bill

consultation as a community councillor of my wee town of Westhill in Aberdeenshire.

I will illustrate how radical and bold we already are when it comes to land reform. When our small group of community councillors was asked whether we would support a community right to buy for urban communities, not everyone around the table understood why urban communities would want to engage with the idea, and most agreed that that proposition was not for them. When we were prompted to consider whether it would be appropriate to transfer unused or underused public sector assets to individual communities, the same answers came that that was not for our community.

By then, I found it difficult to contain my frustration and, when the same answers came in response to the question, "Would it help your community if it owned land or buildings?" I felt an urge to speak. I pointed out to everyone that we were looking for a piece of land to create a space for allotments to benefit many in our community. The answer that I received showed me how different the attitude to land ownership in Scotland is from the attitude in the country that I came from many years ago. I was asked, "Why own a piece of land and be responsible for it when we could ask the local estate to help with this community local project?"

There is a danger that the top-down legislation that Claire Baker seems to ask for is not what is required, as we want land reform legislation to reflect the aspirations of our communities, both urban and rural.

Let me be clear: we have seen great progress, not only in the west of Scotland but in the region that I have the privilege to represent—North East Scotland. Attitudes in my wee town of Westhill have moved on. We celebrated the opening of the first men's shed in Scotland—the Westhill Men's Shed—a community project that I had the pleasure of visiting with the local constituency MSP, Dennis Robertson.

I am proud that the Westhill Men's Shed has been nominated as a contender for the people's choice award by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations. More to the point, the Westhill Men's Shed was one of the first community groups in the north-east to apply for community asset transfer. It was successful, the legislation works and the attitudes are changing. However, I wonder whether Marty Kehoe, who is the chairman of the Westhill Men's Shed, had an influence on the group's change of attitude.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close now, please.

**Christian Allard:** As a New Yorker, Marty would have a more radical and bold attitude to

communities owning and managing land and properties than most people who were born in Scotland.

15:16

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** I am very pleased to speak in the first land reform debate in the Parliament for 10 years.

As Christian Allard said, land reform is a process, not an event. He was, of course, quoting my former ministerial colleague John Sewel, who in 1997 threw himself into leading the process of developing radical proposals on land reform. It was those proposals that we enacted in the exciting first four years of the Scottish Parliament in what was some of the most exciting legislation that we had at the time.

I think that the process stalled in 2007, and it has really only started up again with the land reform review group's report, which is the occasion for the debate. I note the Government amendment, which says that it is an independent report, but when he winds up the debate the minister must answer the point that Alex Fergusson made. He was quoting Jim Hunter, who said that the Scottish Government was involved in the work. We need some explanation of that.

The central problem with the report is that it is focused—and, in my opinion, too narrowly focused—on

"communities rather than relationships between individuals."

Of course communities are important—although, too often, it is just the influence of communities that is referred to in the report—but relationships are absolutely crucial. I am talking about relationships between individuals and the land in general and among individuals on the land in particular. Dealing with those relationships must mean addressing tenure and other related issues.

The problems are well known and have been cited by more than one speaker: 10 per cent of the land is owned by 16 individuals and 432 individuals own half of Scotland. I repeat the much-quoted words of Jim Hunter, who described Scotland as having the

"most concentrated, most inequitable ... and most undemocratic land ownership system in the entire developed world."

That completely contradicts the idea that we like to have of Scotland being a more egalitarian country. Despite that, the report backs off important measures such as tenant farmers having the right to buy their own land. That is why "diversification" is the most important word in the Labour motion.

There are many other issues that I do not have time to deal with, but I briefly mention that the Scottish Affairs Committee at Westminster is looking into the issue of who owns the land in Scotland, because we do not seem to have very full knowledge of that. I noted that the Prime Minister said that he was going to help in that process, which led to another Twitter headline about the Tories doing more for land reform than the SNP, but I will not comment on that.

It is clear that community ownership is a very important part of the agenda, notwithstanding what I have said. I welcome the comments that my leader, Johann Lamont, made about that at the Labour conference. Under part 3 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, an extension is allowed when the landowner is not a willing buyer. All that she was saying was that we should use that legislation to the full, if it is in the public interest.

Part of the issue is about extending the provisions to urban areas, which is a particular interest of mine. I have come across a few issues to do with public land in urban areas and the difficulties of acquiring it. I think that the report is absolutely right to say that the state aid rules must be addressed. My understanding is that they apply only when there is a commercial competitor and that there are also general block exemption regulations in Europe. All that needs to be clarified so that it is much easier to access the large areas of public land that could be put to community use in urban areas.

I have half a minute left. If I can be indulged, I will say something that nobody else will say in this debate. The City of Edinburgh Council quotes the 2003 act in order to prevent signs in parks from saying "No dogs allowed". I have looked into the issue and there is no express right of access for dogs under that act. I hope that the Government can somehow clarify the situation so that we can have some parks in Edinburgh and indeed in Leith where dogs are not allowed without the City of Edinburgh Council quoting land reform legislation.

15:20

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** I am delighted that we are debating land reform, and I am delighted that the Labour Party has moved on from many of the positions that it adopted 10 years ago. For example, during consideration of the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Bill, the SNP brought forward the idea that a compulsory right to buy might be a good idea, and one of those who voted against it was, strangely enough, Rhoda Grant. That was at stage 2 in committee. John Farquhar Munro joined the SNP members and Mike Rumbles voted against.

**Rhoda Grant:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Stewart Stevenson:** There is no time. Sorry.

I do not mind the Labour Party changing its mind. On the contrary, I welcome the fact that some of the things that I said during the passage of previous legislation have now become even more timely. For example, on 23 January 2003, I said that the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill was timid because it left

"much of Scotland's land—that held by companies, trusts and enduring partnerships—beyond the reach of the right to buy that is provided under the bill."—[*Official Report*, 23 January 2003; c 14465.]

In reality, it is only the relatively small minority of land that is in private ownership that is available to be bought.

I hope that we can explore, through the reform group, what kind of constraints are created by that fact. We do not necessarily have the legislative power here to deal with it but, either through voting yes in 2014 or with the enthusiastic support of a Tory Prime Minister who says that he is willing to help, we might see a way of unpicking the trust law that is far too often—in the whole of the UK, but particularly in Scotland—used to conceal beneficial ownership and prevent legal transfers of land because it is the interest in the trust and not the interest in the land that transfers.

I hope that we will see that there is a coalition of interest—a coalition of the willing—that might pick up the significant challenge that exists with the structure of land ownership. In this place, we have limited powers in the area. We certainly have no powers over company law and we have little power over the way in which trusts operate.

I have previous on this. I moved amendment 207 at stage 3 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill on 23 January 2003, which sought to make some provisions to tackle avoidance. In particular, I drew attention to the fact that landlords were scuttling all round the place, taking cover and hiding things so that it would be difficult for us to know what was actually happening. I am afraid that, on that occasion, I was unable to persuade the then Government to support my amendment. Apparently, some of the Tories said in a sedentary intervention that trusts are very good indeed.

Rhoda Grant rightly talked about the Pairc estate. I absolutely share her discontent that part 3 of the 2003 act has, as yet, not delivered a single purchase. I know that the minister will not be able to respond to what is a legal issue that is still in play, but I regret that we have had years and years of legal process that has been deliberately used to thwart community interests. I hope that we will have opportunities to fix that at some time in the future.

15:24

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** Both Labour and SNP speakers in this debate have used the word “consensus” and talked about a consensus on land reform. I have to say that I have heard calmer consensus in the past. I have some empathy with Stewart Stevenson, who clearly tried valiantly to persuade the previous Government to do something that I also failed to persuade Fergus Ewing to do not so long ago. Perhaps we are on the same page on that one.

**Stewart Stevenson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Patrick Harvie:** I am afraid that I do not have time, any more than Mr Stevenson did earlier.

In reality, there are serious differences on some of the questions, but there are people on the Labour and SNP sides who can be part of a consensus. Where the consensus breaks down is elsewhere. In a letter that was published in *The Herald* today, Mr Douglas McAdam from Scottish Land & Estates argues:

“The reality is that Scotland does have a varied pattern of land ownership”.

There are people who will deny point-blank the statistics that we have heard about a few hundred people owning half of the country. There are people who will deny that such a situation is inherently inequitable. There are those who will wish merely to make the current maldistribution of land in this country less problematic.

Those of us who want to be part of a consensus should be clear that the current maldistribution is unacceptable and that we are seeking to change it rather than merely ameliorate it. The decision of the land reform review group to focus on such a narrow interpretation of its remit is therefore very disappointing. It now places emphasis on

“communities rather than relationships between individuals”—

which Malcolm Chisholm referred to in his speech—and on focusing on

“considering how the benefits of community ownership could be extended to more communities”.

Andy Wightman has rightly suggested that the LRRG started out as a land reform review group and became a community ownership review group. It seems that other issues such as the position of the Crown Estate, common good land, taxation and succession will be considered only if and when it is thought that those issues will contribute to the community ownership objectives. That is very disappointing.

Alex Fergusson told us towards the beginning of the debate that the Government’s decision to commission a review group demonstrates a

commitment to radical action; I suspect that Alex Fergusson is a little less naive than that. I think that he knows that sometimes Governments commission reports into things without having a commitment to act. We need to remember that there are people on both sides of the agenda who want to see radical action. However, there are people on both sides of the divide who, when they find themselves in government, find that it is easier to get cold feet.

On land value taxation, the minister seemed to imply that taxation measures might remain on the agenda to some extent, although I did not hear any specific proposals or commitments to action. I hope that Labour, in closing, can indicate whether it remains open to land value taxation. Both the larger parties, over the years, have shown some limited interest in the issue. They have never quite ruled it out, but they have never quite committed to it.

If we look at the consultation responses, some 82 per cent of the opposition to land value taxation came from estates, farm owners, landowners and their representatives. We should not be in the least bit surprised by that. There is an opportunity to take action on the issue in the context of local government finance reform and land reform and the overlap between the two.

15:28

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):** One message that has come out of the wider debate is that, if we are to create a socially just Scotland, land reform must play its part. There also appears to be an acceptance that, although the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 was an important step forward, it is quite complex in parts—a point that Malcolm Chisholm might have been implying earlier.

The LRRG has made a start, and its remit to enable more people in Scotland to have an opportunity of land ownership and to look at governance, management and use has to be right. However, it must be right to look not only at procedures but at approaches that will work in increasing the diversity of land ownership in Scotland and better land use.

We should be proud of the community right-to-buy legislation in 2005. A community in Fife was the first community in Scotland to purchase land under that legislation. I also recognise the value of having a Scottish land fund to support more rural communities to buy land. I recognise, however, that in an ideal world we would want to spend a great deal more than £6 million on that.

It would be complacent for us to rest on our laurels as a Parliament. Land policy needs to be reviewed and I am pleased that the Scottish

Government will also hold a review of agricultural tenancies. I await with great interest the details of how the farm tenancies review will be carried out.

The LRRG has an important job to do, and it has so far travelled widely in engaging with stakeholders. In March, Dr Alison Elliot and others paid a visit to my part of the world, which was warmly welcomed by the east neuk community.

I am pleased to say that we have in the east neuk estates a group of landowners who recognise their wider responsibilities to the local community. They were delighted to welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead, to the east neuk last month.

The east neuk estates group was established in 2008, when six adjoining estates in Fife got together to work strategically to ensure the long-term health of the estates and the local community. They have pooled resources to help the local school, and they contribute to affordable housing and provide employment space in converted steadings. Along with the cabinet secretary, we visited a guitar maker in one such steading.

The estate owners also buy from local producers and so increase their combined economic impact. They have been working with Fife Council, and a joint community action plan is being developed under a steering group, which views that model as an exemplar for a new relationship between land, people, economy and the environment.

I would not for one minute suggest that those initiatives detract from community right-to-buy proposals or from issues of land ownership, but they should be viewed as part of a progressive land-use mix in modern Scotland.

It is essential that people—and especially children—believe that they have more of a stake in our land. For example, understanding food production is a key part of developing a healthy relationship with food. Scotland's first community-owned farm—Whitmuir, in Christine Grahame's constituency—aims to get more stakeholders than the small number of landowners who own half of Scotland. The project is truly inspiring, and I hope it will be replicated in other parts of the country, including in my constituency of North East Fife.

Until we have the LRRG's final report, we will not be able to judge matters fully. However, it is clear—judging from the responses that have been received so far—that land reform is an issue that engages Scotland and which deserves to be taken seriously by the Parliament and the Government.

15:32

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I refer to my agricultural interests as noted in the register of members' interests.

I am pleased to close today's debate for the Scottish Conservatives, and I thank those organisations that have provided briefings, including Community Land Scotland, NFU Scotland and Scottish Land & Estates.

As Alex Fergusson said, the Scottish Conservatives were pleased that the LRRG decided not to examine land tenancy issues. It is appropriate that those issues are being considered by the tenant farming forum, as other members have said, and we look forward to the outcome of the forum's deliberations being made available in the near future.

As Alex Fergusson's amendment makes clear, we are positive about the benefits that can arise from community ownership, and we can be proud of our record on the matter in government, not least the passage of the Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Act 1997.

A transfer of ownership of the Keoldale estate in my region—next door to Cape Wrath—from the Scottish ministers to the local sheep club is going ahead as we speak. The estate, which covers an area of 30,000 acres, is being transferred for approximately £250,000. At less than £10 an acre, the transfer is probably a good deal for the sheep club, and it is down to Conservative legislation.

We strongly believe—and we will always uphold the belief—that community ownership must be achieved through the willingness of both the buyer and the seller. That is fundamental. The idea of forcing people against their wish is not acceptable, and we are concerned that the necessity of having a willing seller landowner as part of any community involvement—

**Stewart Stevenson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jamie McGrigor:** I do not have time.

That necessity is not addressed in the interim report, and we wonder why that is the case. We urge the LRRG to consider that key issue as it continues its work.

Some parts of the interim report can be commended. For example, the need to continue to develop effective community engagement is correct, as is the need to define the outcomes that a community wants to achieve and the need for effective community planning. There is some recognition in the report that there are numerous ways in which the community can have a greater say in the use of land without necessarily owning it. There are many existing examples of good



practice, and I trust that the LRRG will identify them as part of its phase 2 work.

More generally, all of us should recognise that, in the vast majority of cases, owners of private land and property already deliver tangible economic, social and environmental benefits to local people, including communities in our remote rural and island areas. As the Scottish Land & Estates briefing validly points out, it is not correct to view private land ownership as an inhibitor of rural development. A recent survey revealed that just over a quarter of Scottish Land & Estates members will together invest £250 million over the next two years, which will sustain and create thousands of jobs across rural Scotland.

In conclusion, we await with interest the results of phase 2 of the LRRG, including its recommendations on how community ownership might be expanded in urban areas. We are happy to support practical moves that will encourage greater community ownership, management and use of the land, but the basic principle about the willingness of both seller and buyer must be respected.

I support the amendment in the name of Alex Fergusson.

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

I call Paul Wheelhouse. Minister, you have six minutes.

15:35

**Paul Wheelhouse:** I thank all members for what has been a short but fascinating debate that has reflected the cultural impact of land ownership and the passion that it inspires. Members across the chamber have made some very good points in this useful debate, although it would be nice to have a longer debate in future. As I said in my opening speech, land reform is an emotive and complex subject, and the quality of the speeches has reflected both the depth of members' knowledge and the high quality of the briefings and submissions to the land reform review group that stakeholders have provided.

Members have raised so many points that it will be impossible for me to respond to them all in the limited time available, but I will pick up on several.

First, on Patrick Harvie's point about taxation, we expect that the land reform review group will look at taxation and land value tax during phase 2. I confirm that one of the research papers that the review group will commission will be on taxation. As part of its phase 2 work, the group will consider the evidence contained in the research paper and may make recommendations to Government on that as part of its final report. Obviously, we will

look at any recommendations that the group makes.

On the point that Malcolm Chisholm and Alex Fergusson made about the Government's involvement in the group, we are of course involved in any review in a number of ways. Richard Lochhead and I met the review group and were consulted for our views on land reform issues. We have provided the secretariat, we have paid for the independent communications support, which was provided by an agency, and we have been involved in consultation on the group's membership. We have supported the review group with the necessary resources as requested, so we have had some involvement. However, I make it clear that we have always seen the group as being independent of Government. We wanted to see what the group came forward with; we did not want to interfere in the process.

If I have time, I will come on to the points that were made by others, but I had better plough on.

The Scottish Government's commitment to radical land reform is clear, as I set out in my opening speech. I reiterate that we value the work of the independent land reform review group, which is chaired by Dr Elliot. As I said, the review group will help us to move forward the process of land reform in what will be a radical and thoughtful way. The group will tell us where we need to amend the previous Administration's land reform legislation—which I acknowledge was well intentioned but which, I think we all agree, has some flaws—to make it easier for communities to buy land. Indeed, I assure members that I share the frustrations that many people have about the process of community land registration, to give just one example.

We expect that the review group will make radical recommendations for change in a wide variety of areas in both rural and—to pick up Malcolm Chisholm's point—urban Scotland. I said that we intend to explore how to take forward any early recommendations through the community empowerment and renewal bill. The group will also look at whether a land agency could unlock community ownership for a wider range of communities and potentially provide brokerage where there is a problem with conflict between different uses. We welcome that as an area for further exploration.

Of course, the land reform review group is only one part of our commitment to land reform. We have already committed to a review of agricultural tenancies, which will be informed by the work of the tenant farming forum and the land reform review consultation. The separate agricultural holdings review will deliver a pledge that was made in our free-standing 2011 manifesto for the farming sector.

We will continue to work directly with communities that are thinking about buying their land. We will encourage them to consider community ownership, support them in the application process and approve community buyouts of land. We have already supported many communities with funds for acquisitions.

We think creatively about the assets that we hold on the public's behalf. As an illustration, the first example of a community-led woodland croft project is on Mull—in Mr Russell's constituency—where nine woodland crofts have been established. Through the national forest land scheme, Forestry Commission Scotland can already make land available to local communities to establish woodland crofts to help to support local development. We are supporting new entrants to farming on the national forest estate.

I mentioned the land fund earlier, but it is worth noting that we resurrected that fund, which was closed under the Labour Administration.

I hope that the debate has provided members with the opportunity to appreciate the work of the independent land reform review group. We want all our people to appreciate the land that is their heritage. We want all our communities—if they want the opportunity—to have more control of their destiny, and land reform is one of the key ways in which to enable that.

I think that I have taken all my time, Presiding Officer, so I will stop there.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You had six minutes, minister.

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Excellent.

Land reform has a long history in Scotland. In a few short years, it has come a long way but, as I said, we acknowledge that there remains a great deal to do. I hope that the debate marks the point at which we take the opportunity to provide radical solutions. I hope that members will support the work of the land reform review group and, in due course, an agricultural holdings review, to help us to make a real difference across Scotland. I hope that we can look back on this day as the day when a consensus formed and Parliament set out on a constructive path with, I hope, unity of purpose to deliver on land reform.

As I have a bit more time than I thought, I will refer to a couple of points that colleagues made. Christian Allard and Roderick Campbell gave good examples of where community land ownership affects areas that are outside the Highlands and Islands heartlands: in Westhill in Aberdeenshire, and in the east neuk in Fife. We have tried to stress that the agenda goes beyond the heartlands in the Highlands and Islands. One important aspect of the review group's work, as

Alex Fergusson acknowledged, is to consider how we extend community ownership to areas outside those heartlands and what the barriers are that have reduced the number of projects.

Rhoda Grant seemed to call into question the need for an independent review. I remind her that, for her party's manifesto for the 2011 elections, the Labour Party committed to a land reform review. We have delivered a review, and it is incumbent on us to see what it produces. We will treat it as an independent group and, where we can, we will take on board the points that it raises. As I said to Mr Fergusson, we will ensure that the group is resourced. We have an opportunity to support the work of the land reform review group and to move forward with a consensus.

15:41

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** The Scottish Labour Party motion highlights Scottish Labour's belief that

"ownership of land is an economic and social issue".

There are a number of recommendations in the land reform review group's phase 1 report that, if carried forward, will help to shape a fairer future for land settlement in Scotland. Those include recommendations on a possible land agency, the development of community energy and the exploration of minimum engagement standards between landowners and communities, and possible sanctions. However, as the debate and some of the initial comment on the report have shown, there has also been disappointment and some marginalisation.

I acknowledge the widening of the membership of the group, which the minister highlighted. Scottish Labour believes that it is right that communities should have more of a stake in the land on which they live and work. The status quo in land ownership is not necessarily the situation that suits communities best in rural and urban Scotland in the 21st century. Colleagues have highlighted the statistics on land ownership. Does the Scottish Government agree that the pattern of land ownership is inequitable? The issue is in part about business, as some have said to me, but it is also a matter of ethics and fairness and it is about empowerment in a democratic Scotland. Some say that community buyout is the way forward only in the Highlands and Islands, so I was pleased to hear the remarks of the minister and Alex Fergusson in relation to other regions such as the south of Scotland.

Let us take a little time to analyse the issue further. Frankly, from what we heard on the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, Gigha residents initially were not confident about community ownership. In fact,

some residents shied away from the prospect of such responsibility. However, those who visited Eigg returned inspired with confidence and full of ideas for what the future could hold. They and others who have developed land buyouts had support with their bids from Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I was pleased to hear about the membership increase in that regard.

As a member of the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, I have seen for myself that the island is now a resilient community with young families, increased numbers in the primary school, a rolling programme to make tenant houses sustainable, and new employment coming to the island. That is not to say that there are not management challenges, but they are the community's challenges and the future is theirs.

In Scottish Labour's view, communities elsewhere need the same support and contact if they are to move forward towards ownership of their assets. Scottish Labour hopes that the LRRG will consider the options Scotland-wide; indeed, it has been confirmed that it will do so.

Although actual ownership is not the only answer, it should not be said that that is not a possibility in parts of Scotland where communities lack knowledge—that is an issue that has been raised with me. We should at least be daring to ask whether there are indeed outmoded patterns of land ownership in Scotland, as Rhoda Grant and others have today suggested there are. In asking that question, I am not implying that there are not many good large landowners—I have visited some in the south of Scotland in the company of Scottish Land & Estates. Leasing land is a way forward, as shown by the Forestry Commission's action on the Innerleithen mechanical uplift—AIMUp—project. However, I believe that it is right to ask whether the minister sees a connection between land ownership patterns and the promotion of a more socially just Scotland.

Scottish Labour is of the view, as stated by our leader Johann Lamont, that

"Community ownership of assets is a powerful vehicle to tackle not just social injustice and inequality but it also delivers economic growth. It gives power to the people and allows them to transform their communities."

At our recent conference, Johann Lamont said:

"If it is in the public interest, communities will have the right to purchase land, even when the land owner is not a willing seller."

From what Rob Gibson says, I am not sure whether he agrees with that or not. Scottish Labour believes that there should be a strong right to buy, which will come only with legislation.

We are debating reconnecting people with the land, not simply a romantic notion. Interestingly, Nourish Scotland, a non-profit organisation that was set up to develop and promote a fairer and more sustainable food system in Scotland, submitted a briefing to the review group that said that land ownership patterns in Scotland contrasted with the fact that

"an increasing number of our citizens are coming to depend on food banks to feed their families."

Nourish Scotland argues for

"redefining the rights and responsibilities of public benefit from all land".

**Rob Gibson:** The point is that, if there has to be a social and economic part to the issue, there has to be an environmental part as well. I am surprised that Labour has missed that out, because that is the way in which people will be able to till the land, make their own food and so on. That is what the member is talking about as being an alternative to food banks.

**Claudia Beamish:** I assure the member that Labour is committed to environmental ownership for a sustainable future. I think that my line of questioning in the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, even this morning, stands as a testament to that.

There is certainly a strong, renewed interest in urban and rural Scotland in growing our own food, and in community spaces. In order to encourage such use of the land, our view is that land ownership must change.

It is somewhat disappointing that, in today's debate, there has not been a great deal of focus on urban perspectives. All of us in the chamber should think about that. Although the community empowerment and renewal bill has been mentioned, and we have been assured that the views of consultees will be taken on board by the review group, ownership as an economic driver for marginalised communities, which Malcolm Chisholm talked about, is important and should be a strong part of the review.

Another issue of concern, as highlighted by Claire Baker and others, is the marginalisation of the tenanted sector in phase 2 of the group's work. Although I understand what the minister said, if phase 2 is to better encourage communities in both rural and urban Scotland to take more of a stake in land management and land use, why was such a significant sector hived off in the review? I stress that tenant farmers have taken time to attend meetings, such as the one that I attended in Dumfries, and to make submissions in the middle of a challenging winter, only to discover that their perspective and needs are excluded from the main debate. That is surely not right.

**Paul Wheelhouse:** Will the member give way?

**Claudia Beamish:** I am sorry; I am almost in my last minute.

An East Lothian tenant farmer constituent of mine recently sent me "The Destruction of Scottish Agriculture", which was written by the Rev George Brooks in 1885. The first chapter, entitled "To the Tenant Farmers of Scotland", tells of inequality in the relationship between tenants and landowners. Some would say that, although the situation has changed in many ways, there is still a need to consider it carefully. I acknowledge that the Scottish Government is doing that, but I believe that it should be done also by the land reform review group, and that tenant farmers should not be marginalised.

That leads me to a definition of "consensus". I understand that its origins are in the Latin word "consentio", which means "feeling together". Perhaps because of the skewed power relationship between landlords and tenants, the tenant farmers forum does not have that feeling of working together. However, I hope that, in the interests of land reform in Scotland, everyone in this chamber and beyond will share a consensus on working together for our future.

## Student Support

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

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-06843, in the name of Hugh Henry, on student support. I invite those members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak button. The debate is extremely tight for time, so I advise members that they will have to be disciplined in keeping to the time allocated if we are to call everyone who wishes to speak.

I call Hugh Henry to speak to and move the motion. You have 10 minutes, Mr Henry.

15:50

**Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):** We have heard a lot recently about the Scottish Government's determination to help students from lower-income households to succeed in higher education. Indeed, allegedly tuition fees were scrapped to encourage those students to access a university place. The rhetoric is all there; sadly, the reality gives the lie to that commitment.

Just this week, Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski, who was hand-picked by Mike Russell to advise on changes in governance in our universities, said that the main beneficiaries of free tuition are middle-class parents who do not have to pay fees for children who would be more likely to go to university in any case. He pointed out that the current tuition fees policy does not support people from poorer backgrounds, who would not have had to make any contribution anyway, whatever the system.

Professor von Prondzynski is not alone in that analysis. Last week, Professor Sheila Riddell of the University of Edinburgh pointed out that the proportion of students from working-class backgrounds at Scotland's ancient universities has fallen. She said that

"Overall, young people from poorer backgrounds are much less likely to go to university",

compared with those from better-off families. She has also claimed that, to date, free undergraduate tuition has not markedly altered the pattern of recruitment to Scottish universities.

What other challenges might there be in addressing the problem? Clearly, student debt is a major issue. The Scottish National Party came to power in 2007 promising to write off student debt. Scottish Labour said that it could not be done—I remember at the time Allan Wilson being derided by Fiona Hyslop and Nicola Sturgeon, but the SNP persisted in saying that the debt would be written off. Lo and behold! The promise was broken and is now being conveniently forgotten. However, superficial opposition to student debt remains a

feature of SNP rhetoric and it is one of the main arguments that the SNP uses for the abolition of tuition fees.

Unfortunately, opposition to increased debt does not seem to apply to Scottish students from the lowest-income families. We might think that the failure to bring more lower-income students to university and the much-trumpeted opposition to debt would mean that the SNP actually did something to reduce debt levels for students from lower-income families. Let us look at the SNP Government's record.

SNP ministers have told us that the so-called minimum income guarantee is the best student support package in the United Kingdom. The most recent statistics on HE student support in Scotland show that, between 2010-11 and 2011-12, the amount of non-repayable awards, or grants, actually decreased by £24 million, which is a reduction of 19 per cent. At the same time, the amounts authorised in loans—loans that lead to debt—increased by £20.6 million. So much for writing off student debt.

That switch to loans is hitting the poorest students the hardest. Those who are living in households with an income below £25,000 will lose between £890 and £1,640 per year. It should be remembered that more than 40 per cent of full-time students who are supported by the Scottish Government come from households with incomes below £25,000, so they are the ones who are most directly affected. At the same time, students with a family income of £61,000 or more will now qualify for a cheap £4,500 loan. In other words, poorer students are being asked to subsidise better-off students. Debt is being piled on to poorer students, and somehow that is supposed to make it easier for them to go to university.

Since when did debt become part of our income? Those of us who have a mortgage know that that is a debt that has to be repaid. However, according to the SNP and the National Union of Students, for lower-income students, debt is now part of their income. The idea is bizarre and perverse. We should remember that this is from the same Scottish Government that said in 2008:

"We believe that it is wrong for students to be put into debt by the state."

It is clear that it did not mean—or did not care about—students from lower-income families, whose debts are being increased and whose grants are being cut.

We should listen to Lucy Hunter, who is a former head of higher education in the Scottish Executive. She said:

"The grant reductions now planned will add considerably to the overall debt of students from lower income

households without increasing the cash they have to spend."

In other words, the amount that those students have to spend is being switched from grants to loans, which leads to more debt. Scottish graduates from poorer backgrounds will end up with higher Government debt and less disposable income later in life.

Comparisons are often made with students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Are bursaries and grants being cut for poorer students in those jurisdictions? In England, students whose household income is of up to £25,000 can claim grants of up to £3,354. In Scotland, the same grant could be as low as £500; at most, it would be £1,750. Even the much-derided English system is prepared to give more help to poorer students. In Wales, grants of £5,161 are available to students whose household income is under £18,730. In Northern Ireland, maintenance grants of £3,475 are available to students whose household income is £19,203 or less. It seems that, in Scotland, the rocks will melt with the sun before any significant assistance is given to poorer students.

It is not just younger students who are being hit. As Lucy Hunter demonstrated in her excellent article, Scotland is the only part of the United Kingdom in which mature students are given lower grants than young students receive. Apparently, we have a commitment to lifelong learning in this country, but grant support for mature students, who often have family and other financial commitments to meet, is being reduced to a flat rate of £750 for those with incomes of up to £17,000. Poor mature students are being given a grant of £750, which is the worst in the United Kingdom.

I know many teachers and lecturers in colleges and universities who went back to education after having been made redundant or having decided on a career switch. It seems that the Scottish Government is turning its back on such people, who often have a huge amount to contribute by drawing on a wealth of working and life experience. In SNP-led Scotland, mature students will receive lower grants and finish their studies with around 45 per cent more debt than all students from the most well-off backgrounds. Over four years, young Scots from lower-income homes will need to borrow £22,000 to obtain their full state support for living costs. So much for writing off student debt. Lucy Hunter pointed out in her excellent article,

"With much the lowest grants and universal free tuition",

Scotland is the part of the United Kingdom that is moving

"closest to treating higher education support as a flat-rate benefit, while other jurisdictions choose instead to give

more grant to those from lower-income homes ... As a result, the Scottish Government is the only one in the UK which expects graduates from poorer backgrounds to end up with a higher government debt and, therefore, a larger claim on their future earnings"

and less disposable income in later life

"than their peers from wealthier homes."

The SNP quotes the NUS in its amendment—both parrot the "best support package" nonsense. Yes, Scotland stands out from the rest of the UK—we should be quite clear about that—but the reality is that Scotland stands alone in its diminishing use of student grants, in asking poorer students to subsidise the better off and in refusing to take the action needed to help more students from poorer backgrounds succeed at university. The new support package is penalising the poor to help the rich.

It is time to admit that the present system is perverse and unfair; time to move from paying lip service to social justice to making it a reality; time to ditch the present funding system, which hits poorer students the hardest; and time to bring in decent grants now.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the introduction of the minimum income guarantee for students; notes that grants for lower-income students are being cut; believes that lower-income students are being financially disadvantaged in Scotland compared to elsewhere in the UK; does not accept that lower-income students should be disadvantaged in order to provide support for those from better-off households, and believes that the cuts to grants for lower-income students should be reversed in order to address inequality in access to higher education in Scotland.

16:00

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** I will start with two irrefutable facts: first, if you charge students fees, they will end up owing more money. That is the missing sentence from Mr Henry's opening speech: if you charge students fees, they will end up owing more money.

**Hugh Henry:** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

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

The second irrefutable fact is that if you vote against widening access, you will not widen access. Of course, that is precisely what the Labour Party did at stage 1 of the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Michael Russell:** I will take Mr Findlay in just a minute. We wait with bated breath to see whether Labour will vote against widening access for the second time. Will Mr Findlay tell us?

**Neil Findlay:** I am sure that the cabinet secretary will want to correct the record rather than continue with a mistruth, because he knows that in the committee we wanted to widen access even further but he rejected our amendments.

**Michael Russell:** The merest sophistry as ever from Mr Findlay. I repeat: if you vote against widening access, you will not widen access. However, that is what Labour did. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Michael Russell:** I thank Labour for bringing the debate, because it allows me to celebrate one of the great successes of the SNP's second term: the implementation of the manifesto commitment to introduce a minimum income for students. We did what we said we would do, and in fact we went further, because we set the minimum income at £7,250. I note Mr Henry's full-frontal attack on the National Union of Students. However, I will quote again what the NUS rightly said, which was that we have produced the "best support package" available anywhere in the UK.

The Labour Party seems to be hell-bent on telling people what they cannot have and what will be taken away from them. We have had Ed Balls saying this week that the Tory cuts will be sustained. If ever there was a shameful statement, it was that. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Michael Russell:** Presiding Officer, can the record note that Mr Findlay is enjoying himself by shouting, as usual?

Now we have the Labour Party's determination to take away free education in Scotland. This is what the Labour motion is all about, yet again: "Let's take away free education in Scotland."

**Hugh Henry:** Perhaps the cabinet secretary has not read the motion, because there is nothing in the motion that talks about that particular point; what it is saying is, "Let's restore grants to poorer students." That is what the cabinet secretary is ignoring.

**Michael Russell:** There is no direct line from Ed Balls to Hugh Henry. That is yet another spending commitment made that has not been cleared by the shadow chancellor and which is obviously not in the manifesto. The reality is that all the rhetoric from Labour is about imposing student fees, but it has not got the guts to say so. That is the reality of where we have been for the past year.

Free education is central to my vision of the Scotland that we should have and, indeed, to the

vision of Scotland that most people in Scotland share. It is also central to the NUS's vision of the country that it wants to live in. I listen and talk to the NUS; I do not deride it in the Parliament chamber, as Mr Henry does.

The NUS said, after we had been talking about student support and student finance over a long period, that it wanted to ensure that there was "money in student pockets". That is what the NUS wanted to see. We worked hard with the NUS, to adjust the amount of money that was available to support bursaries, so that we could make the maximum amount available to students. In that way, we have been able to produce the minimum student income.

**Hugh Henry:** More debt.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Michael Russell:** Mr Henry continues to mutter and shout. That is Labour's contribution to debate. All Labour members are prepared to do is mutter and shout.

Let us look at student debt figures, which are crucial. The UK graduates survey in 2012 showed clearly that the average student loan debt for Scottish students at that stage was £6,480, compared with £17,140 in England and £13,650 in Wales—that is without student fees.

**Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

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

It is now estimated that the English and Welsh figures could climb to £50,000. That is the reality of the debate that we are having. That is what Labour wants. There is to be that massive increase, but it is all cloaked in the language that we heard.

We are trying to widen access in a way that will work, because we know that fees will turn people off. We are trying to legislate for widening access. Statutory widening access agreements will be put in place, and this will be the only place in these islands where there is such a commitment.

We are determined that the agreements will work, and our discussions with Universities Scotland and universities themselves have been very positive. Of course, Labour does not want the agreements to work, because Labour's absolute approach is that whatever the Scottish Government proposes is to be opposed.

**Neil Findlay:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Michael Russell:** No, sorry. I want to finish my point.

Labour's way of opposing the agreements is therefore to vote against a bill that will widen access and to bring to the Parliament the mess of a proposal on student finance that we are considering, as though that makes a contribution in some way.

We must ensure that we widen access. We know from every survey that has taken place that what puts students off is the prospect of fees. The motion has nothing to commend it at all, except Labour's oppositionism. What we need to commend is the commitment to free education that the Parliament has shown. We need to ensure that we continue to deliver free education, because that is the only way—along with the legislation that we have—that we will genuinely widen access.

Let us not have these silly games about the notions that Labour is putting forward. Let us look at the truth. In Scotland we provide the best package of student support that is available anywhere in the UK. That is something of which we should be justifiably proud, and which is supported by students and universities. Only Labour and perhaps other parties are against the expansion of higher education that we have undertaken.

I move amendment S4M-06843.2, to leave out from first "notes" to end and insert:

"believes that access to university should be based on ability to learn, not ability to pay; further believes that neither upfront nor backdoor tuition fees have any place in Scotland; welcomes the removal of tuition fees, saving around 125,000 students up to £27,000 compared with England; further welcomes the introduction of the minimum income guarantee to give the poorest students a minimum income of £7,250 per year in maintenance support from 2013-14 and the increase in the minimum level of student loan to £4,500 a year for every eligible student, and agrees with comments by the National Union of Students Scotland that Scotland has 'the best support package in the whole of the UK'."

16:08

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I welcome the Labour Party's scheduling of a debate on student support. This is not the first time that the Parliament has addressed the issue and I am sure that it is by no means the last. The issue is regarded with keen interest by students, people in higher education and parents whose youngsters plan to go to university.

Hugh Henry's motion, which Conservatives are pleased to support, notes the cut in grants for lower-income students. Hugh Henry was quite right to point that out, because the figures are beyond doubt. The amount of money that the Student Awards Agency for Scotland has handed out in non-repayable grants has fallen by 19 per cent, from £127.7 million in 2010-11 to £103.4 million in 2011-12.

The Scottish Government will argue—we have already heard it do so—that it is increasing the level of loan support as an alternative. That is what it has done, but such an approach is directly contrary to what the SNP promised in the past, as Hugh Henry said. Because I have been in the Parliament for a long time—sometimes it feels like a very long time—I can remember the debates that we had before 2007. Of course, the cabinet secretary was not here at the time, so perhaps he is excused, but all his colleagues, day after day, lambasted the then Executive for bringing in loans, rather than grants.

**Neil Findlay:** Is the member aware that the cabinet secretary wrote a book during the time when he was not here? Is he aware of what the cabinet secretary said about education and universities in that book? I assure the member that it makes interesting reading.

**Murdo Fraser:** The cabinet secretary's book is my constant bedtime companion; whenever I have difficulty sleeping, it is the first thing that I turn to. At that time, he had very interesting ideas about bringing market forces into higher education, but I will not embarrass him by repeating them in full this afternoon.

At the root of this issue is a debate about priorities and whether support should be targeted or universal. The SNP's clear view is that support should be universal, even if that means that those most in need have to suffer as a consequence. We have more sympathy with Labour's approach that support needs to be targeted.

Of course, as we have discussed before, this issue applies not just to student support but to prescription charges, tuition fees, universal free bus travel for the over-60s—and the list goes on. The important point that goes across all those issues is that a choice has to be made for which a price has to be paid and universal benefit for students comes at the expense of those most in need.

I have some sympathy with the SNP in that the Labour motion does not make clear where the money would come from to reverse the cuts in grants for lower-income students. The assumption is that it would come from the students who are currently benefiting but I think that Labour would be more credible on this issue if it spelled that out.

**Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind):** Will the member give way?

**Murdo Fraser:** I am sorry, but I have only five minutes. The member will forgive me if I go on to deal with my amendment.

My amendment brings in the related issue of improving access to higher education, which the cabinet secretary has touched on. I have on many

previous occasions in the chamber highlighted Scotland's poor record compared with England on access to university for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. There was a time when people disputed my figures, and I am pleased that no one seems to do so now. The latest statistics from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service confirm that the application rate of 18-year-olds from the most disadvantaged areas is substantially higher in England than it is in Scotland and that Scotland fares worst out of the four countries in the UK on those statistics.

I hope that that puts to bed for good the notion that the SNP continually puts around—and which we heard a hint of this afternoon from the cabinet secretary—that the introduction of tuition fees south of the border deters those from less well-off backgrounds from applying to go to university.

**Michael Russell:** All the evidence shows it.

**Murdo Fraser:** All the evidence is to the contrary. In England, applications from those from disadvantaged backgrounds are going up. Why would that be happening in England if the introduction of tuition fees were a deterrent? I say to the cabinet secretary that his claim is nonsense. After all, tuition fees allow generous bursaries to be paid to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Indeed, Professor von Prondzynski himself has said that we need to get over the idea that

“just because the higher education in Scotland is free, ... that somehow supports people from poorer backgrounds—it doesn't.”

He is absolutely right.

**Michael Russell:** Will the member give way? That is a very—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is concluding, cabinet secretary.

**Murdo Fraser:** I would give way if I had time. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will come back to the issue later.

We should be concerned about Scotland's participation rate. Targeted student support is one way of tackling that and we also need to look at improvements in school education, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The SNP seems to be pretending that all is well in higher education, but it is not. It is failing too many from less well-off backgrounds.

I am pleased to move amendment S4M-06843.1, to insert at end:

“, and believes that both better student support and improvements in the school education system for those from disadvantaged backgrounds are essential if Scotland is to tackle its relatively poor record of access to higher education from this group”.



**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** As members might have noticed, this is a very tight debate. Speeches must be of no more than four minutes.

16:13

**Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP):** I am delighted that Labour has brought forward this topic for debate, because it is good to flush out its position on higher and further education funding and, of course, student support. We know that Labour supports tuition fees, because it introduced them in Scotland and Gordon Brown introduced them elsewhere in the UK. In fact, Labour is a big fan of fees.

I was particularly interested—indeed, intrigued—by the bold assertion in the Labour motion

“That the Parliament ... believes that lower-income students are being financially disadvantaged in Scotland compared to elsewhere in the UK”.

That came as something of a surprise to me, given that Robin Parker, the president of NUS Scotland, called the Scottish Government’s support package “very welcome news indeed” and went on to say:

“Abolishing fees, protecting places and improving student support are the foundations on which we can achieve fair access.”

Perhaps the NUS is wrong and Labour is right on this matter; I know that it is unlikely but, as it could theoretically be possible I decided to check Labour’s claim and see what it is so keen for us to adopt by comparing two students, one in Scotland and the other in England. In carrying out this comparison, I wanted to be fair to Labour and have therefore focused on the very students it mentions in its motion. Both students come from households with incomes of £15,000 and they are doing the same course but at different institutions, one in Scotland and one in England. In 2013-14, the Scottish student will receive £7,250 in a combination of bursaries and loans while the English student will receive less than that—£7,177—again through a combination of loans and bursaries. However, the Scottish student will pay zero—absolutely nothing—in tuition fees, while the English student will have to pay fees.

Sally Hunt, the general secretary of the University and College Union, which is the lecturers union, said:

“When pushing higher fees through the Parliament”

UK ministers

“promised that fees above £6,000 would be the exception rather than rule.”

However, the Office for Fair Access checked that and found that, of the 122 higher education institutions that were included in its report, which covered those that receive Higher Education

Funding Council for England income and have full-time undergraduates, every single one charges more than the basic fee of £6,000 per year.

Again, I want to be fair to Labour. I do not want to use the maximum fee of £9,000 in my comparison, because that would be unfair. I cannot use the minimum fee of £6,000, because nobody charges it. So what about the average fee? The 2013-14 fee in England will be £8,507. Again, I want to be fair, because I am sure that Labour, the Tories and indeed the Lib Dems—if they were here—would say, “But what about all the additional support they get? What about the fee waivers, the bursaries, the Office for Fair Access agreements and all of that?” Well, the Office for Fair Access has commented on that. It said:

“Taking bursaries, scholarships and fee waivers into account reduces the average fee to £7,898”.

In other words, the OFA says that, when all university and Government financial support is taken into account, the average fee is around £7,900 per year. Therefore, after all factors such as loans, bursaries, fees and all the other support are included, a financially disadvantaged student in Scotland will accrue in effect a debt of £5,500 from their loan, while an identical student in England will accrue a debt of £11,721 in a single year—more than twice as much as that of the student in Scotland.

If we go down the road that Labour wants us to go down, Scottish students from lower-income households will receive less support and gain debt levels of more than double those that students currently face under the Scottish system. Labour’s position is now clear: vote Labour, get less and pay back more.

I support the amendment in the cabinet secretary’s name.

16:17

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** I join my Labour colleagues in stating that we want to see not only a well-funded, high-quality education system in Scotland but one that helps people from all backgrounds to succeed and allows people to fulfil their potential, irrespective of their income. If that is to become a reality, the Government needs to do more than just talk about improving equality in access to higher education. That is what our motion is about: taking action to reverse the cut to grants for the lowest-income students

On widening access, I say to the cabinet secretary that the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill will not put money in the poorest students’ pockets. If the cuts remain, they will damage poorer people’s opportunities to go to university. The Government’s minimum income policy looks

more like a maximum debt policy. By cutting bursaries for the poorest students by £890, the SNP is placing lower-income students at a serious financial disadvantage.

Instead of encouraging lower-income students to enter and stay in higher education, increasing their student loan debt is likely to have the opposite effect. If SNP members believe that to increase tuition fee debt will put people off seeking to study at university, they must also accept that to increase student loan debt will do the same. Debt is debt.

Speaking of debt, I point out that the SNP Government promised to dump the student debt. Its excuse in its first term was that it did not have a majority. It has a majority now, so it can get on with that if it still wants to pursue the policy.

As Hugh Henry mentioned, the most recent statistics on student support show that the total amount paid in non-repayable awards fell by 19 per cent in 2011-12, while the amount authorised in loans increased by more than £20 million, so there is a clear trend in the Scottish Government away from bursaries and towards loans. That is the reality.

When SNP members such as Stewart Maxwell make comparisons between the support that is available for poorer students in Scotland and what is available for those in the rest of the UK, their rhetoric is yet again at odds with the reality. Stewart Maxwell mentioned combinations of loans and bursaries. A maximum bursary of £1,750 is available here for students whose household income is less than £17,000, whereas in England a maximum grant of £3,354 is available to those whose household income is less than £25,000. Wales and Northern Ireland also offer better support to the poorest students. Put simply, Scotland is not the best place but the worst place for someone who is poor to get student support. Rather than the minister congratulating himself, he should be ashamed.

The household income threshold of £17,000 in Scotland is now so low that, if a student's parents both work full time on the minimum wage, the student will not qualify for the minimum income guarantee. That is at the same time as the maximum non-income-assessed loan is increasing to £4,500. The Scottish Government needs to prioritise support for lower-income students, as it is clear that we could and should be doing more to ensure that lower-income students are not disadvantaged in order to provide cheap loans to those from the most affluent backgrounds.

I am sure that many members across the chamber will have read with interest the comments that were made by Professor von Prondzynski yesterday as well as the compelling recent

comments by Sheila Riddell and Lucy Hunter. We keep hearing from the SNP that everything would be better for students in an independent Scotland, but we know that cutting public expenditure to fund corporation tax cuts for big business is more of a priority for the SNP Government. This is about priorities. Instead of cutting taxes for big business, Labour would prioritise widening access and supporting lower-income students into higher education. It is not too late for the Government to do the same and reverse the cuts to grants for lower-income students.

16:21

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** The increase in funding for student support in the Scottish Government's budget provides significant increases for Scotland's poorest students, setting a new minimum income of £7,250 a year for those who are most in need and overall putting an additional £140 million a year into students' pockets. That was NUS Scotland's verdict after it had lobbied the Scottish Government to do just that. It is the best student support package across all the nations in the current UK and puts nearly £1,000 extra into the pockets of our poorest students. There are no front-door tuition fees in Scotland and no back-door endowment charges, and overall debt levels are the lowest in the UK.

It seems that Labour is now constantly at odds with the NUS in Scotland, and it appears to be heading towards a confrontation with Scotland's students and the wider Scottish community on the principle of free education. That is where we are heading if Labour ever wins again—tuition fees will be back. I cannot imagine any students and their families now or in the future being thrilled at that prospect. Maybe Labour members miss their endowment charges, or back-door tuition fees as they really were—in fact, Labour members voted to keep them—but the rest of us do not miss them and they will not be back as long as the SNP remains in power.

We should not be surprised at this coming back to haunt us in the Parliament once again. The attack on student support is a fig leaf behind which to hide what is really happening in the Labour Party in London. Mr Balls holds his hands up and admits defeat, sides up with the Tory cuts agenda, refuses to repeal the bedroom tax and starts attacking winter fuel payments for pensioners. That is the real source of where Labour in Scotland is now coming from. Scottish Labour members are hooked on a leash by their London bosses, no matter the cost to Scotland. The planned journey back to power for Labour in the UK means the consequent abandonment of the principles of collective social solidarity that Labour

was once proud to defend, and Scottish students and their families will pay the price if Labour is ever elected again.

It does not need to be like that, and it will not be like that in Scotland under the SNP Government. The commitment to free education is not cheap. It costs us money to deliver it, but that is the point. It costs the Scottish Government and not the families of students in Scotland, because we believe that education is a right for every citizen who can learn and not a privilege for those who can pay their way through the front door of our universities. I believe that the communities of Scotland are with us on that.

**Margo MacDonald:** Has the member given any thought to the fact that there are perhaps too many degrees on offer and that too many people feel that they have to go to university instead of enrolling on a more suitable course elsewhere?

**Willie Coffey:** As always, Margo MacDonald makes a valid point. Looking to the future, we should encourage a wider and more accessible education for all young people in Scotland.

On top of our commitment to having no tuition fees in Scotland, we have put up £10 million to get 2,000 students from our poorer backgrounds into university, 700 of whom have come from our widening access programme, which Labour also opposed.

When I spoke on this subject in February, I told the chamber of my good fortune to have gone to university pretty much for free in the 1970s when an enlightened Labour Government also thought that that was the right thing to do.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close.

**Willie Coffey:** There was still a cost to my family: the cost of having a son who was not contributing to the wellbeing of the family for another four years.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that you must finish.

Sadly, the Labour Party agenda in the UK would take us back down that road to introducing fees. I hope that Labour's motion is not supported.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask members to stick to their four-minute allocations.

16:25

**Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab):** I am, as Mr Glasgow, a friend of students, so I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. On my people's behalf, I am passionate about widening access to education and support for poorer students in our communities.

I start by welcoming the steps that have been taken by the University of Glasgow to create up to 800 places over the next four years for students from low-income backgrounds. The university has received money from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council to create 200 extra places a year from 2013 to 2016. The places will be open to students from the 40 per cent most deprived areas. Although welcome, the impact of such schemes to widen access is limited. However, the difficulty is that not only do poorer students face instability, but they cannot sustain themselves with the available financial packages while they are in education.

A lot of attention has been paid to fees, but not enough has been paid to student costs. Therefore, I am glad that the debate will look at support for students entering higher education. Students are supported by grants and bursaries that they do not have to pay back. However, they must pay back loans, as a percentage of their earnings, later on in life. With the planned cuts to grants this autumn, poorer students will have to borrow more, despite their being disadvantaged to begin with.

The new arrangements will increase the amount of cash that students can borrow without means testing. That will be much more useful to students from more affluent backgrounds than it will be to those from poorer backgrounds who start off, as I have said, from a disadvantaged position.

For students from lower-income households, the new arrangements will mean that what they are given with one hand will be taken back with the other, so it is even more difficult for those people, simply because they are poorer. Students who are disadvantaged will continue to be disadvantaged; I do not see how they will benefit. However, students who come from affluent backgrounds will always have an advantage over our disadvantaged students. I have always believed that it is our job to ensure that our student community has a level playing field.

Day in, day out, I see a lot of students who have been disadvantaged not only through lack of resources, but through the choice of subjects. That has become a serious issue for Scotland. I have always believed that we are a nation that is here for our people, that we would deliver for our students and ensure that everybody has opportunities.

When I was at school, my mother went to university. She was able to do that because she had free access. That situation is changing because students are not getting places in colleges and the people who are affected are the people from the poorest parts of our communities. Those students are going to be betrayed again: they will not get the full package of grants because of the proposed cuts.

I support Hugh Henry's motion.

16:29

**Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):**

First, I will put on the record what the minimum income guarantee will mean for Scottish students. It will mean an annual income of £7,250, through a combination of bursaries and loans, for students from families that are on incomes of less than £17,000. All students, regardless of their circumstances, will be eligible for a student loan of £4,500 per year, as requested by NUS Scotland, which wants to see more cash in students' pockets.

Part-time students whose personal income is less than £25,000 will now receive full support for tuition fees as a proportion of the full-time fee equivalent. Increased support is being provided for part-time students from the lowest-income households, who will now be able to have the full cost of their tuition fees, up to the equivalent rate of fee support for full-time courses, met by the Scottish Government. That brings the arrangements for them into line with those for full-time students. In addition, dental and medical students will receive support for the duration of their courses when, previously, they received less support in their final year.

Robin Parker of NUS Scotland has been quoted a lot. In today's *Scotsman*, he said:

"Our research shows that student hardship, and not having enough money to live on, is one of the largest deterrents to starting and staying at college or university.

That's why it's so important to see the huge investment being made into financial support from this summer, worth an additional £140m per year in the money students receive in their pockets, with increases for the poorest students worth almost £1,000 a year each."

It is extremely important that we acknowledge that we are looking after our students.

The widening access agenda has been mentioned. I will address Mr Findlay's assertion that we had somehow voted against further participation in widening access. In committee, we democratically gave the cabinet secretary the flexibility to identify groups that would be affected by the widening access agenda. The Labour proposition was based on protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, despite the fact that they are already protected in the process. The example that I gave in committee, which I give again, is the Gypsy Traveller community, which does not have a protected characteristic but might well be supported by what we voted for, which means that the cabinet secretary could identify such a group for support in widening access.

The principal of the University of Edinburgh, Sir Timothy O'Shea, said:

"We support the bill's intentions with regard to widening participation and having greater efficiency in the sector and

greater accountability."—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 22 January 2013; c 1838.]

Robin Parker said that, rather than having an obsession with tuition fees, Scottish Labour's obsession should be with promoting fairer access to higher education, which he said that the NUS would be very willing to work on with it.

Where is all this coming from? It is coming from the blue Labour agenda, which is why Labour down south is not proposing to reverse the child benefit cuts and is proposing the introduction of means testing for fuel payments. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order, please.

**Clare Adamson:** Labour members would lead us to believe that they are looking after poor people, but that is not what is happening in reality. In the London borough of Newham, the long-standing Labour mayor, Robin Wales, has overseen fast-tracking of people who are in employment on to the housing waiting list. What Labour members say here does not reflect what Labour is doing down south. We must remember that the recently appointed Labour peer Lord Maurice Glasman—Baron Glasman—is at the forefront of this agenda. He advocates removing absolute entitlement to welfare in favour of rewards that are based on financial and social contributions. The Labour Party is not protecting the poor, or anyone else, in Scotland.

16:33

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I, too, welcome the debate, albeit that it is a brief one. I may struggle to take interventions. If so, I apologise.

As Hugh Henry said, part of the SNP narrative has always been that education south of the border is going to hell in a handcart, while students north of the border are emerging into sunlit uplands. That glosses over the rather inconvenient truth about the SNP's promise to dump the student debt. As Murdo Fraser pointed out, the SNP has succeeded in doing precisely the opposite. The changes to student support also paint an interesting picture in that regard and are at odds with the image that Scottish ministers have sought to project.

The minimum income guarantee is a worthwhile initiative and I think that it will deliver in a number of respects. It is similar to a commitment that the Scottish Liberal Democrats made. However, the way in which the cabinet secretary has chosen to achieve it seems to be regressive and works against some of the objectives of widening access. Lucy Hunter is one of a number of people who have been extensively quoted today. As she has said, the new regime will burden students from poorer homes with the greatest debt.

For under-25s and students from households with incomes under £17,000, the move from non-repayable grants to loans means a grant of £1,750 and a loan of £5,500, whereas under the previous system, grants for students from low-income families were set at £2,640 with a possible additional £1,000 entitlement through the independent student bursary. Lucy Hunter's calculations suggest that those from the poorest backgrounds now need to borrow £22,000 to obtain their full state support for living costs. She concludes:

"Scotland appears uniquely willing to allow student grants to melt away, at the expense of the least well-off."

Her findings back up what Sheila Riddell of the University of Edinburgh school of education said at the end of last month.

Let us take a look at the situation south of the border. There, grant support has increased from £3,250 to £3,354 for students from households with incomes under £25,000—not the lower £17,000 threshold that has been set in Scotland. The national scholarship programme provides additional support, and funding has been increased from £50 million to £150 million in 2014-15. It also involves match funding from individual institutions. The threshold for repayment of loans has increased from £15,500 or thereby to more than £21,000 per annum, and loans are paid back over 30 years, whereas in Scotland graduates will end up repaying far sooner, at a threshold of about £16,500, and the debt will last for 35 years.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You are in your final minute.

**Liam McArthur:** That is perhaps why the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests that the new system is

"substantially more progressive than its predecessor".

The other thing that SNP ministers have been at pains to point out is that there has somehow been a crash in enrolments south of the border. As Murdo Fraser said, the number of Scots applying to universities has increased by 2 per cent, while the number of English students applying has increased by 3 per cent, from UCAS's latest figures. The number of Scots applying to study at English universities has increased by 2.7 per cent, which is higher than the increase in Scots applying at home, and the application rate for English 18-year-olds, at 35 per cent and increasing, is higher than the application rate in Scotland, which is static at about 32 per cent.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Come to a conclusion.

**Liam McArthur:** That is perhaps why the chief executive of UCAS says:

"Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are 80 per cent more likely to apply than a decade ago."

SNP ministers assert that their approach is progressive and that they are working to achieve wider access to further and higher education. The reality is that, in many respects, that is a smokescreen. Cutting grants and increasing loans, setting repayment thresholds that are lower than elsewhere in the UK—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must conclude.

**Liam McArthur:** —and slashing college budgets risk hitting those from poorer backgrounds with higher debt and fewer opportunities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call George Adam. I apologise, but I can give you only three minutes.

16:38

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I do not thank Liam McArthur for taking an extra three or four seconds off me, though.

I take this debate extremely seriously. Higher education is one of the foundations of our future, and the Scottish Government is committed to it. It will help us to create the Scotland that we all want, and to ensure that our young people have the future that we all want them to have.

I take the issue very seriously, but I do not have the same thoughts about the Labour Party and its antics in the chamber. As the cabinet secretary did, though, I thank the Labour Party for bringing the debate to the chamber because it gives us an opportunity to tell everyone exactly what the Scottish Government is doing on higher education.

Hugh Henry said that we are all parroting the same thing. He must also be talking about Robin Parker and the NUS, because they agree with us that the investment that the Scottish Government is making has to happen and that the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill has to go through.

Let us look at what Labour members are doing. They say that they believe in widening access—Neil Findlay is nodding his head vigorously. They say that, but when they get an opportunity to vote on it in committee, they vote against it. They come into the chamber and do a bit of showbiz in front of the media, but they do nothing with regard to the people who count—the students.

**Hanzala Malik:** Will George Adam take an intervention?

**George Adam:** I am sorry, but I do not have time.

For me, the most important things are the students and the offer that we have. It was mentioned earlier that in an article in *The Scotsman*, NUS president Robin Parker said:

“Our research shows that student hardship, and not having enough money to live on, is one of the largest deterrents to starting and staying at college”.

That is why it is so important to note the huge investment that is being made in financial support—£140 million per year. That shows the commitment of this Government and of Scotland—the NUS appreciates that as well. That is the difference between the Scottish Government and the Labour Party.

I mean this kindly and I want to say it gently, because I believe in consensual politics and in us all working together and so on, but I ask the Labour Party, please, to not let the Labour Party become a sideshow in a carnival. Work with us and engage in the future and try to build the Scotland that we want. Move away from the Saturday night variety performance and do something for Scotland’s future. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**George Adam:** This is about the future—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**George Adam:** For me, the future is about ensuring that we can—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**George Adam:** The future is about ensuring that we can create the Scotland that we want for our younger people. That will not be achieved by the Labour Party’s current antics.

16:41

**Murdo Fraser:** The cabinet secretary got rather excited earlier about the important issue of whether the introduction of tuition fees in England has deterred people from less well-off backgrounds. Let us bottom out that important point, because the cabinet secretary continually makes a case—without evidence to back him up—that tuition fees have deterred people from the least well-off families.

I checked the latest figures. The UCAS publication came out in January this year—I am sure that the cabinet secretary has seen it—and it says quite clearly that the application rate of 18-year-olds in England from the most disadvantaged areas has increased from 10.7 per cent in 2004 to 19.5 per cent in 2013. That is a virtual doubling in a period when tuition fees and top-up fees were introduced. There is not much evidence there of people from less well-off backgrounds being deterred.

I quoted earlier Professor von Prondzynski, and from a sedentary position, the cabinet secretary suggested that I was somehow misquoting the professor. I took the opportunity to dig out my copy of the latest *Holyrood* magazine, which is hot off the press. I should say that there is a very nice photograph of me on page 20. I will quote directly from Professor von Prondzynski’s interview on page 8. He says:

“we need to get over this idea that just because the higher education in Scotland is free, that that somehow supports people from poorer backgrounds—it doesn’t.”

The professor goes on to say:

“I’m not going to argue the case against free higher education, but you have to be aware of the fact that the main beneficiaries of that are the middle classes, not the disadvantaged.”

If the cabinet secretary believes that I have misquoted Professor von Prondzynski, he should get to his feet and say that.

**Michael Russell:** The point that I was going to make earlier, before Murdo Fraser ran out of time, is precisely the point that I will make now. Professor von Prondzynski also argues—very convincingly, I think, and I have heard him argue it several times—that the reality is that we need to do more than simply have free education. That means including things such as compulsory progress towards widening access—which he supports—in the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill. The Tories voted against that. It would be—

**Murdo Fraser:** The cabinet secretary has had long enough. Given that he made that intervention, I will again quote Professor von Prondzynski, who was equally scathing about the new widening access targets that have been introduced by Mr Russell. He said:

“I’m afraid that this will be seen as a substitute for doing the things that actually need to be done.”

Far from being an ally of the cabinet secretary, the professor takes a completely different view.

Of course, it is not just the professor who holds that view. As Liam McArthur fairly pointed out, Professor Sheila Riddell from Edinburgh university said:

“Free undergraduate tuition ... has not markedly altered the pattern of recruitment to Scottish universities.”

She went on to say that

“universal free tuition is of greatest benefit to those who are already socially advantaged.”

Let us be absolutely clear about where we are on this debate. The introduction of tuition fees south of the border has not deterred people from less well-off backgrounds from accessing higher education. The cabinet secretary would do himself more favours if he were to accept that basic point.

I took the trouble to check the SNP's 2007 manifesto. In it, the SNP states that it

"will ... replace the expensive and discredited Student Loans system with means-tested student grants",

and goes on to say:

"We will remove the burden of debt repayments owed"

to the Student Loans Company

"by Scottish domiciled and resident graduates."

The SNP has done neither of those things, and its members have the temerity to condemn those in other parties—and the parties in government south of the border—for the approach that they have taken to higher education, which is delivering better access rates for people from deprived backgrounds. We should be proud of that record, but not of the record of the Scottish Government.

16:45

**Michael Russell:** Politics always eventually comes down to the argument that some things are simple common sense.

Simple common sense says that transferring the burden of funding of higher education from the state to the student will massively increase the student's debt and change the way in which society views education. Education will be seen as a private good and not as a societal benefit.

What we have seen—[*Interruption.*]

Presiding Officer, I would like to be able to speak without constant interruptions from members on the Labour side of the chamber. I do not know whether that is possible.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can we have some order, please?

**Michael Russell:** Such a view of education is a major problem in a society.

If the Labour Party has now bought into that view of education—as it proposed to do by setting up the Browne review that accelerated the process south of the border—its members should say so quite clearly. Any system that decides to transfer the interests of the state and society to the individual student monetises higher education, which is inimical not just to the traditions of Scottish higher education but to the important things that underpin its success.

Many people—including me—fear that, if that approach is taken, we will see a massive erosion of the extraordinarily high standing and status of Scottish higher education. For those who are prepared to take it, such an approach is playing with fire. If they are prepared to bring in those proposals—which is what they are talking about, despite all their fine words—they run the very

substantial risk of undermining the whole of Scottish higher education.

I will address one or two key points that members have raised. Hanzala Malik made an interesting point, and I agree with his support for the University of Glasgow's access to the professions scheme. The scheme is important, and its success has led to a large increase in those from the most deprived communities entering the professions. That is precisely the type of initiative that is encouraged and underpinned by the agreements on widening access. Unfortunately for Mr Malik, however, his party voted against that system in the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill. If he is in favour of that scheme, as I am—it is a wonderful scheme—he should attempt to persuade front-bench Labour members to support rather than reject it in the bill.

The simple question that must be asked is how we meet the needs of students and widening access. One does not bring in tuition fees that cost thousands of pounds—

**Murdo Fraser:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Michael Russell:** I would like to make some progress.

One does not bring in tuition fees that cost thousands of pounds while arguing, as Labour has done, for a £900 bursary increase. That is either economic illiteracy or gross hypocrisy, and I leave it to members to decide which it is, because that is the thesis that Labour has presented today.

If we look at what happened when Labour was previously in power in Scotland, we see the reality. Student debt rose at that time—indeed, it rose by £26 million—because of the imposition of the graduate endowment. I suppose that we should say, "By their works shall ye know them." In reality, Labour's time in office resulted in an increase in student debt, including debt for the poorest.

Margo MacDonald made an important point, which I will address—I am sorry that she is not in the chamber. She wondered whether there were too many university courses. We should remember that 25 per cent of higher education is delivered through further education, so the proposals that we heard from Labour today—which would damage and destroy higher education—would also affect further education.

All the evidence shows that having fewer courses deters those who are least likely to go to university. Reducing the number of courses and creating these barriers would not affect most students, but it would affect those who have the most difficulty.

**Hanzala Malik:** Many young constituents who come to me cannot get a place in college. In fact, I

have a letter from a college that says that my constituent is in the 108th position for being considered for a place. If my constituents cannot get a place in a college, there is no way that they will get a place in a university. How can the cabinet secretary help me with that?

**Michael Russell:** This is the only Government in these islands that provides the opportunities for all guarantee, which will be available to the member's constituent if he is 16 to 19. If the member writes to me—he has not done so yet—or to Angela Constance, we will of course intervene to help in the matter. For young people above 16 to 19, we would like to see that guarantee expanded. Indeed, the European Commission has recommended that there should be an expansion of such schemes, but that is being prevented by Westminster.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, you are in your final minute.

**Michael Russell:** I want to see guaranteed places, but it is absolutely clear that the opportunities in many colleges are expanding as a result of regionalisation. The more that we see that, the more that I am convinced that regionalisation will answer those questions for the member's constituents.

I want to finish on a point that Mr McArthur raised. He seemed quite incapable of recognising the following very simple equation. Debt is rising, undoubtedly, and will be higher for students, but it will be massively higher south of the border under the system that his Government has actively supported. Debt there will be massively higher because of the cost of tuition fees. If debt is the great disincentive, he and the Tories, who are tied together, along with Labour are actively supporting a system in which debt will be absolutely higher—

**Murdo Fraser:** Not for the poorest students.

**Michael Russell:** Mr Fraser argues constantly that that will not apply to the poorest students.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, you must finish.

**Michael Russell:** By their works shall ye know them. If debt discourages in that way, the system south of the border is a disaster. Please do not support any party that will destroy Scottish higher education, because that is what will happen.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Neil Findlay to wind up the debate. You have eight minutes, until just before 5 o'clock.

16:51

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** Meanwhile, let us get back to the terms of the motion for today's

important debate, which is on support for low-income students.

For young people leaving school or leaving home for the first time who are filled with the exciting prospect of a new academic life and of new life challenges, and for adults who are returning to or moving on in higher education, the issue of how they finance and sustain themselves through their studies is often at the forefront of their thoughts. Student finance and the pressures of increased day-to-day living costs mean that it is now normal and no longer the exception for students to take on part-time—and sometimes full-time—jobs to make ends meet.

On the face of it, the Scottish Government's announcement of a student minimum income guarantee, which was trumpeted as the "best student support package" in the UK, appears to be very good news. Of course, in this area of policy, as in so many areas of Scottish Government policy, smoke and mirrors and mythology and spin cloud reality. Once again, the Scottish Government appears to be reinventing the English language. Just as we have the non-profit distributing of financing, whose only snag is that it distributes profit, we now have the minimum income guarantee for students who want to enter higher education.

Now, I do not know whether the cabinet secretary has any debts, but I am afraid that I have. My mortgage on my house and my loan on my car are just that—they are loans—so I do not classify them as income. Why would a young person's student loan be classified as income? In no other walk of life or area of finance would an increased loan be classified as increased income. Indeed, the dictionary defines the word "loan" as

"something lent or furnished on the condition of being returned"

and the word "income" as

"the monetary payment received for goods or services".

Perhaps the cabinet secretary can advise us which of those definitions he believes best describes his proposal, but I do not see him rising to do so.

What of the increased loan guarantee? In essence, the amount of loan available is increasing as non-repayable bursaries are decreasing. For students from households that earn less than £25,000, the grant that is lost will be between £890 and £1,640. As Neil Bibby, Hugh Henry and Murdo Fraser said, poorer students are having their bursaries reduced and loans increased—under the guise of what we might call the mythical income guarantee—while students from wealthier backgrounds will see their access to loans increased further.



Those significant cuts will affect the neediest students. For a student from a family in which two parents earn the national minimum wage of £6.19 per hour, the total family income is just over £21,000. That student's annual bursary is only £1,000 per year, which means that £1,945 more of borrowing will produce only £427 of additional spending power, with the rest needed to make up for the lost grant. For a family income of £18,000, £1,760 of increased borrowing will produce only an extra £120 over and above the previous situation. Of course, with student accommodation in halls of residence in this city at about £100 a week, it is easy to see the pressure on students trying to pay for rent, food, books, computers and bus fares—although, of course, that is not an expense that students will ever share with the cabinet secretary. Far from being a great deal, that to me seems like another Government con. My understanding is that the original plan was for a taper from a maximum grant of £7,000 for those on the lowest income to a maximum loan of £7,000 for people at the other end of the scale.

Hugh Henry quoted an article by Lucy Hunter, the former head of student support at the Scottish Executive, in *The Scotsman* today. She highlights that low-income Welsh students can access more than £5,000 in bursaries and will at the same time leave with less borrowing than Scottish students who are in the same position. Although the cabinet secretary likes to point to the great Satan in terms of fees and debts in England, the reality is that the difference in cost for low-income English and Scottish students is very small.

Last week, Sheila Riddell from the centre for educational sociology wrote a well-informed article on these important issues. In setting out her critique of Government policies, she said that inequality in education is still rife in Scotland. We agree with her. Far too many children and young people from working-class backgrounds and from the villages, towns, cities and regions that we all represent are not realising their potential or being given the opportunity. That is not because they are less able, willing or ambitious than others; it is because they are not gaining access to universities while others are. For example, in Scotland, only 6 per cent of the school population attends independent schools, yet 34 per cent of students at the University of St Andrews come from that sector and the figure is 20 per cent at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Aberdeen. Clearly, there are many reasons for that, but I cannot for the life of me see how reducing bursaries for poor students helps to redress that inherent inequality in our education system.

Mr Russell, along with Clare Adamson and George Adam, claimed that Labour opposes everything that the Government does. However, I

ask the cabinet secretary how many amendments he accepted from the Labour Party during the deliberations on the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill. Among the 200 or so amendments that were lodged—about 150 or so by the cabinet secretary—how many did he accept from the Labour Party? None, yet he asks us to contribute.

If we are serious about tackling deep-seated educational inequalities, we need to work closely with our communities, schools, colleges and universities to ensure that they do everything possible to encourage and help people from all backgrounds who have the ability and willingness to go to universities and, crucially, to provide them with the support that they need when they are there to complete their course.

I am afraid that Government spin dresses up debt as income and gives the impression that students are whooping in celebration at the prospect of the mythical minimum student income guarantee. As always, the reality is somewhat different. So, although the rocks perhaps have not yet melted with the sun, it is clear that bursaries are melting day on day.

## Business Motions

16:59

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

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-06861 in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 11 June 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Update on the Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Supporting a Sporting Nation, Celebrating and Building on Scotland's Success in Youth Sport

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill – UK Legislation

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 12 June 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
Health and Wellbeing

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Progress toward National Planning Framework 3 and the Scottish Planning Policy

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 13 June 2013

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Ministerial Statement: Report of the Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: The Scottish Guardianship Service, a Celebration of Success

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 18 June 2013

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 19 June 2013

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 20 June 2013

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-06862, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 1 timetable for the Tribunals (Scotland) Bill.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Tribunals (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 8 November 2013.

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:59

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motions S4M-06863 and S4M-06864.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health and Sport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Services Reform (Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland etc.) Order 2013 [draft] be approved.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

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

## Decision Time

17:00

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-06845.2, in the name of Paul Wheelhouse, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06845, in the name of Claire Baker, on land reform, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that amendment S4M-06845.1, in the name of Alex Fergusson, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06845, in the name of Claire Baker, on land reform, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

### For

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

### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)

Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 12, Against 98, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-06845, in the name of Claire Baker, on land reform, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)

MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

#### Against

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

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 98, Against 12, Abstentions 0.

#### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the publication of the Land Reform Review Group's interim report; recognises that the Land Reform Review Group was appointed by the Scottish Government as an advisory group independent of Scottish

ministers to offer a "radical review of land reform"; believes that ownership of land is an economic and social issue; recognises that the Scottish Government has the power to deliver further land reform now; supports greater diversification of land ownership in Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to demonstrate a commitment to radical and bold land reform.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S4M-06843.2, in the name of Michael Russell, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06843, in the name of Hugh Henry, on student support, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)

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

#### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 65, Against 45, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S4M-06843.1, in the

name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S4M-06843, in the name of Hugh Henry, on student support, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)

Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

#### Abstentions

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

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 45, Against 63, Abstentions 2.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-06843, in the name of Hugh Henry, on student support, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Walker, Bill (Dunfermline) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**Against**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)

**Abstentions**

Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 65, Against 44, Abstentions 1.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament believes that access to university should be based on ability to learn, not ability to pay; further believes that neither upfront nor backdoor tuition fees have any place in Scotland; welcomes the removal of tuition fees, saving around 125,000 students up to £27,000 compared with England; further welcomes the introduction of the minimum income guarantee to give the poorest students a minimum income of £7,250 per year in maintenance support from 2013-14 and the increase in the minimum level of student loan to £4,500 a year for every eligible student, and agrees with comments by the National Union of Students Scotland that Scotland has 'the best support package in the whole of the UK'.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-06863, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health and Sport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-06864, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Services Reform (Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland etc.) Order 2013 [draft] be approved.



## Banks (Branch Closures)

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):**

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-05922, in the name of John Mason, on bank branch closures. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now—or as soon as possible—and those who are leaving the chamber to do so as quietly as possible.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament expresses deep disappointment in the Royal Bank of Scotland's (RBS) latest decision to close a number of branches across Scotland, including Gourock and one of its two remaining branches in Glasgow Shettleston; considers that these proposals go against the wishes of many RBS customers, particularly those in poorer areas who may not have easy access to internet and mobile banking, and finds a sense of irony in RBS' decision to turn its back on customers who it considers bailed it out after it found itself in serious financial difficulties.

17:09

### **John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):**

I thank all the members who have given me the opportunity to have the debate today.

Some time ago, the Royal Bank of Scotland announced that it was closing its Bridgeton branch in my Glasgow Shettleston constituency. It closed the branch earlier this year. To an extent, we accepted that that was inevitable. Cuts were being made across the board in society and in the banks, so perhaps we did not put up much of a fight.

However, in the very same week that RBS closed the branch, it announced that it would also close the Shettleston branch—no consultation, no asking for opinions, just a decision that had already been made. I was furious about that. That would leave only one branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland in my constituency of some 70,000 people. To be fair, RBS agreed to meet me. It told me how wonderful the one remaining branch would be—it even had a machine there that would give out £5 notes. That is really wonderful, is it not?

Around the same time, I attended a meeting of Sandyhills community council and quickly picked up that it was not just me who was seriously upset; the community as a whole was furious about the decision. We therefore agreed to put together a petition and collected more than 1,000 signatures from local residents and others who came into the area, often specifically to use that branch. It is not just the bank's customers—individuals and businesses—who suffer in such a situation; the

danger is that footfall will drop for all the other shops in the area and that it will cause problems for a number of other businesses, including, in this case, the credit union, which is very close by.

Members may be aware that Labour and the Scottish National Party do not always have the closest of relationships in the east end of Glasgow; in fact, we do virtually nothing together unless we are absolutely forced to. However, on this occasion, given the strength of feeling in the community council and among the wider public, I felt that we had to try to bring everyone together. There is nothing like having a common enemy such as RBS to draw normally antagonistic politicians together.

The campaign has been led by Sandyhills community council and supported by Shettleston and Tollcross Credit Union, Margaret Curran MP, the ex-MSP Frank McAveety, local councillors and me. The role of community councils can be important in relation to such issues. They are non-party political and cover a smaller distinct area than even city councillors do. I admit that I have had clashes with community councils in my time, but the campaign has been an example of how they can be a real asset to a local community.

On a cross-party basis, with the credit union and the community council, we went to Gogarburn to hand in our petition. Again, to be fair, RBS accepted it and was reasonably polite, but it was not exactly enthusiastic.

What are the bank's arguments for closing the branch? One argument is that there are fewer customers than there used to be. Of course I can accept that numbers may be down a little, but people who go into that branch—as I do, and as other members may have done—often have to queue to get served. It is a busy branch.

Another argument is that more customers are using online banking. I am afraid that that argument upsets me somewhat. We know that fewer people are online in poorer areas; in fact, Glasgow Housing Association has found that only 10 per cent of social housing tenants have regular access to online facilities. Across the parties, we have been concerned that the bank has sought to move down the online route, which will clearly disadvantage many of our constituents. The Department for Work and Pensions is another example of an organisation going down that route. Many people want to speak face to face to their local politician or their bank—they do not want to do things online. That may well come in the future, but we are a long way away from a majority of our constituents being comfortable with going online for a range of services.

In the Parliament, we debate finances—whether they are Government finances, organisations'

finances or individuals' finances—often enough, and on many occasions we do not agree with one another. However, I think that there is broad agreement on some issues, such as the need to improve financial education in our schools and, beyond young people, in the wider community. Debt has been a huge problem right across society, and we all need to learn from mistakes that have been made in the past.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** I absolutely agree with John Mason about the need to improve financial education in schools, but it is RBS that very often does that education in schools.

**John Mason:** Absolutely. That is ironic. To be fair, I have visited St Anne's primary school, where the local RBS staff did a perfectly good job in encouraging the kids. I make it clear that the local staff are absolutely fine—I am sure that that is true in virtually every RBS branch. Today, I want to challenge the top decision makers.

To close a bank branch in an area such as Shettleston goes completely against the financial education agenda that we are trying to achieve of helping people to manage their finances better.

We might ask whether all the banks are closing such branches, and the answer is no. In the past week, I read an article in *The Herald* about Santander, which specifically said that it was not closing branches. If that bank does not need to close branches, I do not understand why RBS, which is much more deeply embedded in our communities, needs to do so. One more thing that really infuriates me about all of this is that we—the public—actually own RBS. It is not just any other bank but one that has been bailed out by the public purse. One might just think that it owes some extra duty to the public in return. That point is not lost on my constituents.

What is RBS's response? It has offered us a further meeting to explain why it is closing the branch, but there is no offer of a meeting to discuss whether it should close the branch. I realise that the Government has limited influence on the situation, but I would be grateful for any reassurance that the Government sees this as an important issue and will raise it with RBS on behalf of not just my constituents but vulnerable constituents across Scotland.

Can we see any signs of improvement in RBS's attitude? Its report for 2012 runs to many hundreds of pages, from which I have selected just one or two. To be fair to RBS, it accepts that it has got it wrong in the past. However, I am concerned about where it seems to think that it is now. For example, on page 8, under the heading "Our customers", RBS states:

"Successful companies put their customers first. If they do not serve customers well they have no purpose. Without

satisfied customers there is no return for shareholders, no jobs for employees, no sales for suppliers and no taxes to support public services. Most of us at RBS get up every day with the aim of serving our customers well."

I am afraid that most of us in Shettleston are not convinced that the decision makers in RBS are getting up every day with the aim of serving their customers well.

17:17

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** I apologise, because I will have to leave when I finish my speech.

I thank John Mason very much for bringing the debate to the chamber. Many of us, like Mr Mason, have a direct constituency interest in the issue. Indeed, given the volume of banking closures that are on the cards, I think that hardly a town or village in Scotland will be unaffected.

Mr Mason's motion specifically identifies RBS. In its current incarnation, it is a bank that is 81 per cent nationalised—it is 81 per cent owned by us as taxpayers. However, it is a bank that acts like the most arrogant capitalist and that still pays eye-watering bonuses to executives—£600 million last year—while imposing a measly 2 per cent increase for staff pay.

Sums from the Klondike were paid to those at the top at a time when they had overseen an information technology disaster that meant that customers could not access their own cash. Many of the same executives took decisions that resulted in a £390 million fine for fixing the London interbank offered rate—LIBOR—and for miss-selling. It was not the branch staff in Edinburgh, Livingston, Bathgate or Glasgow who caused that—it was the people at the top. If what they received was not a reward for failure, I do not know what it is. Of course, it will be the workers in the branches who will suffer the consequences, as will the communities affected—they will lose their jobs and their branches respectively.

In May, Sir Philip Hampton, the chairman of the bank, announced to the RBS annual general meeting—like a starving man over a dripping roast—that the worst was over and that the bank was ready for privatisation. Members must forgive me for not jumping up and down with delight. Where is the logic in nationalising the debt when the bank is in trouble and privatising the profit when it goes back into the black? That is economic madness.

Of course, it is not just RBS that is up to those tricks. Lloyds Banking Group is getting rid of 1,300 staff across the United Kingdom, many of them in Scotland. It is estimated that 40,000 jobs will go over the next five years in the group's learning, pensions, insurance and IT departments. In

addition, IT jobs are being offshored on the back of a claim that there is an IT skills shortage. As with RBS, Lloyds branch after Lloyds branch will close: in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Aberfeldy, Barrhead, Alloa, Bathgate, Carluke and Cowdenbeath—the list goes on and on.

The banking crisis led me to believe that the banks would mend their ways, but on this evidence no one can believe that to be the case. I thank John Mason for securing the debate, but I am sure that, unfortunately, many members will be deliberating and campaigning on the issues that he has raised as the closure programme comes to a village or town near them.

17:20

**Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I congratulate John Mason on bringing the issue of bank closures to the chamber today. It is an issue that will have an impact on the lives of many people in Scotland.

As an ex-employee of RBS, I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I receive a pension from RBS. I worked for RBS for 10 years as a regional manager, and my whole division was made redundant by the bank in early 2000-01.

I welcome the points that John Mason outlined in his speech, and I agree that Parliament should be disappointed by the closures, particularly because the people who will be most affected—the public—were the very ones who saved RBS when the financial crisis happened.

John Mason also mentioned that those in poorer areas may not have easy access to internet and mobile banking. I highlight that point, as I recall that we recently debated a motion in the name of Christina McKelvie regarding the current attitude described in "Voices from the frontline ... Digital by default", a report that ties in well with what we are discussing today. Furthermore, a case study by the Carnegie Trust showed broadband uptake to be as low as 90 per cent in some cases, further highlighting the need for a much valued local branch.

On a more general point, "A Strategy for the Financial Services Industry in Scotland" cited the following figures, stating that the financial services sector

"accounts for 9.3% of Scottish jobs, employing 108,000 directly and almost 90,000 more in a range of related industries. Including other effects, this amounts to more than 220,000 jobs in Scotland".

The closure of local branches in areas such as Gourock and Shettleston cannot possibly be a good thing. We tell people these days to shop locally and buy locally. What about banking

locally? Without local branches, people will not have the opportunity to go to a local bank and discuss their banking issues with a friendly face. I remember the RBS television advert a number of years ago, which promised no bank closures.

Bank closures result in further questions of exclusion: people will need to pay for transport to the nearest bank branch to discuss their banking issues; people who cannot afford broadband cannot bank online; and people who—like me until recently—have a dinosaur mobile phone cannot bank on the go. It is a question less of want than of necessity. Banking locally is key to every community. I therefore hope that the worrying trend that RBS has set halts and that there are no future closures anywhere in Scotland.

I end by thanking John Mason for bringing the important motion before us today. Bank closures should be stopped. I do not agree entirely with all Neil Findlay's comments, but I agree that banks should be working for local people. We own RBS and it should be working for us.

17:23

**Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank Mr Mason for bringing the debate to the chamber this afternoon. I do not recognise any of the antagonism that he describes in relation to politics in the east end of Glasgow, but I am grateful to him for ensuring that the matter is debated in the Scottish Parliament.

It has not escaped members' notice that the Royal Bank of Scotland is more than 80 per cent owned by the taxpayer. Unfortunately, it does not appear that that fact has led to the bank becoming any more responsive to the real needs of its customers or indeed to those of the people whom Mr Mason and I represent in the east end of Glasgow.

The rationale for the closure of the Shettleston branch on 20 June 2013 is that a declining number of customers wish to make use of a physical branch located in their community. Many of us are increasingly using home broadband internet connections, smartphones and other means to access online applications for banking services. However, when my colleague and local Shettleston MP Margaret Curran met RBS representatives—and I know that John Mason, too, will have raised this issue—she quoted the footfall figures that were collected and which demonstrate that people use the branch at the rate of almost one a minute. It hardly sounds as if the service that RBS is offering from the cash counters is moribund; indeed, John Mason has described the queues that he has encountered at the branch.

There are good reasons why people rely on the branch, and the options that RBS seems to think will replace the service for local people are not likely to be useful for many people in the east end of the city. I would have thought that a bank would seek to know its customers and their circumstances as well as possible, but perhaps RBS's lack of understanding on this issue partly explains the troubles in which it has recently found itself. It is well known that in Glasgow digital inclusion is in fact a story of exclusion. Many RBS customers in Shettleston will not be switching to an iPhone or app but they will be quite right if they decide to switch bank.

Likewise, at a time when there is so much debate about how we ensure that the many people who do not have access to a bank account can access benefit payments as a result of welfare reform changes, RBS's decision will make things worse. Richard Lyle was absolutely correct to highlight our recent debate on Citizens Advice Scotland's report on the subject; indeed, I suggest that the managers at RBS seek advice from CAS on the impact of the changes on communities such as Shettleston so that they understand just how difficult the decision will make the job of ensuring that people have access to bank accounts.

I also note the concerns expressed by Sandyhills community council and particularly the credit union, which have thrown the issues into pretty stark relief. Given all the prevailing reasons for encouraging credit unions, I have to say that I find it incredibly worrying when a credit union says that such an unthinking decision will seriously affect its ability to provide services to local people.

I commend the community council, the credit union and all of the area's political representatives both from Mr Mason's party and my own, and I echo the call for RBS to change its mind. If it will not listen to its customers in Shettleston, perhaps it will try listening to its 70,000 shareholders in the area.

17:27

**Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP):** I, too, congratulate my colleague John Mason on securing this important debate. I should put it on record that I have an RBS account.

Store, factory and bank closures are always a matter of concern because they affect people's livelihoods as well as their local communities. That said, although the bank closures that we are discussing will certainly have a negative impact not only on Glasgow Shettleston but on Gourock, the closure itself will by no means destroy Gourock's fabric. Moreover, the motion focuses on RBS closures but it is important to note that other

institutions are closing branches. For example, the Nationwide Building Society has closed a branch of the Dunfermline Building Society in Alexandria in the west of Scotland.

A key element of a successful town centre can be the presence of a number of large high-street branded stores. That can bring comfort to localities, but I have to say that Gourock bucks this trend because, although there are larger chain operations such as the Post Office and a couple of bakers, many of the shops in the town are actually small independent traders. That augurs well for the future because the town already has a sense of resilience and pride. When I talk to people in the town about the bank closure, the message I get is that the people of Gourock will deal with this sad news and move on.

Nevertheless, the decision to close the branch is disappointing. When I contacted RBS, I was told that the reason for the closure was, as has already been pointed out, that the number of people using the branch has fallen by nearly 30 per cent over the past few years. It is right that any business that experiences a drop in numbers needs to ask itself what it should do. However, before it gets to the position of closing, I suggest that it asks itself what more it can do to make its business busier and more relevant to its customers, former customers and potential new customers.

I am not aware that any of those things has taken place in this instance. However, I am sure that after today's debate I will receive some correspondence from RBS, in which it will tell me what it tried to do before it decided to close the Gourock branch.

I welcome the agreement made with the Post Office to allow RBS customers to access their accounts, withdraw money and check their balances after the closure. However, that is too little, too late. Furthermore, given the westwards population shift that has been taking place in Inverclyde for many years, not to mention the development work that will take place in Gourock, I suggest that there was an opportunity to promote the branch more widely, as a means to keep it open.

I accept that the way that people bank these days is different from that of, say, 10, 20 or 30 years ago. Much more is done online—I have an online account. However, many people like me do not want to do everything online, and many people who are IT illiterate will suffer from the closures.

Many people commute daily from Gourock to work outside Inverclyde. Gourock is a gateway to Argyll for tourism and a tourism location itself. I genuinely cannot see how an RBS branch cannot exist in the town. Maybe a more imaginative opening-time structure would have meant that the

branch could have been kept open. Maybe more promotion of the branch would have kept it open. Maybe—just maybe—the constant battering that the RBS has taken as a consequence of past reckless decisions is a sign of a lack of confidence in the institution.

I know that the RBS is working hard to get back to a healthy financial position. However, I ask its management to remember that it was not its branches that took the bank to the brink. It was not the communities in our constituencies and regions that took it to the brink. It was others who were clearly out of touch with the high street.

I am sure that an RBS representative will be listening to or watching today's debate. I genuinely ask them to think again about this decision. RBS should stick by the people who stuck by it in its hour of need: the taxpayers.

17:32

**The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing):** I thank John Mason for lodging his motion. I am aware that he raised the issue with John Swinney in March. I understand the concerns about the impact of branch closures in communities throughout Scotland that have been raised by John Mason and all the colleagues who have taken part in the debate.

Banks play a key role in our society and local economies; members have underscored many ways in which they do so. We rely on banks in order to conduct our daily lives. The Scottish Government is absolutely clear that customers must be at the heart of what banks do and the decisions that they make. We have been very explicit about that in our banking strategy, about which I will say more later.

I want to emphasise a point that John Mason made very clearly. My experience of meeting bank staff—recently, I had the pleasure of meeting staff in a branch in Inverness—is that they are unfailingly courteous, helpful, positive and devoted to doing their very best in their work. I make that point quite deliberately, because although all of us here are debating problems that have arisen, we all recognise that ordinary bank staff, who are at the front line and are the face of the bank, do an excellent job for this country. Perhaps sometimes the brunt of criticisms and public disquiet about decisions that are taken by banks' leadership falls on front-line staff, who have had nothing whatever to do with the decisions. It behoves me, as minister, to thank all the bank staff who do a great job around the country, and who are committed to helping ordinary customers, whether they are individuals or businesses.

It was mentioned by Stuart McMillan that following the financial crisis that the banks have

been facing, they have to address their long-term financial sustainability. There is no two ways about that; that task needs to be tackled. We must accept the reality that that task needs to be done. It is not an easy task or one that anyone wished would be necessary, but necessary it is and it involves reducing costs and making difficult decisions. That has been alluded to by some members in the debate.

I am acutely aware of John Mason's point that not everybody has access to the internet and mobile banking. It is undoubtedly true that some people prefer to bank in a branch. Other people are perhaps not comfortable with or are unable to use the internet either because of unwillingness to break the habits of a lifetime or through age and physical impairments or difficulties that make it impossible to use those facilities. Nonetheless, it must be recognised that banking is changing dramatically.

In preparation for the debate, I asked the Royal Bank of Scotland for information about how it is changing. As John Mason said, internet banking is now such that 50 per cent of the bank's customers bank online. However, that is not the case in Mr Mason's constituency, as he said. Therefore, the point that he made about local facilities is relevant. More than 1 billion transactions were carried out on mobile apps, and RBS Group's customer services handled more than 2 million phone calls in 2012. Increasingly, banks are looking at different ways of serving the public. We are now used to ATMs; branches, mobile banks and points of presence in railway stations and so on may become more popular as people seek convenient solutions in busy lives.

The nature and practice of banking are changing, and there is less demand for the traditional format of banking services that—if I may say so—the Deputy Presiding Officer and I grew up with, when none of those other forms of banking were possible. When the world changes, the nature of policy solutions must change accordingly.

Nevertheless, we recognise the concerns that Mr Mason has expressed and which will be felt by some of his constituents. Therefore, I asked the Royal Bank of Scotland to respond specifically to the issues about the location of the branch in Shettleston that has closed. The bank has advised me that there are several alternative Royal Bank of Scotland branches within 3 miles of the Shettleston branch. Mr Mason also referred to a post office that is located relatively nearby, and Mr McMillan said that there is a post office in Gourrock that is fairly close to the Gourrock branch that has closed.

I appreciate that those alternatives will not suit everybody and will still leave constituents of Mr

McMillan, Mr Mason and other members inconvenienced. The problems are, therefore, not to be dismissed. They are real concerns and I recognise them. Therefore, I would be happy to raise any individual case or specific difficulties that have been caused in Shettleston and Gourrock directly with RBS, if either member wishes me to do so.

Mr Mason asked me to say what engagement we have had with the Royal Bank of Scotland. I met RBS on 8 January, the First Minister met RBS on 9 January, Angela Constance met RBS on 7 February, John Swinney and the First Minister met RBS on 13 February, John Swinney met RBS on 28 March, and the First Minister met Ross McEwan, the chief executive officer for UK retail, on both 18 April and 14 May 2013. At those meetings, a huge number of things were discussed, including an undertaking by the Royal Bank of Scotland to invest £26 million in its branches over the next three years. That refurbishment will bring a lot of work to tradesmen throughout the country. I appreciate and acknowledge that as a good thing. In total, the bank is investing £175 million in improving services, branch refurbishments, ATMs and cash-and-deposit machines, and it is investing £50 million in information technology. It is also investing £450 million in IT hardware in its Edinburgh data centres.

I appreciate that none of those things will address—perhaps in any way—the problems that Mr Mason has raised; nonetheless, they are part of the wider picture and it is appropriate to mention them for that reason.

I am grateful to members for highlighting one of the issues that affect banking matters in Scotland. It is right that they do so; it is right that they stand up for constituents who are inconvenienced. However, we must not only recognise the difficulties that face the banks; we must also recognise that they are doing good things in the country. We must be willing to acknowledge that and thank them for doing that.

One member mentioned bonuses. It is my opinion that bonuses are perfectly legitimate when they reward success. However, in the absence of success, the award of bonuses to top directors and a tiny minority of senior employees of financial and other institutions causes extreme public disquiet perhaps more than anything else.

*Meeting closed at 17:40.*

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ISBN 978-1-78351-229-4

Revised e-format available  
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