



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 19 March 2014

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 19 March 2014

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

## Portfolio Question Time

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** Good afternoon, everyone. The first item of business is portfolio questions.

### Culture and External Affairs

#### Independence (European Union Membership)

**1. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what so-called red lines an independent Scotland would set when negotiating membership of the EU. (S4O-03017)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** As is set out in “Scotland’s Future”, the Scottish Government will base its approach to EU membership negotiations on the principle of continuity of effect—a transition to independent membership that is based on the EU treaty obligations and provisions that apply to Scotland under our present status as part of the United Kingdom, and without disruption to Scotland’s current fully integrated standing within the legal, economic, institutional, political and social framework of the EU.

**Neil Bibby:** The Scottish Government has said that EU membership would be a matter for negotiation. I asked what the Scottish Government’s red lines would be, but my question was not answered, so I will try again. Would the euro, the Schengen arrangements, the UK’s rebate, common agricultural policy reform and rest-of-the-UK fees be red lines? Would a derogation from the EU directive on banking headquarters be a red line? Am I to assume that, because the cabinet secretary will not tell me what the red lines would be, the Scottish National Party Government has no red lines on EU membership and would be content to join the EU at any cost?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I recommend that the member read not only “Scotland’s Future” but “Scotland in the European Union”, which was issued at the same time as the white paper. If he had read those papers, he would be better informed. With six months to go to the referendum, people not only expect information and explanations from the Government but kind of expect a better-informed Opposition and no-vote position.

**Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con):** If Scotland votes for independence, how will the Scottish Government deal with a requirement from

eastern European EU member states that any admission of Scotland to the EU should be conditional on transitional measures that last for up to and beyond 10 years? Will the Scottish Government refuse to accept any such transitional conditions? If not, what is the maximum period that it will accept for them?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am sure that the member has read the material that I just referred to. She will understand that the white paper “Scotland’s Future” does not present an analysis that talks about Scotland as an accession state.

The member will recognise from the evidence that is being given to the European and External Relations Committee that there is significant support from well-informed and experienced contributors for using article 48 to vary the treaties from within continued membership, which is a completely different matter. She should also acknowledge that not one EU member has said that Scotland would not be part of, and a continuing member of, the EU.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary share my disappointment that the Labour Party in Westminster is doing the political hokey-cokey by supporting an in/out referendum on EU membership? Does she agree that the only way to secure Scotland’s place in the EU is with a yes vote?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Yes. I think that many Labour members are uncomfortable that Labour’s stance is being driven by a reaction to an anti-EU party that loses its deposit in Scotland.

As for the UK Government’s position, even the Secretary of State for Scotland acknowledged on “Sunday Politics” on 24 November last year that he did not

“think anybody can give any guarantee”

that the UK would still be in the EU by the end of this decade.

**Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab):** I return to Mr Bibby’s question about red lines. A few weeks ago, Ms Sturgeon indicated in the chamber that there would be at least one red line—something that would be a line too far for the Scottish Government. Does Ms Hyslop agree with that position and would she like to restate it?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am sure that the member is aware that 11 EU countries do not use the euro. Before being permitted entry to the eurozone, a member state must meet five economic preconditions, including voluntary participation in the exchange rate mechanism for at least two years. None of those preconditions is legally binding on a member state. In relation to understanding and being informed on the issue, it

is therefore clear that a member state cannot be legally obliged to adopt the euro as its currency in the first place.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 2, in the name of Fiona McLeod, has not been lodged, for understandable reasons.

### **Cultural Heritage (European Funding)**

**3. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what European funding streams are available to help safeguard the cultural heritage of communities. (S4O-03019)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** A wide range of European funding streams are available, many of which could provide funding to safeguard the cultural heritage of communities. For example, in the member's Highlands and Islands region, the creative industries and media centre in Stornoway has received more than £1 million of European regional development funding; the Skara Brae and Urquhart castle visitor centres have received £316,000 and £893,000 respectively in recent years, also from the ERDF; and the Applecross landscape partnership scheme has received £94,000 from the LEADER programme under the European agricultural fund for rural development.

**Rhoda Grant:** I have written previously to the cabinet secretary about the precious archaeology in the Western Isles that has been lost due to coastal erosion. I stood recently in a neolithic house that was appearing out of the side of a sand dune; the other half of the house was already strewn on the beach below, lost to future generations. Will the cabinet secretary seek to access funding from the European Union or indeed other sources to protect that archaeology before much of it is lost for ever?

**Fiona Hyslop:** There are some challenges in the focus of European funds going forward to Europe 2020 in relation to accessibility. However, I acknowledge the challenge for archaeology of coastal erosion, which we see not just in the Western Isles but elsewhere in Scotland. On identifying opportunities for European funding, one of the best ways to access European money is to do so in co-operation with other countries; indeed we are already in discussions with Ireland on how we can take that forward.

### **Film Studio (Glasgow)**

**4. Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Scottish Enterprise regarding the establishment of a film studio in Glasgow. (S4O-03020)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** Scottish Enterprise in partnership with Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government—which have been monitoring the issue through the delivery group for film and television that I established last year—commissioned a report from the consultants EKOS. The report, which was published on Friday, indicates that tax incentives have created a surge of interest in filming in Scotland, which is driving demand for studio space. The report assesses several potential options and recommends that representatives of the private sector be invited to submit their own development briefs for a studio facility. If that request for proposals fails to identify a suitable commercial project, the report recommends that public sector agencies should concurrently proceed with a detailed appraisal of and business plan for a foundation studio.

**Patricia Ferguson:** As the cabinet secretary knows, Glasgow has recently had a number of very successful forays into the world of film production and those are now being shown widely in our cinemas. That seems to me to demonstrate that there is huge demand for such a facility in Glasgow. Independent film producers have been crying out for it for a long time, and although the EKOS report is welcome it does not tell us anything that we did not know.

While we have been waiting for the publication of the EKOS report, we have had the spectacle of Northern Ireland and Wales becoming seriously involved in the area. Is it not time that we stopped talking about it and actually began to establish a film studio in Glasgow?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member is a former culture minister and had responsibility for establishing a studio and developing the film industry. Obviously, the market conditions have been challenging, not just during her period in government but at the start of ours. The conditions have now changed, in relation to not just the welcome tax incentives that this Government campaigned for, but the relationship between the dollar and the pound, which creates opportunities.

The member is quite correct to identify successes. In September, we saw the premieres of five major films—"Filth", "Starred Up", "Sunshine on Leith", "The Railway Man" and "Under the Skin". "Filth" and "Sunshine On Leith" were the two biggest grossing United Kingdom-made films on release in the UK.

I agree with the member that action is needed, which is why we are taking forward the recommendations in the EKOS report and why, on 26 February, John Swinney and I met Independent Producers Scotland to discuss a number of areas, including a studio and other support for the film

industry. We will take that work forward proactively over the next period.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Can the cabinet secretary confirm how much has been provided from the Scottish public sector purse to support the screen sector in the past three years?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Yes. Total public sector support for the screen sector over the past three years was £58.2 million: £19.7 million in 2010-11; £17.5 million in 2011-12; and £21 million in 2012-13. It is important to recognise the importance of that sector not only to Scotland's economic growth but to the portrayal of Scotland and the cultural development of the indigenous film industry.

### College of Piping (Support)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Kezia Dugdale to ask question 5. [*Interruption.*] I ask members to ensure that their phones are off, please.

**5. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports the College of Piping and the wider traditional music sector. (S4O-03021)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** The Scottish Government supports the traditional music sector through Creative Scotland, which disburses nearly £2 million each year to organisations that directly form part of the sector. Creative Scotland supports piping mainly through the National Piping Centre. It has never received an application for funding from the College of Piping, which is also based in Glasgow, although it has advised the college that it has the same opportunity to apply for funding as any other body. The College of Piping is not a statutory body and is not funded through the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, although it awards Scottish Qualifications Authority-recognised exams in tandem with the Piping and Drumming Qualifications Board.

**Kezia Dugdale:** The minister will be aware that the Scottish school piping championships were held only a couple of weekends ago. I am sure that she will join me in congratulating all the winners of that contest. However, she might be aware that all the winners in three of the categories were from private schools and that there is a problem in attracting state school kids to learn the pipes. Will her Government consider introducing a right to piping in schools and will she discuss that matter with her education colleagues?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am a keen champion of piping. I have attended the world pipe band championships in the past number of years. My father was a member of a pipe band and I look forward to welcoming the British pipe band

championships again to Bathgate in my constituency.

Kezia Dugdale is also right to note that we need to ensure that piping and piping tuition are more widely accessible. Boghall & Bathgate Caledonia Pipe Band, one of Scotland's premier pipe bands, is in my constituency. It has an excellent relationship with young people from all schools. We need that community approach to piping and the dedication of the members of staff not only at the College of Piping but at the National Piping Centre to pass piping on.

I certainly hear what Kezia Dugdale says and would be more than happy to discuss it with my education colleagues.

### Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

The availability of bagpipes as a musical instrument in schools is variable, to say the least. Tuition costs range from zero to more than £250 a year, which is prohibitive for many families. Will the cabinet secretary consider a more consistent approach to piping in schools to provide opportunities for more pupils to play the bagpipes and more schools to form pipe bands?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am certainly in favour of more piping in schools and more generally. Mary Scanlon raises an issue that cuts to the heart of the extent to which central Government can provide consistency across local authorities before we hear cries for local authorities to have the independence to make their own decisions.

As Mary Scanlon will have seen, my colleague Alasdair Allan has been proactive in addressing some of the issues about instrumental provision in schools. We are keeping a close eye on that, but I acknowledge the calls for recognition of piping. I have heard magnificent piping in our schools and will always remember hearing in Linlithgow academy a combination of the orchestra and the pipes in "Highland Cathedral". We have many talented young pipers, but we need to ensure that the pipeline of pipers continues.

### Syrian Conflict

**6. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what representations it has made to the United Kingdom Government regarding the impact of the Syrian conflict on the Scottish Government's external affairs strategy. (S4O-03022)

**The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf):** The Scottish Government's international framework sets out our strong and enduring commitment to securing democracy, the rule of law and fundamental human rights across the world.

In keeping with that commitment, the First Minister wrote to the Foreign Secretary last September and the Prime Minister in January about the situation in Syria, urging the United Kingdom Government to support the resettlement of those fleeing the conflict who are most in need and stating that Scotland would play her part in providing a welcoming safe home for Syrian refugees. That was reiterated in a letter from the First Minister to the Home Secretary on 4 March, and I am pleased that the UK Government has agreed to do so.

**Jim Eadie:** Although the UK Government's provision of humanitarian assistance to Syria is to be welcomed, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has called on European Union member states to provide shelter to 30,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees. Germany has agreed to take 10,000 refugees and Sweden has accepted 25,000, while the UK has agreed to accept only 500. Does the minister agree that the UK and Scotland should do much more to assist men, women and children who are escaping the humanitarian crisis in Syria?

**Humza Yousaf:** It is important to emphasise that the UK Government has played a leading role in supplying overseas aid during the Syrian crisis by providing more than £650 million. We should also welcome the fact that the UK Government has agreed, as Jim Eadie said, to take a number of Syrian refugees. We hope that it will be a first step on which to build in years to come, because the crisis is huge. Approximately 2.5 million people have been displaced externally and 6 million people—more than the population of Scotland—have been displaced internally. We should welcome the UK Government's decision to play a part, and Scotland will play a part too. In addition, we will encourage the UK Government to play a further role wherever it—and Scotland—can do so.

#### **John Muir Festival (Californian State Government)**

**7. Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Californian state government and governor regarding how to ensure a lasting legacy from the Homecoming Scotland 2014 event, the John Muir festival. (S4O-03023)

**The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf):** The John Muir festival is a signature event in the homecoming 2014 programme of more than 700 events that are taking place in every local authority area throughout Scotland. The legacy of the festival's celebration of that great Scot's life will be the opening of the spectacular Falkirk Kelpies and of the John Muir way, which is a new national

pathway stretching for 120 miles across central Scotland from Dunbar to Helensburgh.

Scottish Natural Heritage has worked jointly with the US National Park Service to produce detailed digital models of John Muir's birthplace home in Dunbar and his family home in Martinez, California. I will be using Scotland week in the USA to take part in a tree-planting ceremony in the Muir woods on the edge of San Francisco to mark the creation of the John Muir way. Plans are being drawn up for meetings during my visit with representatives not only from the Government but from the Sierra Club, which is keen to explore opportunities for the on-going promotion of the way to its members across the United States.

**Chic Brodie:** I thank the minister for that comprehensive answer. April sees the principal kick-off of the John Muir festival, with the town of Dunbar—his birthplace—as a focal point of that festival. On the back of that, will the Scottish Government seek to establish twinning arrangements with towns in California further to the current arrangement between the towns of Dunbar and Martinez?

**Humza Yousaf:** Twinning arrangements such as the long-standing links between Dunbar and Martinez enrich communities across Scotland by fostering friendship and understanding between cultures and celebrating important ancestral connections such as the global legacy of John Muir.

The Scottish Government is keen to encourage meaningful twinning where it is appropriate, but it is a matter for individual local authorities. Of course, in principle, we will support twinning where connections are meaningful.

#### **Culture and Arts (Young People)**

**8. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to promote young people's interests and talents in culture and the arts. (S4O-03024)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** In addition to all the cultural and artistic activity that is taking place in our schools and colleges, the Scottish Government is promoting young people's engagement with the arts and culture through "Time To Shine: Scotland's Youth Arts Strategy", which I launched in November last year. Creative Scotland's youth arts programme is taking shape and funding for regional youth arts hubs will be awarded shortly. Creative Scotland is working with Young Scot to identify the membership of the youth arts national advisory group, which should be in place by mid-May.

**Margaret Mitchell:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that comprehensive answer. Is she aware of



the success of North Lanarkshire Council's creative residency programme? It was established nine years ago and provides 50 school students with the opportunity to spend one week each year developing their artistic talents in a creative environment, which has resulted in the pupils producing superb garments, paintings and sculpture that have been exhibited at the Summerlee museum of Scottish industrial life in Coatbridge. Does she consider that such programmes should be available to more students and pupils throughout Scotland?

**Fiona Hyslop:** That programme is a good example of embedding arts and creativity in curriculum for excellence; we can ensure that other authorities are aware of it, and I look forward to learning more about that particular project.

## Infrastructure, Investment and Cities

### National Housing Trust (Completed Units)

#### 1. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland)

**(Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how many units have been completed under the national housing trust. (S4O-03027)

**The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):** The national housing trust initiative—the first guarantee-based model for housing in the United Kingdom—is a major success. Deals for the delivery of more than 1,600 homes across 10 local authority areas have been signed, and more deals are expected to be signed shortly. Five hundred and fifty-five NHT homes are already complete.

**Alex Johnstone:** The minister will be aware that, despite the existence of the national housing trust, there remain a number of potential investors in both the private and institutional sectors who seek to work in partnership with local authorities to provide affordable housing. Will the minister consider what can be done to escape the inflexibility of the national housing trust and begin to deliver the encouragement and support that are necessary to ensure that our local authorities take up that investment and begin to cut waiting lists?

**Margaret Burgess:** The national housing trust is a very popular way to build houses at no cost to the Scottish Government and is something that we will continue to do and to promote, as it serves a particular need in the areas in which it delivers. At the same time, our financial innovation unit continues to work with investors to discuss ways in which we can go forward with major investment through—as the member said—pension schemes and other types of investment in the housing sector. We continue to do that, but we will also continue to support and develop the NHT.

### Glasgow Airport and Glasgow City Centre (Transport Links)

#### 2. Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will support improved transport links between Glasgow airport and Glasgow city centre. (S4O-03028)

**The Minister for Transport and Veterans (Keith Brown):** The recent Glasgow airport strategic transport network study identified much that Glasgow City Council and Renfrewshire Council, working with Glasgow Airport Ltd, could do in the short term to improve bus services to and from the airport. Few risks are attached to the implementation of those measures and much can be achieved at low cost.

I have also asked Transport Scotland to work with Glasgow Airport Ltd and the councils to consider further the feasibility of a tram-train link from Glasgow airport to Glasgow Central station.

**Hugh Henry:** Will the minister fully fund any suggested tram-train link between Glasgow airport and Glasgow city centre? If so, when will it happen? Will such a link involve the repurchase of land sold off when the previous plan was shelved?

**Keith Brown:** I think that it is obvious from the statements that are in the report and that have been made by the partners that we are at a very early stage. We have said that we will initiate the work that is required and will look for contributions to it to ensure that we can do the feasibility and design work that is necessary to take the link further forward.

I make it clear that we recognise—as does the report—that there are risks inherent in the tram-train link and that it is not a straightforward thing to do. We understand that point at this stage. That also means that, as yet, there is not a fixed trajectory for the tram-train link; in fact, the report covers three options. Further work on those will tell us whether further land would have to be acquired. I think, from memory, that the routes would not require any buy-back of land previously disposed of, but we will have to wait and see exactly what comes forward. The tram-train link should be considered alongside the other achievements—the M74; the M80; funding fastlink; and the Paisley corridor improvements—that this Government has taken forward.

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

Does the minister agree that a major disadvantage of the Glasgow airport rail link scheme was that it would not have linked into any local communities? If he is looking at future options, could one of them be a light rail link that goes through Braehead and Renfrew, which would boost local communities and reduce car journeys to shopping centres?

**Keith Brown:** The member mentions an important point, which is that the report vindicates the Scottish Government's decision to cancel the GARL project based on its cost benefit ratio. At this stage, we want to focus on further consideration of the proposals in the report and to look at more details of the feasibility of delivering the tram-train solution that has been identified.

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Will the minister outline any discussions that he or his officials have had with Network Rail or the Office of Rail Regulation on the tram-train system that is known as dual running? Can he confirm the earliest possible opportunity at which such a scheme could be approved?

**Keith Brown:** The report, which was just published last week, would have taken into account some of those factors. Detailed discussions on the implications of those are the next stage that we are ready to push forward on, in concert with our partners at Glasgow City Council, Renfrewshire Council and, of course, Glasgow Airport Ltd, which carried out the study. We will discuss the issues with them and some of the issues that Mark Griffin mentioned will have already been considered when the report was compiled.

**Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con):** The history of this issue precedes by many years the arrival of the minister in this Parliament. I have painful recollections of ministerial rigidity, for which I cannot blame Mr Brown, excluding everything but an expensive heavy rail link. Echoing John Mason, I ask the minister whether he agrees that any consideration of improved transport links to Glasgow airport would benefit from flexibility of approach and a range of options.

**Keith Brown:** Annabel Goldie is right. The report lays out other options, for example personal rapid transport and a number of bus improvements, which could be made quite quickly, as well as the tram-train link. We said at the start that having cancelled GARL and having seen its cost benefit analysis, we would not fund a heavy rail option. That could still have come forward—others might still want to progress with that—but we have said that we would not fund it. All the other options that have been proposed have been seriously considered. A statement of our intent in that regard is our willingness to take forward the tram-train option and look at it in much more detail.

### **Strategic Infrastructure Developments (Aberdeen)**

**3. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will support strategic infrastructure developments in the Aberdeen city region. (S4O-03029)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon):** We welcome Aberdeen City Council's strategic infrastructure plan, which was published in the autumn, and we expect to continue to support and complement local and regional investment in Aberdeen that can unlock sustainable economic growth.

**Lewis Macdonald:** The latest national planning framework recognises that expanding Aberdeen harbour, including the roads infrastructure, is a national priority. Does the cabinet secretary agree that connecting the new harbour facilities to the rail network could create business and jobs, for example in commissioning offshore renewables and in decommissioning oil platforms? Will the Government undertake to work with Aberdeen Harbour Board, Network Rail and other interested parties to ensure that those opportunities are not missed?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I agree with Lewis Macdonald, but all the issues he mentioned are opportunities for Aberdeen if it gets it right. I am certainly happy to undertake to work with all the stakeholders and agencies that Lewis Macdonald mentioned, including the harbour board, Network Rail and the council. We are keen to work collaboratively to ensure that we make strategic infrastructure investments that unlock Aberdeen's economic potential.

Aberdeen is one of the fastest growing parts of Scotland and we need to ensure that its infrastructure facilitates the further economic success of the city. We are happy to work with anybody and, as I said, we support the strategic infrastructure plan that Aberdeen City Council has published. We look forward to working together with it directly and through the collaborative framework of the Scottish cities alliance to look at how we take those things forward.

**Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** One of the key infrastructure projects in Aberdeen is the improvements to the Haudagain roundabout in my constituency. The Minister for Transport and Veterans joined me at a meeting with Middlefield residents on Monday evening to discuss the Scottish Government's plans. Residents welcomed the certainty provided at that meeting but they want politics to be left to the side and the Scottish Government and the council to work together to improve the area and deliver the project. Will the cabinet secretary join me in calling on the council administration to join the Scottish Government in that approach to ensure that the project is delivered for the betterment of the city and the community?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I strongly endorse Mark McDonald's comments. It would be to the benefit of everybody in Aberdeen if we left a lot more

politics out of some of these really important discussions. We are all politicians, but we are also public servants who are there to serve the needs of the people of Aberdeen. Mark McDonald talks about the important investments that are required in the Haudagain roundabout. We are now moving forward with the western peripheral route after many years of delay—which was not of this Government's making—and it is important that that continues apace so that we can deliver the important improvements at Haudagain.

As I indicated to Lewis Macdonald, we are committed to working with anybody, regardless of politics, to maximise the potential of the great city of Aberdeen. I hope that we can all get together in that spirit and do exactly that.

#### **Open Market Shared Equity Scheme (Fife)**

**4. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many people in Fife have received support from the open market shared equity scheme since 2011. (S4O-03030)

**The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):** Between April 2011 and December 2013, 64 homes have been purchased through the open market shared equity scheme in Fife.

**Roderick Campbell:** I have been approached by constituents who are struggling to find a suitable property in their preferred area of Anstruther and who believe that the price thresholds are too restrictive. Are there any plans to review the thresholds, particularly taking into account the fact that property prices in Fife are far from uniform?

**Margaret Burgess:** The threshold prices for the open market shared equity scheme are currently set at the lower quartile, which is the most commonly used measure for identifying affordable houses in the private sector. That allows us to help as many buyers as possible and to continue to target those people who need help to access the affordable housing market. We will continue to keep the threshold prices under review, but the open market shared equity scheme is just one of a range of initiatives operating across Fife and Scotland to help buyers to access home ownership. The Scottish Government's popular help to buy (Scotland) scheme has 51 developments across Fife that are registered to participate in the scheme. The industry-led my new home scheme, which is supported by a Scottish Government guarantee, is also helping home ownership in Fife.

**Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** How many people from homes owned by councils and registered social landlords have been accepted for

the scheme? What further support will be given to target the scheme at those people who are on low to medium incomes?

**Margaret Burgess:** I do not have those figures with me, but I can certainly get them to the member. The scheme has been set for a particular group of people and RSL tenants have moved from RSL lists into the open market shared equity scheme and the National Housing Trust scheme after discussions on affordability. I do not know whether we keep those figures but I will check and let the member know.

#### **Scottish Welfare Fund (Vulnerable Families)**

**5. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how the Scottish welfare fund supports vulnerable families in Glasgow and across the country. (S4O-03031)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Nicola Sturgeon):** Glasgow City Council has a budget of £7.7 million to deliver the Scottish welfare fund in its area. That represents 23 per cent of the total £33 million fund.

To the end of December, informal monitoring showed that Glasgow City Council had spent more than £5.4 million on crisis grants and community care grants. Across the country, local authorities have made grants worth around £18.5 million during the same period.

In addition to help directly from the Scottish welfare fund, applicants can also be referred or signposted by local authorities for support from other agencies such as advocacy services, welfare rights, housing and money management organisations.

**Bob Doris:** My constituents in Glasgow who rely on the Scottish welfare fund for money, often because of draconian United Kingdom benefit cuts and sanctions, sometimes face a variety of other challenges and have other support needs. The cabinet secretary alluded to that. Can the cabinet secretary give some more details about how the Scottish Government measures the successful outcomes for those who receive cash and other support from the Scottish welfare fund for those softer types of support such as signposting for welfare rights, jobseeking skills, and other things of that nature?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** As Bob Doris will be aware, a variety of information about the operation of the welfare fund is being collected and reported regularly. Last October, we appointed Heriot-Watt University to undertake an independent review of the operation of the new fund. We expect to be in a position to publish the evaluation report in the spring, and it will help us to identify any changes

before we put permanent arrangements on a legislative footing.

In the course of that evaluation and our regular reporting, the type of help that is being given to people is obviously important. As Bob Doris will be well aware, local authorities are responsible for deciding how to make awards that best meet the needs of the applicant, whether they be for cash, goods or signposting, and they need to be able to use discretion.

My final point is on sanctions. We have concerns about the application of the sanctions regime and we are in the process of changing the welfare fund guidance to local authorities to make it clear that help can be given to people who are in crisis because of the application of sanctions.

### **New Build Completions (Dumfries and Galloway)**

**6. Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how many housing association new builds were completed in Dumfries and Galloway in 2013. (S4O-03032)

**The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):** During the calendar year 2013, 27 housing association new builds were completed in Dumfries and Galloway. A further 659 approved units are expected to be completed by March 2016.

We also support affordable housing in the area through a range of national programmes such as the national housing trust, open market shared equity and the help to buy (Scotland) scheme.

**Elaine Murray:** The minister will probably be aware that that figure of 27 new builds is the lowest number of completions in any year since 1999. In 2013, there were only 47 house starts, the lowest number since 2010, and 38 were improved, which is the second-lowest figure since 1999. Does the minister agree that, as there are more than 5,000 households on the registered social landlord waiting lists in Dumfries and Galloway, action must be taken to increase the availability of social housing for rent in my constituency?

**Margaret Burgess:** As the member says, at face value, the figure of 27 does not look that high, and the figures appear to suggest that those are the only completions and that the number of completions has declined significantly. A number of figures contributed to that. The figures are for the calendar year and, already this year, there have been a further 44 completions, with another 30 to come, which will come to a total of 101 up to the end of this financial year. However, there is also a large contract of 312 units in Dumfries and Galloway, which I am sure that the member is aware of. Most of those are complete and tenants

are in them. However, they will not appear in the statistics until the full contract is complete. That is why the figure may seem as low as it does.

I can assure the member that we are still building more social rented houses in Dumfries and Galloway than were built under the previous administration and we will continue to do that. Housebuilding in the social and RSL sectors is higher since 2007 than it was under the previous administration and we continue to go forward towards our target, which we intend to meet.

### **Poverty (Housing)**

**7. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what contribution it considers that housing can make to tackling poverty. (S4O-03033)

**The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):** Too many of Scotland's people still live in communities suffering the effects of deprivation and disadvantage. As outlined in the revised child poverty strategy for Scotland, which was published on 10 March, we intend to focus on area-based factors that currently exacerbate the effects of individual poverty for many families. Housing is a key part of our physical, economic and social fabric and getting housing right will contribute significantly to our wider aims with regard to tackling poverty and health inequalities and building confidence and capacity in communities.

**Sarah Boyack:** Has the minister seen the report on poverty that was presented to the City of Edinburgh Council last week and identified the stark difference that exists between the richest and the poorest areas in the city, and the fact that we now have 152 bids for every social rented property that becomes available, with 25,000 people waiting on our housing lists? What is she doing to work with the council to help to deliver the 16,000 affordable rented houses that the council estimates are needed over the next decade? A huge amount of social housing was built in the early years of this Parliament but I am afraid that, given the current austerity measures that our housing associations are experiencing and the council's lack of finance, we are not getting the rate of social housing starts that the city and its residents urgently need.

**Margaret Burgess:** The Scottish Government understands the affordable housing issues in Edinburgh and has supported the city with significant levels of Scottish Government funding over the past few years. In the period from 2012-13 to 2014-15, £81.168 million of Scottish Government grant funding, managed through the transfer of management of development funding arrangement with the City of Edinburgh Council, has been made available, and is expected to

assist in the delivery of 1,469 affordable units, and we have just announced a further £88 million for the period to March 2019. We continue to work with the council to help it to address the housing need in Edinburgh.

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** What consideration has the minister given to targeting future affordable housing investment in areas where there are the greatest job opportunities?

**Margaret Burgess:** As the member will be aware, it is the local authorities that determine housing in their area. We have an arrangement with them and with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about how the affordable housing supply funding is distributed. That arrangement is in place and we will continue with it. We will also continue to work with the councils in the areas of high demand in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, where there are job opportunities for people who move into those areas. We are working with those councils in innovative ways in order to ensure that there is a proper level of housing for all those who require it.

## Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

14:40

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is the election of a member for appointment to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. I have received one valid nomination for appointment. The nomination is Liz Smith.

The question is, that Liz Smith be elected for appointment to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. Members should press the yes, no or abstain button.

### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)

Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

wish her well in her duties that she is about to take up. [*Applause.*]

#### Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the vote for the appointment of Liz Smith to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body is: For 98, Against 0, Abstentions 2.

As a majority of members have voted in favour, Liz Smith is duly elected for appointment to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

I congratulate Liz Smith on her appointment, and on behalf of the corporate body members—Liam McArthur, Linda Fabiani, David Stewart and myself—I express our thanks to Mary Scanlon for the fine job that she has done as a representative on the corporate body. She has worked tirelessly and diligently on behalf of the Parliament, and we

## European Youth Guarantee

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-09376, in the name of Angela Constance, on the European youth guarantee.

There is sufficient time in hand for members to take interventions. The Presiding Officers will, of course, allow additional time if they do so.

14:43

**The Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance):** I am very pleased to have the opportunity to open this debate on the European youth guarantee.

As we have seen from the labour market statistics over the past few months, there is no doubt that tackling youth unemployment remains one of the biggest national challenges that we currently face in this country. Six months from now, the people of Scotland will have their say on the constitutional future of our country, and they will decide whether the decisions on issues such as the youth guarantee are better made by the people who live and work in Scotland. Between now and September, we all have a duty to set out our vision for the future of our country. That is a historic decision, and it is right that we have a robust debate on the issues that concern all of us.

Our young people have a critical role to play in our securing long-term, sustainable economic growth. I hope that this debate offers an opportunity for us to develop a cross-party, cross-Government consensus, at least in Scotland, on developing a positive vision for our young people.

In January 2013 I expressed my support for the principles of the European Commission's youth guarantee, which would provide young people with the support that they need to progress to employment within four months of becoming unemployed and to be offered a job, an apprenticeship, a traineeship or a place in education. It is a bold but compelling vision of how we could align the delivery of existing services and use domestic and European funds to develop new solutions to support young people. I remain absolutely convinced that early intervention is vital if we are to avoid young people becoming long-term unemployed.

It would surprise me—and I believe that it would be unacceptable to the people of Scotland—if the Scottish Parliament adopted a less ambitious vision for our young people than some other nations are currently committed to delivering. Are our young people less deserving than those in Finland, Denmark or the Netherlands? Are our young people less able or less ambitious than their

fellow European citizens, such as those in the Czech Republic? My answer is that they most certainly are not. Are we so set in our ways and so aligned to party loyalty or so lacking in ambition that we cannot develop the partnerships that will drive the delivery of the guarantee that our young people deserve? I most certainly hope not.

It is clear from other countries that have adopted the guarantee that aligning employment, skills, benefits and taxation policy is crucial if we are to improve how we tackle youth unemployment and inactivity, and improve education-to-work transitions. That is why I am keen to engage with the Westminster Government and, indeed, others to persuade them of the value of developing a more positive offer for our young people and of the merits of the European youth guarantee.

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The minister presented a very robust welcome of the European youth guarantee in her opening remarks, but that view is not shared right across the Scottish National Party. Her member of the European Parliament, Alyn Smith, was quoted in the *European Journal* as saying:

"The Youth Guarantee scheme sounds good, but ... It's window dressing. It allows MEPs to go back to their constituencies and say ... youth guarantee scheme, look what we've done."

Is it not the case that the SNP is a little ambivalent about the scheme, but really got behind it when it realised that it could use it as a constitutional issue?

**Angela Constance:** I refute that entirely. If Ms Marra reads the entire quote that was attributed to Mr Smith, she will see that he was concerned about the lack of budget associated with the European youth guarantee. We now know that it has an associated budget. It is important for the record to note that Mr Smith voted for the European youth guarantee when he had the opportunity to do so in the European Parliament.

The United Kingdom Government states that it supports the aim of the youth guarantee, which is to reduce youth unemployment, but it does not support its adoption in the UK. That is disappointing for us because without the powers over tax, benefits and employment, we cannot fully deliver the terms of the youth guarantee. I accept that the European Council's recommendation in favour of establishing the youth guarantee is non-binding on member states, but against the backdrop of the Prince's Trust youth index report that shows that 40 per cent of unemployed young people say that they have faced symptoms of mental illness and that 21 per cent of long-term unemployed young people believe that they have nothing to live for, surely we must continue our efforts to persuade and encourage the

Westminster Government to change its position on the youth guarantee.

In February, I wrote to Iain Duncan Smith urging that his Government should adopt the principles of the European youth guarantee. Last month, I wrote to the shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Rachel Reeves, seeking Labour's support for the European youth guarantee, following a very public spat between her and Iain Duncan Smith. In both letters I suggested that the European youth guarantee offers us a solid base on which to build a cross-Government, cross-party and long-term plan to tackle youth unemployment. Although precise figures cannot be calculated until each member state has defined exactly how it will implement the scheme, researchers rate the benefits of the European youth guarantee much higher than the costs. However, the costs of not acting on the scheme are staggering. We should consider the youth guarantee as an investment in our young people.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions—Eurofound—estimated the economic loss in the European Union from having millions of young people out of work, education or training to be more than €150 billion in 2011 alone, and that does not take account of the long-term costs of unemployment to the economy, society and the individuals concerned, such as the increased risk of future unemployment and poverty.

The United Kingdom Government cites the fact that more than 80 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds flow off jobseekers allowance within six months as evidence that it would not be cost effective for the UK to implement a four-month guarantee. It believes that the work programme and the youth contract better suit the national circumstances that are faced by young people in the UK. I do not dispute the off-flow figures, but I believe that failing to intervene at four months or earlier represents a missed opportunity for young people who need a helping hand. Surely it cannot be cost effective to wait six, nine or 12 months to support young people who need that help the most.

That point is an important one, because the youth guarantee does not ask that all young people receive the same level of support. Its purpose is to ensure that no young person is left behind and that young people can access the level of support that they need to move to a positive destination such as a job, an apprenticeship, a traineeship or a place in education. Interventions will range from careers advice for those who just need information all the way through to tailored interventions that tackle the serious barriers to employment that some of our most vulnerable young people face.

It is that second group who are being let down by the current arrangements. I do not think that it is acceptable and I know that it is not cost effective to play a numbers game by waiting before we offer help to those who need it most. The increasing numbers of young people who are moving to long-term unemployment is evidence of that flawed logic.

I believe that elements of our offer to young people that are delivered in partnership with local authorities, community planning partnerships, national delivery organisations such as Skills Development Scotland and a large number of third sector groups are already consistent with the EU youth guarantee. Our interventions are based on the principle that early intervention is key to avoiding young people becoming long-term unemployed.

I am frustrated that, without the powers of an independent member state, this Parliament cannot deliver the alignment of employment, skills, taxation and benefits policy that would allow us to deliver the guarantee in full to all our young people. However, within the scope of our current powers, we have already delivered a range of programmes. Opportunities for all is our unprecedented guaranteed offer of a place in learning or training for every 16 to 19-year-old, and our commitment to 16 to 19-year-olds has delivered record numbers of school leavers progressing to positive destinations. Our successful modern apprenticeship programme is meeting our commitment to deliver 25,000 apprenticeships each year.

**Jenny Marra:** Will the minister give way?

**Angela Constance:** I will in a moment.

Our youth employment Scotland and community jobs Scotland initiatives, together with our support to encourage employers to take on graduates, are all delivering opportunities for young people, and that is not to mention the employability fund or other initiatives such as the certificate of work readiness.

I am happy to give way to Ms Marra.

**Jenny Marra:** I thank the minister for giving way. She—I am sorry. I will let the minister continue for now, if that is okay.

**Angela Constance:** Well, that was easy. I thank the member.

The point that I was trying to make is that key to our interventions is that we are targeting young people early, before they drift to long-term unemployment. Longer-term measures such as the curriculum for excellence, reform of the college sector and our support for university graduates have all been taken with a view to better preparing young people for the world of work.



The commission for developing Scotland's young workforce will offer a framework for creating opportunities for work experience for young people and a real focus on ensuring that young people do not disengage early from education but embark on pathways that link closely with labour market demand.

The Government is committed to using the £74 million of European youth initiative funding that will be available to us to make a real difference in south-west Scotland. That funding is allocated to regions across the EU in which the unemployment rate for young people was above 25 per cent in December 2012 and supports individuals aged between 15 and 29 who are currently inactive or are at risk of not moving to education, employment or training. To unlock that funding, we need the UK Government to finalise a partnership agreement with the Commission, but I am open to engaging widely on how we can use it to tackle long-standing problems in areas such as Glasgow, Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, Dumfries and Galloway and Renfrewshire. I have already received an assurance from the Deputy Prime Minister that the Scottish Government will be responsible for the management of the youth employment initiative money for south-west Scotland and a programme that, when matched with domestic resources, will be worth at least £110 million.

An important aspect of my role is persuading Scotland's employers to invest in their future by growing young talent. I believe that our young people are intelligent, creative, hardworking and willing to work and, as the economy shows signs of recovery, we must continue to make the business case to employers to future proof their ability to take advantage of the new business opportunities that will emerge. Our make young people your business campaign will continue throughout 2014 with sectorally themed events in key areas such as the digital sector, information and communications technology, oil and gas, textiles and engineering, to name but a few.

Young people are without doubt hit the hardest when the economy is weak, but, as I have previously emphasised to the Parliament, youth unemployment is not just a product of recession. Prior to the recession and at a time of economic growth in this country, youth unemployment rates in Scotland reached around 14 per cent. We have to be more ambitious; after all, our goal cannot just be a return to pre-recession levels. I am sure that we all want better for the young people of Scotland.

Today's debate and the cross-party support for the European youth guarantee should be taken as an opportunity to signal this Parliament's determination to deliver a shared positive vision for our young people. The lessons that I have

gathered from what other European countries are doing, from what we are doing in Scotland and from my wide discussions with employers, young people and other stakeholders across Scotland confirm my belief that we need to engage early to offer young people the support that they need before they drift to long-term unemployment; to better align our skills and employment systems with a supportive tax and benefits regime that is focused on moving young people into employment instead of penalising them for not being able to find work; and to tackle underemployment to create entry opportunities for young people with fewer or no qualifications.

With that in mind, I move,

That the Parliament recognises the critical role that young people will play in delivering long-term economic growth; recognises the disadvantage that young people face in the labour market and the negative impact of allowing long periods of inactivity; accepts the principle of early intervention to offer young people a positive destination; supports the principal aim of the European Youth Guarantee to reduce youth unemployment; endorses the aim of ensuring that all young people under the age of 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education, and agrees that, to deliver this, delivery agencies must align skills, employment, taxation and benefit policy to better support young people into education, training or employment.

14:58

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The European youth guarantee began as a campaign by the Party of European Socialists, of which the Labour Party is a member, back in May 2012, one year after the International Monetary Fund stepped in to bail out the Greek economy with a loan of more than €100 billion and just a month before Spain agreed its own bailout. The campaign was devised as the world watched the eurozone's collapse and the decline into insolvency of states that, just years before, had been in growth and in plain sight of the stringent cuts to public services and the loss of livelihoods that caused riots on the streets of Athens and marches in Madrid.

Through it all, young people, particularly young women—the students of Lisbon, Rome and, closer to home, Dublin—were forced into a world not of their own making but in which, nevertheless, work was nearly impossible to come by and wages even less likely to meet the rising cost of living. In countries such as Spain, the situation has not abated. Earlier this year, youth unemployment in Spain was reported to have reached a staggering 58 per cent—in other words, six out of 10 young people are unable to find work. In Greece, the figure has peaked at nearly 70 per cent.

At its heart, the campaign for a youth guarantee was for those young people whose hopes of a career, whose trust in the political process to deliver opportunities and, most important, whose self-belief were evaporating. Scottish Labour, UK Labour and socialist parties across Europe came together and voted to support the youth guarantee, because we saw the long-term risk to our economies of a generation of European young people—students and school leavers—being out of work.

The EU says that the youth guarantee is “not a jobs guarantee”. Rather, it is a commitment to re-engage young people in work or education, with the shortest possible delay, as the minister said. To fund the guarantee, states are urged to make use of the European social fund, and a further €6 billion has been set aside for member states whose youth unemployment rate is more than 25 per cent.

I want to challenge the minister’s assertion that without the full powers of independence we cannot deliver jobs and opportunities for young people in Scotland.

**Angela Constance:** For the record, I think that I said that we could not deliver the European youth guarantee in full without having the full range of powers over employment services, Jobcentre Plus, the economy, tax and welfare. Is Ms Marra giving the European youth guarantee her unreserved support today?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** Time can be reimbursed for interventions, Ms Marra.

**Jenny Marra:** We absolutely support the European youth guarantee. I thought that I had been quite clear about that, but maybe I can reassure the minister.

Right now, we have the infrastructure, the power and, more important, the responsibility, to do better. We have control over our education system—the single biggest driver of a skilled and balanced workforce. In Skills Development Scotland we have a skills body that has the power to ensure that every young person is afforded an opportunity. In Scottish Enterprise we have a body that is dedicated to growing Scotland’s economy, building businesses and creating job opportunities.

In short, we have control over the most powerful tools in the box for the delivery of outcomes for young people. However, we are not using those tools to their full potential. In education, colleges face an 11 per cent reduction in funding, which amounts to cuts of more than £62 million by 2015. Some 80,000 part-time places have gone since 2007, and courses and teaching budgets have been cut. What hope do we have of offering young people a place in quality education, as the

European youth guarantee envisages, if we make such drastic cuts to the education system?

The European youth guarantee prioritises young people up to the age of 25, and the Scottish Government’s priority is to focus on 16 to 19-year-olds. However, we are not even giving all young people in that age bracket the opportunity that they were promised, Skills Development Scotland having lost 17,000 people from the system last April.

**Angela Constance:** It is important that Ms Marra acknowledges that, although we do not know the destination of a very small proportion of young people, despite Skills Development Scotland’s best efforts, that is not the same as young people being lost. Should we not acknowledge the importance of monitoring and tracking, and of the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013, which will help us to track, monitor and support young people better?

**Jenny Marra:** One person lost is one person too many. If the Government is to guarantee opportunities to all 16 to 19-year-olds, it is simply not good enough that 17,000 people have been lost in the system since April. By December, the system had recovered only 2,000 young people, leaving nearly 15,000 lost from the system, while another 5,500 were left looking for a job. How can we meet the four-month target for every young person under 25 if it is going to take Skills Development Scotland five years just to find all the lost 16 to 19-year-olds?

When we look at the spread of apprenticeship opportunities and consider to whom opportunities are being offered, we find that only 2 per cent of construction and engineering places go to women. Less than 0.5 per cent of placements go to disabled people and less than 2 per cent go to ethnic minorities. In a report that was published just last week, Audit Scotland noted concerns about the lack of clarity about the long-term benefits to young people of Scotland’s apprenticeship programme.

**Angela Constance:** For the record, Ms Marra should accept that the Audit Scotland report acknowledges the huge achievements of the modern apprenticeship programme. For clarity, I point out that the purpose of the modern apprenticeship programme is largely, but not exclusively, to get young people into work and to help them to develop skills in work. Its success is demonstrated by the 80 per cent employment rate of people with an apprenticeship qualification.

**Jenny Marra:** I thank the minister for her clarification—I know what the purpose of an apprenticeship is. In its report, Audit Scotland says that it has doubts about the long-term benefits. Instead of just refuting the point, the minister

would do better to read the report and address that issue.

Just this morning, the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee considered an amendment to the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill in the name of my colleague Mary Fee that would have enabled the Scottish Government to require that 5 per cent of the employees of a contracting company providing services to the Government are apprentices, yet SNP members voted against that amendment.

**Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jenny Marra:** I have already taken three or four interventions, thank you. [*Interruption.*]

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

**Jenny Marra:** I invite Maureen Watt to say that the SNP did not take that position.

**Maureen Watt:** I thank Jenny Marra for giving way so that I can clarify the position. If she reads the *Official Report* and sees what the cabinet secretary said on the matter, she will understand that the Labour amendment would have constrained companies from employing more apprentices instead of encouraging them to do so.

**Jenny Marra:** If the SNP members were completely committed to this, they would have voted for the amendment this morning.

It is easy to blame others for your own failure, but that is not good enough for young people in Scotland, who are looking to the Government for help now. Alasdair Allan may laugh, but those 15,000 young people are not laughing. The Scottish Government needs to accept responsibility for the powers that it has and the choices that it makes in key areas of youth employment, education, our skills bodies and our apprenticeships system. If we are to make a difference, we should be debating improvements in those areas regardless of whether the Government wants to have that debate. Only then will we be able to achieve the ambitious proposals for Scotland's young people that are envisaged in the EU youth guarantee.

I move amendment S4M-09376.2, to leave out from "delivery agencies" to end and insert:

"the Scottish Government must align skills with colleges, local authorities and local employers and better distribute the spread of opportunities among young people up to 25 in education and training to account for the fact that only 2% of construction and engineering apprenticeships are taken up by women, less than 0.5% are taken up by disabled people and less than 2% are taken up by ethnic minorities, and more effectively monitor the outcomes of its key youth employment policies in light of the comments of Audit Scotland that "existing performance measures do not focus on long-term outcomes, such as sustainable employment",

and looks forward to the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (the Wood Commission) reporting over the coming weeks and the recommendations that it will make to improve opportunities for Scotland's young people".

15:07

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

The Public Audit Committee had a good meeting with the Auditor General for Scotland this morning on modern apprenticeships—I note that my committee colleague James Dornan is in the chamber. The Scottish Conservatives very much welcome the 25,700 modern apprentices and our commitment to training and education. Even if someone does not finish their apprenticeship, I think that three months, six months, a year or two years is better than nothing at all—although I would want them all to finish. The Auditor General made some very good points, and the Public Audit Committee will look into the matter further.

Jenny Marra made the point that fewer apprenticeships are now in the Scottish Government's economic growth sectors, and I would like to see more apprenticeships in those sectors. Another important issue—one that I am sure, given her background in training and education, the minister will take on board—is the need for a review of training providers. We all know what our colleges do, but in the training sector there are a range of training providers, both private and charitable, and I would be pleased to see a review of them to make sure that they all offer a high standard of training.

As the Auditor General highlighted, the existing measures do not focus on long-term outcomes such as sustainable employment although that would be something constructive that we could learn from and which could improve apprenticeship training overall.

**Angela Constance:** The evidence shows that 92 per cent of those who undertake modern apprenticeships are in employment six months after the completion of their apprenticeships. There is nothing in the Audit Scotland report that the Scottish Government does not accept. Mary Scanlon will also know that a lot of work is going on through the Wood commission, which will address some of the points that she raises.

**Mary Scanlon:** Absolutely. I have become a total anorak on the Audit Scotland report, so I remind the minister that 92 per cent of those who responded to Skills Development Scotland's survey found sustainable employment, which we very much welcome. That issue was clarified at this morning's Public Audit Committee meeting.

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mary Scanlon:** Be quick.

**James Dornan:** Thanks very much, Mrs Scanlon. Will you accept that the Auditor General or one of her staff said that at least 50 per cent of former apprentices responded to that survey, which is a decent number for any survey? Furthermore, will you accept that surveys work on the basis of taking the percentage of the people who respond and extrapolating from that?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members to speak through the chair, please.

**Mary Scanlon:** The Auditor General's staff member said that they would clarify in writing to the committee the exact number of respondents.

We previously had a £60 million budget for 10,600 apprenticeships, so the average spend for each apprenticeship was £5,660. We have achieved an additional 15,700 modern apprenticeships for an additional £15 million. If we divide £15 million by 15,700, we see that the average cost of an apprenticeship has been brought down to less than £1,000.

I appreciate that there are more level 2 apprenticeships; I also appreciate that modern apprenticeships have replaced the skillseekers scheme. I am familiar with that scheme because of my background; I am sure that other members are, too. I look forward to the information from Skills Development Scotland and the Auditor General about how many people were transferred from the skillseekers scheme to modern apprenticeships. However, at the end of the day, what we all want is that more people receive the training.

I am pleased to hear that the minister is working together with the UK on the EU youth employment initiative. Youth unemployment is a challenge of our times. It threatens economic health and social wellbeing. It has been estimated that it will cost the UK economy more than £28 billion—a sum that does not even begin to address the human cost.

I must move on quickly, given that I have taken some interventions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will give you back that time.

**Mary Scanlon:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

The Scottish Government runs education in conjunction with Skills Development Scotland, so we have significant powers here in order to achieve more training, education and access to employment.

I will turn to the UK Government's position on the European youth guarantee and the other measures that have been undertaken and look at how Scotland compares.

As the Minister of State for Employment, Mark Hoban, made clear, the UK Government does not believe that an all-encompassing work or training guarantee after four months is cost effective or in keeping with the UK labour market's traditional strength of flexibility. Although I agree entirely with the European youth guarantee's aims, it is perhaps best viewed as a response to particular challenges, some of which Jenny Marra raised, faced by several underperforming eurozone countries. Jenny Marra mentioned Greece, but I could equally mention Italy. Italy has a 42 per cent youth unemployment rate, compared with UK and Scottish levels that are both, I am pleased to say, below 20 per cent.

Accordingly, the UK Government is right to adopt a different policy response that is cost effective and focuses on the long-term unemployed. Our youth unemployment is below the EU average and falling at a faster rate. The centrepiece of the UK's policy is the £1 billion youth contract scheme that was introduced two years ago, before the European youth guarantee scheme. That will provide almost 500,000 new opportunities for 18 to 24-year-olds through wage subsidies to employers, as well as apprenticeships and work experience placements. I am sure that the Scottish Government appreciates and endorses the value of such measures, and welcomes the fact that, between July and September last year, national youth unemployment fell by 48,000 across the UK.

Both approaches have the same essential aim of increasing the number of young people who are in work and ensuring that youth unemployment recedes back to historical norms. Consequently, the debate is best characterised not as a battle between two diametrically opposed forces but as a technical discussion about a time period.

László Andor, the European Commissioner for Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion, recognised that point in a speech at the University of Greenwich last year. He explained that there was significant disagreement in the Council of the European Union between those who felt that the four-month trigger was necessary and those who felt that six months would be more appropriate. If the Scottish Government falls into the former camp, my party and the coalition Government are in the latter group, but we all share the same aims—we all want the best opportunities and training for young people.

Another statistic is that four out of five young people come off jobseekers allowance within six months of signing on, which suggests that the current targeted approach best aligns with how our labour market is structured.

My final points are about the cuts to the colleges budget. SDS directly contracts less than 10 per

cent of apprenticeships to further education, although I appreciate that the figure is higher for subcontracting. In these difficult times, I hope that our colleges, whose reputation is second to none, will get an additional share of that budget.

We know that there are 140,000 fewer students at college now than there were in 2007, which will harm our economy in the long run. Further education has lost 2,000 staff in the past three years and the number of staff is still falling—another 400 job losses in the past quarter were announced today. There are opportunities for modern apprenticeships, training and a quality education that every employer in Scotland recognises. We can involve the private sector and the third sector, but please do not forget our colleges.

I move amendment S4M-09376.1, to leave out from “within a period” to end and insert:

“; however recognises the reasons why the UK Government has opted not to sign up to the scheme; appreciates that a more flexible approach better aligns with the UK labour market; commends the work done by both the Scottish and UK governments to tackle youth unemployment, and recognises the shared commitment by both governments and all parties to tackle joblessness and improve the life chances of young people”.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We come to the open debate. I have a bit of time in hand for interventions.

15:17

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** There are two large sections of society that the Westminster Government seems to be good at ignoring. Maybe they just do not yell loudly enough. One is the vulnerable elderly people who have neither the money nor the resources to manage alone and the other is the swathe of young people who feel cynical, hopeless, ignored and rejected—or in some cases even worse, as the minister said.

That cynicism comes partly from those young people's previous treatment. We have seen a long line of Westminster solutions to youth unemployment and a lack of opportunity. Tony Blair told us that 50 per cent of school leavers should go to university, regardless of their ambitions or their suitability for academic qualifications, and without even taking into account whether they could pay Labour tuition fees. We have also had a range of so-called youth opportunities schemes, none of which has brought real success.

The Scottish Government's commitment to provision of 25,000 modern apprenticeships in each year of this parliamentary session is a key target, and one which we have already surpassed.

The young people of Scotland deserve better than Westminster can offer, has offered or ever will offer them.

Within the restrictions of UK governance, Scotland is doing better on every level, and with independence, we will do much more. We have already established the opportunities for all commitment, which is to offer a place in learning or training to all 16 to 19-year-olds who are not already so engaged.

**Jenny Marra:** Will Christina McKelvie take an intervention?

**Christina McKelvie:** I welcome the minister's commitment to working with Westminster on that.

**Jenny Marra:** Will the member take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Marra—Ms McKelvie is not giving way.

**Christina McKelvie:** I will not take an intervention from Ms Marra, because she cannae get her facts right.

Youth employment is not some insurmountable wall. Meeting the needs and ambitions of young people as they leave the education system is about recognising those needs and ambitions and listening to young people. Maybe some members should try that. That is why the European youth guarantee approach is significantly different. Its mission is to get under-25s a good-quality concrete offer of work, continuing education or training within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. Its approach is solid and practical. The scheme demands an offer of a quality job, apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education that is adapted to each individual's needs and situation.

Here are the member states of Europe coming together in a common interest that demands strong co-operation between all the key stakeholders: public authorities, employment services, career guidance providers, education and training institutions, youth support services, business, employers, trade unions and many others. So far, about 18 member states have submitted youth guarantee implementation plans, which leaves about 11 still to deliver. The UK submitted its plan only two weeks ago, on 3 March 2014.

László Andor, the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, said:

“We urge Member States which have not yet finalised their Youth Guarantee implementation plans to do so as soon as possible”.

He continued:

“Leaving young people without help damages their lifetime prospects as well as Europe's economic potential

and social cohesion. It is in each Member State's interest to act swiftly—"

I emphasise "swiftly"—

"and put in place practical measures to help young people get a job or acquire the skills to get a job in the future".

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I do not disagree with what Christina McKelvie is saying about the aims and objectives—it is entirely true. However, there is an area in which we have a difference of opinion. It is difficult to do this without considering economic theory, but one of the reasons why flexibility is being sought is because the actual structures of unemployment in countries throughout Europe are very different, so different timescales can apply.

**Christina McKelvie:** I agree but, as usual, Westminster has dragged its feet on the matter and we should be asking why it has taken so long. The Government at Westminster tells us over and over again that it has always been in a better situation than some countries in Europe. Some countries in Europe are surpassing us now on all the measures. What has taken Westminster so long? Could it be anything to do with the UK's antipathy to the EU? Here is an opportunity to take up an offer of European funding, and the coalition Government is dragging its feet.

The Commission itself says that

"The plans submitted and/or still upcoming are expected to identify in each Member State the measures to be taken to implement the Youth Guarantee."

It is not rocket science. It goes on to say that

"The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans clarify how the partnerships between responsible public authorities, employment services, education and training institutions, social partners, youth organisations and other stakeholders will be organised. They should also outline which youth employment reforms and measures Member States expect to see co-financed from the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative."

Adopting the European youth guarantee at UK level would allow the SNP Scottish Government to align employment, skills, policy and early intervention better. That is absolutely necessary for some of our young people.

We have to aspire to better; small, independent and very successful Finland's Government's youth guarantee scheme has 83.5 per cent of young jobseekers successfully being allocated a job, traineeship, apprenticeship or further education within three months of registering as unemployed. That was in 2011. We are now in 2014 and the UK is still playing catch-up.

Today, we have some excellent figures on unemployment, with Scottish figures at 6.9 per cent—much lower than the UK figure. With the limited powers of devolution, the Scottish Government has managed to mitigate the worst

excesses of Westminster's cuts. With independence, we will be able to take action to grow the economy, create more jobs and ensure that more women and young people have the opportunity to take them up. I urge the UK Government to finalise the partnership agreement and to let us get on with giving our young people the opportunities that they need in order to flourish.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I advise Parliament that I have looked at the time that is available and I can offer members up to seven minutes.

15:24

**Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab):** At the outset, we must acknowledge that the debate takes place at the start of a six-month period in which Scotland faces two big tests of public opinion. This May, people throughout Europe will decide the complexion of the next European Parliament and, this September, in the referendum, Scotland will decide on its future. The next six months will, inevitably, be dominated by the debate on independence, but let us not lose sight of the importance of the European elections in determining the future direction of the EU and the shape of the recovery after years of economic crisis in Europe.

Throughout Europe—the UK's biggest export market—there is an average youth unemployment rate of 22 per cent, which is not unlike our youth unemployment rate at home. However, in troubled Southern European economies such as Spain and Greece, the youth unemployment rate frequently breaches 50 per cent. Youth unemployment is a Europe-wide crisis. It is a challenge to every government of every party in every one of the EU's member states.

The European youth guarantee is now part of the EU response to the crisis. It is a guarantee to offer every young person in eligible member states a job, further education or work-focused training within four months of their leaving education or becoming unemployed. It is disappointing that the UK Government has found itself isolated in Europe as the only member state that is eligible for a share of youth employment initiative funds that has chosen not to use those funds to support implementation of the youth guarantee. Its reason—supposedly—is that it would rather prioritise Nick Clegg's youth contract scheme and the work programme.

**Mary Scanlon:** I ask Margaret McCulloch to acknowledge that the UK scheme was in place more than 12 months before the European scheme and that it is seen to be working well.

**Margaret McCulloch:** I will cover that question next; I do not think that Mary Scanlon will like it. The youth contract might be well-intentioned, but reports in the press this month indicate that it has paid out just 6 per cent of the wage incentive payments, and local authorities believe that it is underperforming.

The work programme is not working, either. The Government's own figures have shown that people who use the programme are more likely to return to the jobcentre than to find work. Only one in six has a long-term job and less than 5 per cent of those who are claiming a disability benefit have found work.

In any event, the work programme is part of the Government's prescription for long-term unemployment—it kicks in after 12 months unemployment. The real significance of the youth guarantee is that it would compel Government to intervene earlier and, if successful, would prevent young unemployed people from becoming long-term unemployed.

Throughout Europe, the younger generation has been bearing the brunt of the crisis. We cannot lose them to uncertainty and unemployment, or to a cycle of low pay and no pay. We want young people to achieve progress from training to employment, from subsidised jobs to unsubsidised jobs and from insecure work to work in which they can support themselves and build for their futures.

I hope that people can see that it was Europe's socialists and democrats who campaigned for the youth guarantee and who fought to persuade of their case a sceptical Commission and a Parliament that is dominated by the right. In order to defend the youth guarantee and to fight to secure investment in young people throughout Europe, we need to strengthen the voice of socialists and democrats in the European Parliament. In Scotland, we have the chance to do that in May.

We should also recognise that Scotland—and indeed the whole UK—has to be in Europe if we are to benefit from European investment in our economy. José Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission, said that it would be “extremely difficult” for an independent Scotland to join the EU. I hope that, in the second big test of public opinion this year, the people of Scotland will realise that Scotland cannot be part of a European jobs policy if it is not part of the European Union.

Scotland has lost out on the youth guarantee because of the UK Government's dithering. We do not want to lose out again because our EU membership has been put at risk.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** On top of the seven minutes that I can give members, there is time for interventions.

15:29

**Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** When I was of school-leaving age, the country was in recession. Although I was lucky enough to attend college and attain a degree, many of my friends faced the same dilemma that young people face today. Back then, the options were very limited. The youth opportunities programme, which was introduced by Labour and continued by the Conservatives, was the only option in a de-industrialising Lanarkshire, and many of my friends became “yoppers”.

We have come a long way since then. Although many of our former industrial and mining communities are still struggling with the devastation from more than 20 years ago, I believe that Scotland, the UK and, in particular, the European Union have recognised the specific problems and issues that impact on youth unemployment.

Jenny Marra said that we have lost young people in the system. It is a pity that when the Labour-Liberal coalition in the Scottish Parliament introduced the “More Choices, More Chances” action plan in a much healthier economic climate in 2006, and gave money to local authorities to tackle the problem of NEETs, or young people who are not in employment, education or training—I do not like using the word—no strategies were put in place to measure the plan's effectiveness or to track the outcomes for those young people. I am glad that the current Government has, in the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill, introduced a process that will enable that.

I am extremely pleased that the Scottish Government is focusing on early intervention principles and on boosting employment and economic opportunities for young people. For the second year running, we are surpassing our target of providing 25,000 apprenticeships.

However, it is disappointing that up to this point the UK Government has failed to adopt the European Union's youth guarantee, which could help to take us so much further. Although the UK Government defends its position by stating that 80 per cent of jobseekers in the UK are off the scheme within six months, the long-term positive destinations for those young people are not being analysed.

It is not happening, despite the success of the Finnish Government's scheme as detailed in Eurofound's 2012 evaluation report, “Youth Guarantee: Experiences from Finland and

Sweden.” The report specifically mentions early intervention as being a strength of the scheme, and notes that immediate action is particularly important because the intervention can take place before the young people become disengaged. That makes the UK Government’s approach of not taking up the EU youth guarantee all the more difficult to accept.

The Labour amendment suggests that our colleges are perhaps not focused on skills and on linking with industry, but statistics from the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council show that, in the Labour Government’s last term in office, there were 206,594 people enrolled in courses that did not lead to recognised qualifications.

**Jenny Marra:** Does Clare Adamson recognise that one of the most successful job schemes—as we are told by business, colleges and employment agencies throughout the country—was the future jobs fund, which was instigated by a Labour Government in Westminster?

**Clare Adamson:** It was not successful enough to track the outcomes of the young people who were more disengaged from the process.

I repeat that 206,594 people were enrolled on courses for qualifications that are not recognised, and 67,000 of those were enrolled on courses that lasted under 10 hours. By last year, that figure had fallen by 68 per cent to 87,834, which shows that the focus has shifted away from non-recognised qualifications and short-term programmes to employability and work-based skills programmes, which is a move forward for our colleges.

Despite what the Opposition would have us believe about its commitment to women, the Scottish funding council’s report, “SFC Statistical Publication: Baseline Report for Academic Year 2012-13”, which was published this year, shows that only 26,986 women were on full-time SFC-funded courses under Labour’s last Administration in the Scottish Parliament, whereas 30,372 full-time places have been taken up by women in the past year.

**Liz Smith:** Will Clare Adamson take an intervention?

**Clare Adamson:** No. I am sorry, but I have already taken an intervention.

We recognise that women consistently make up the majority of full-time students in our colleges. There are 3,386 more women in full-time courses than there were under the previous Labour Government.

I am also quite disappointed by the point that Labour’s amendment raises about gender segregation. We had a very good debate about such inequality last week. I am disappointed that

the point has been made because gender segregation is an issue across all sectors. Although we have to tackle gender segregation in engineering, we should also be looking at the care sector, in particular, where women take up the overwhelming majority of positions. If we are truly to achieve equality, we must challenge gender segregation in all job areas. As a former information technology professional, I welcome the fact that the Scottish funding council’s baseline report indicates that the gender differential in that subject was only 4 per cent last year. That is an incredible improvement on the situation when I studied many years ago.

The Opposition would sometimes have us believe that in some way our colleges have abandoned the communities—such as my own in Lanarkshire and others in my region—that have been most affected by unemployment and deindustrialisation. Last year, the Scottish funding council produced a table showing the hours of learning per head of population for each local authority. The ten local authorities that performed above the Scottish average include nine of the areas of top deprivation: North Ayrshire, Inverclyde, Glasgow City, East Ayrshire, Fife, West Dunbartonshire, Dundee City, North Lanarkshire and Clackmannanshire. Those local authorities all provide more than the average hours of learning per head of population for local authorities. The Scottish funding council has not produced the figures for this year, but I see a college sector that has changed and adapted to provide more skills-based qualifications, that is concentrating on our young people and which is delivering for the areas that are the cause of most concern in Scotland.

15:37

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** Last month, I met a young man from East Renfrewshire, Ryan Cannon, who has just started a full-time and fulfilling job with a local housing association, following nine months on the dole. That was nine months of unsuccessful job hunting and depressing interviews at the very start of that young man’s working life, during which he was made to feel unwanted instead of invaluable. I was particularly proud to meet Ryan, as he is the first success of a voluntary work experience programme that I have launched in my constituency of Eastwood, along with my MP colleague Jim Murphy and, crucially, with the support of dozens of local businesses.

There is no doubt that Ryan secured a job because he is bright, industrious and talented, but I am conscious that he got the opportunity only because of that six weeks of work experience. If we can help young people such as Ryan with a



voluntary work experience programme in one constituency alone, just think what we could do and the difference that we would make across the country with a properly resourced youth guarantee programme.

The worrying thing is that most members are less likely to hear about the success stories and people like Ryan and more likely to hear from young people who are struggling to find a job or, worse still, struggling to cope with the effects of joblessness. The economists David Bell and David Blanchflower have found that unemployment for people while young, especially of long duration, causes permanent scars rather than temporary blemishes. No member could disagree with the central argument in the motion about the critical role that young people play in our economy and the huge disadvantage that they are placed at by periods of unemployment.

I want to make common cause with the SNP on the youth guarantee scheme. As I have said in previous debates, including as recently as last month, the UK Government should implement the policy now and unlock the millions of pounds of funding that is available via the EU to support such schemes. Although the fall in overall joblessness in recent months has been good, unemployment among young people in Scotland still stands at about one in five, and it remains a hugely worrying issue not just here, but in most European economies. Long-term youth unemployment continues to rise. The latest figures show that the number of people aged 18 to 24 who have claimed jobseekers allowance for more than 24 months is increasing. Although economic inactivity among that group declined slightly in the last quarter, it has been steadily rising over several years and remains significantly higher than pre-recession levels.

The youth guarantee, as my colleague Jenny Marra highlighted, was a Labour initiative and it has been approved with a starting budget of more than €6 billion. It will give young people a guarantee of work, education or training. Unfortunately the Tory Government does not seem to share our sense that that is a priority.

Although Labour and the SNP can agree on the importance of the programme, it is worth repeating, as Ms Marra did, that the Scottish Government is not exactly powerless when it comes to implementing some of the elements of the guarantee, particularly those around colleges, skills and work experience. Colleges Scotland confirmed in its briefing for this debate that the budget given to further education means that any new activity in the sector can happen only at the expense of current activity. Last week, figures showed that 80,000 fewer women are at college since the SNP came to power. In fact, the number

of students studying at college fell by a further 19,000 last year, adding to an already deplorable cut of 140,000 students since 2007. That is 140,000 fewer Scots, many of whom are young people, who are missing out on a college place because of decisions made by this Government.

Colleges should be a key part of any strategy to combat youth unemployment, not only to provide further education opportunities for young people, but foster links between schools, business and industry. One of the central recommendations of the Wood commission's interim report is that there should be better links between schools and colleges, which would allow more vocational skills to be taught in schools. In turn, colleges should foster links with business and industry through programmes such as engineers of the future, which Sir Ian Wood highlighted. That programme provides an engineering qualification and hands-on work experience and the whole process is sponsored by industry, which ensures that young people receive a salary while participating. We need to engage much more with industry from a school level onwards.

**Angela Constance:** I appreciate Mr Macintosh's support for the work of the Wood commission and his support for the European youth guarantee. Does he accept that colleges are being funded more every year by this Government than they were by the previous Labour-Liberal Executive?

**Ken Macintosh:** As a way of looking at the decisions this Government has taken on further education, it is simply myopic to compare and pretend that funding is somehow better. The figures that I just read out say that 140,000 students every year—not in total, but every year—are being denied a place at college. It is an entirely devolved decision.

**James Dornan:** That is not true.

**Ken Macintosh:** Mr Dornan interrupts from a sedentary position to deny my figures. I challenge Mr Dornan to justify his remarks.

**James Dornan:** Can you explain to me who those 140,000 people are who are missing out on college places? Once again, you are playing with figures and not telling us the facts.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Once again, I remind members to speak through the chair, please.

**Ken Macintosh:** I am happy for my figures to be challenged, examined and scrutinised by anybody in the Parliament. These figures are absolutely unequivocal: the number of people who go to college in Scotland has fallen from something like 480,000 to 300,000. It is a phenomenal figure.

It is a disgrace that the SNP claims that it is spending more on colleges, when it should be utterly ashamed of the doors that it has slammed in people's faces in this country. I do not doubt that SNP colleagues desire to do the best for people in Scotland, but for them to deny the implication of their own policies is blind—it is blinkered. To constantly blame others for the decisions that they take with the power that this Parliament has to make a difference is not logical. It will certainly not persuade people to vote for the SNP in September.

We need to do more. Just last week, the Labour Party announced what we could do: a guaranteed jobs scheme for all young people on unemployment benefit for over a year and all adults aged 25 and over who have been on benefit for more than two years. The Government would pay wages and national insurance directly to businesses to cover 25 hours of work per week. In addition, a Labour Government would provide an extra £500 per employee to help businesses with set-up and administration costs. That is the kind of practical programme that we need to give young people a helping hand into work.

Even in Opposition in this Parliament, from 2007 onwards, my Labour colleagues and I have argued to reinstate Labour's future jobs fund and establish a Scottish wage subsidy programme. I was one of the first to welcome it when John Swinney, the cabinet secretary, finally announced £15 million in his budget statement in September 2012. It took a further year for the employment minister to announce the employment recruitment initiative. I have asked the Scottish Parliament information centre to estimate the figures. They are only indicative at the moment but I believe that just over 4,500 jobs have been created up to March this year. That is 4,500 jobs that are more than welcome, but what could have been created with more of a sense of mission, more of a sense of purpose and more drive behind the initiative?

Young people have been the hardest hit by the recession and we must act now to give them a brighter future. We do not need to bemoan lost opportunities, and certainly not to defer all decisions until after September this year. We need to use the powers of this Parliament and this Government today to make a difference to young lives.

15:45

**Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP):** Before I begin my remarks, I must take issue with what Ken Macintosh has just said. He is, of course, manipulating figures. He is in effect giving an example using numbers that are based on short-term and part-time courses, and comparing them with numbers based on full-time courses.

The changes that have been made to the college sector mean that we now have targeted, full-time courses for young people. That was the right thing to have done and the Parliament should be doing that to support young people at this particularly difficult time.

**Ken Macintosh:** I am talking about people, whereas the member seems to be talking about courses.

**Stewart Maxwell:** I am talking about the fact that you are talking about numbers that are based on part-time, short-term courses. That is what you are talking about and, frankly, you should be ashamed—

**Ken Macintosh:** I am talking about people.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order, please. Members must speak through the chair.

**Stewart Maxwell:** The member should be ashamed of trying to pretend that a short-term, part-time course for a person is the same as a full-time educational opportunity. That is the difference. He can pretend that chalk is cheese, but it is not, Ken.

**Margaret McCulloch:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Stewart Maxwell:** No, I will not take an intervention on that point.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to take part in this debate on the European youth guarantee.

As we have heard, the European Union's youth guarantee scheme is a scheme to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 get a good quality offer of a job, apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education within four months of leaving formal education or of becoming unemployed.

Apart from the obvious reason, why does that matter? It matters for a variety of reasons. First, unemployment has a negative impact on the emotional health of young people. Research by the Prince's Trust in 2012 found that young people who were unemployed were more likely to feel stressed and depressed and less likely to feel loved or hopeful when compared to those in work or education. It is particularly sad when young people are denied hope just as they are starting out on their adult lives and we should make every effort to ensure that all young people feel that they have a worthwhile future.

From the point of view of the Treasury, an unemployed young person is claiming benefits and not paying taxes, so there is a loss of revenue and a concomitant cost to the public purse. Moreover, a young person who is not in training, employment, or education is neither developing any skills, nor acquiring any experience. That is

one of the most important points for the young person and for the country. There is some evidence that early-career unemployment is linked with repeated incidences of unemployment among low-skilled individuals.

A good deal of research has found that early youth unemployment has an impact on future earnings. Research by Gregg and Tominey found that

“youth unemployment does indeed impose a wage scar upon individuals, in the magnitude of 12% to 15% at age 42.”

Ensuring that all young people are in education, training or employment helps those young people now, protects their future employment and earnings prospects and, of course, it benefits the wider economy.

There are also social implications of youth unemployment. For example, research undertaken in France concluded that increases in youth unemployment induce increases in crimes such as burglaries, thefts and drug offences. There are therefore good social and economic reasons for doing our utmost to reduce youth unemployment, as well as the obvious moral reason that the personal lives of young people would be transformed by meaningful employment or educational opportunities and that no young person would be excluded or left behind.

I want to be fair to the Conservatives. I am therefore pleased that, in light of that research, at the beginning of this month, the UK Government submitted an implementation plan for a European youth guarantee scheme to the EU. I accept that that is what the UK Government has done, but I am very disappointed that it has been half-hearted in its approach by not supporting early intervention and by ignoring one of the most crucial parts of the process: the four months. The four-month period is so important. To ignore it and reject it is unfortunate and disappointing indeed.

**Margaret McCulloch:** Would the member agree that offering short part-time courses to young carers, carers who are unable to work full time or young people who are looking after children would be an early intervention that could help them to update their skills and allow them to consider moving back into the job market at a later date?

**Stewart Maxwell:** I think that we should offer lots of things to people. There should be a variety of offers. One of the problems that Margaret McCulloch has is that she supports a constitutional settlement that leaves all the powers over welfare, benefits, taxation and the economy—in effect, all the decisions about the money—with the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. That is what she supports. I understand that she was a

member of the Conservative Party for a number of years; perhaps that is the reason for her support.

The youth guarantee scheme would require co-operation and co-ordinated action among all the key stakeholders and would, therefore, introduce a joined-up approach to provide early and effective intervention for young people, to ensure that they are helped into some meaningful training or a job.

I hope that all the members of the Scottish Parliament will unite to urge the UK Government to commit to establishing the European youth guarantee scheme as soon as possible and I hope that, even at this late stage, the UK Government will also accept the four-month period.

I am delighted to say, however, that in the economic strategy that it published in September 2011, the Scottish Government recognised the importance of the employment and training of young people as one of the ways in which we could accelerate recovery and drive sustainable economic growth while developing a more resilient and adaptable economy.

**Jenny Marra:** Would the member support the Labour Party's new proposal for a tax on bankers' bonuses to ensure a jobs guarantee for the long-term unemployed?

**Stewart Maxwell:** Again, of course, this Parliament has no power to impose a tax on bankers' bonuses. If Jenny Marra supported that power coming to this Parliament, we could perhaps then debate the merits of such a tax. I think that many of us would very much welcome that.

Because it recognises the importance of the employment and training of young people, the Scottish Government introduced the opportunities for all programme. Since 1 April 2012, every 16 to 19-year-old in Scotland has had a guaranteed offer of a place in education or training—the very first such guarantee ever made in Scotland.

That has required the kind of co-ordinated approach between agencies that is a key feature of the EU's youth guarantee scheme and it has resulted in the rate of young people staying in employment, training or education after leaving school currently being the highest on record.

In fact, the proportion of young people from publicly funded schools who are in learning, training or work nine months after leaving school has increased from 85.2 per cent in 2010-11 to 89.5 per cent in 2012-13. That is not enough, and we must go further, but it is a tremendous achievement, particularly in such a challenging economic climate.

In order to achieve that, the Scottish Government has marshalled over £125 million from 2012-13 to 2014-15 to support young people

towards and into work. That has included £30 million of funding for the opportunities for all programme between 2012 and 2015 to fund our commitment to young people, £1 million to the Prince's Trust in 2012-13 to offer loans to young entrepreneurs and £5 million to support up to 2,500 young people into opportunities linked to major cultural and sporting events, as well as other funding.

I would like to point out that, at the moment, the financial benefits of employment initiatives such as modern apprenticeships, educational funding and so on accrue to the Westminster Government. We are delighted to make efforts to help young people, but it is the Westminster Government that gets increased tax revenues and is able to reduce welfare payments. In an independent Scotland, the financial benefits of those measures would come directly to the Scottish Government, which could use the extra income to fund further employment services and thus create a virtuous cycle of increased success.

I know that employment services in an independent Scotland would be built on an early-intervention principle that would seek to ensure that young people are helped into some meaningful work or training before they become long-term unemployed, with all the adverse consequences that that brings for the individual and for society.

Yet again, it is clear that it is only with a yes vote in the referendum that Scotland can gain all the powers that are necessary to ensure that we succeed in creating a country that provides real and sustainable opportunities for all our young people.

15:54

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate and thank the minister for bringing it to the chamber. Once again, I acknowledge her personal commitment to tackling issues around youth unemployment. I believe that her appointment was a positive step in addressing a problem that we all recognise requires consistent, collaborative and sustained action, even if, in keeping with many of her colleagues, too many of her earlier remarks were taken up by a bit of a constitutional whinge.

Although the Scottish Liberal Democrats will support Jenny Marra's and Mary Scanlon's amendments, there is nothing in the Government motion with which I disagree, as it simply asks us to support the aims of the European youth guarantee. Indeed, Ms Constance's motion sets out very fairly and appropriately the damaging and corrosive effect that prolonged periods of

unemployment and inactivity can have on our young people.

The minister is also right to point to the benefits of early intervention. I think that we all accept that the longer someone of any age is left inactive, the more difficult the situation becomes to address. Skills can deteriorate over that time and self-confidence and even self-worth are affected in ways that can be profound, as Stewart Maxwell rightly suggested. Therefore, early and targeted intervention is not just desirable; in many cases, it is essential.

That is the ethos of the European youth guarantee, of course. In that sense, I do not think that any member in the chamber would take issue with it, but there is a debate to be had about whether the guarantee adds value to what is being done at a UK and/or Scottish level. Like Colleges Scotland in its briefing, the minister has pointed to additional funding that might be available. On the face of it, why would one look a gift horse in the mouth? However, it is important to look at the conditions that would be applied to such funding.

Although the underlying objectives of the youth guarantee are entirely laudable, operating within such a structure could prove overly rigid. I am passionately pro-European, but even I am uneasy at the way in which the EU can find itself being overly prescriptive at times. It has a tendency to try to micromanage from the centre, which I am intuitively sceptical about.

It would appear that I am not alone. As Jenny Marra observed earlier, the minister's colleague Alyn Smith MEP recently argued that

"The Youth Guarantee scheme sounds good, but there's no budget behind it of any significance. It's window dressing. It allows MEPs to go back to their constituencies and say ... look what we've done."

It was not simply a question of funding; he went on to bemoan what he called

"a knee jerk reaction"

in parts of the European Commission and the European Parliament

"that says we need to do everything at the European level."

He said:

"The Youth Guarantee is precisely one of those. I am not in favour of the EU being responsible for social policy, I am not in favour of the EU being responsible for delivering apprenticeships".

As the minister rightly observed, Mr Smith went on to vote for the youth guarantee, of course, perhaps tempted by the idea of going back to his constituents and showing off the "window dressing" that he had managed to secure.

**Angela Constance:** Mr McArthur needs to acknowledge that the Commission has moved

some way forward on flexibility, but I wonder whether he agrees with Glenis Willmott MEP, who said:

“I call on the British government to follow today’s vote and use the UK’s share of the six billion euro Youth Guarantee funds to save a generation of youth”.

I wonder whether Mr McArthur could persuade his colleague Nick Clegg to make progress and implement the European youth guarantee.

**Liam McArthur:** Persuading our colleagues may be a question that we both want to reflect on, given the comments from Alyn Smith that I have just quoted.

The serious point that Alyn Smith made was that approaches are almost certainly better tailored at a member state level or, for that matter, by the Scottish Government, its agencies and local authorities. I cannot see how an EU-wide, blanket approach will prove more effective.

Even in member states in which the youth guarantee model is well established, such as Sweden and Finland, evidence suggests that there have been strengths but also weaknesses. I understand that a study of the Swedish and Finnish experience by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions concluded that schemes in those countries were more effective for young people who were already work ready than in addressing those who were further from the workplace and whose issues may be more deeply entrenched. That is not to say that those schemes have not been valuable, but flexibility in adapting approaches to meet the needs of individuals or groups of individuals is important. I am sure that the minister agrees with that—indeed, that characterises much of what she has been doing, which she set out in her earlier remarks.

The work of the Wood commission, for example, illustrates that perfectly and emphasises the need for collaboration at all levels: between the public sector and the private sector; between local and national Government; and, of course, between both Scotland’s Governments.

I welcome the fact that the UK Government is not taking a one-size-fits-all approach. As Mary Scanlon indicated earlier, the youth contract has been in place since back in April 2012 and it provides a range of possible support for young people, including wage incentives of up to £2,275 each for employers recruiting long-term unemployed young people, an additional 250,000 work experience places, extra adviser support through Jobcentre Plus for careers advice and sector-based work experience and skills training. In addition, the work programme provides personal support so that those not in employment, education or training can gain earlier access,

which I think in part addresses the issue to which Margaret McCulloch and Stewart Maxwell referred. By September last year, 376,000 18 to 24-year-olds had been enrolled, including 36,000 in Scotland.

Taxation changes have also been made with a view to assisting our young people and providing opportunities and removing obstacles. For example, basic rate employer national insurance contributions for under-21s will be abolished from next year. I also believe that the universal credit can provide further help by removing some of the cliff edges that adversely affect young people moving between benefits and work.

Allied to what the minister is doing and reflected in her remarks, I think that in each area we are seeing a recognition that there is no magic bullet to address the problem of youth unemployment. Today’s unemployment figures provide cause for optimism, demonstrating that the UK Government’s economic strategy is delivering a sustained recovery, despite the dire predictions of many in the minister’s party who seem to see no irony in now claiming credit for that recovery. However, the figures also underscore the need to do more and to try further innovative approaches. I suspect that it is those furthest from the labour market whom we are still struggling to reach effectively, despite the collective efforts to date to do so.

In her amendment, Jenny Marra raised valid concerns about the extent to which apprenticeships and other initiatives are or are not benefiting certain groups of young people. That is not to decry what has been done, but simply to reflect that lessons continually need to be learned about what does and does not work, and perhaps about what works in ways that were not anticipated. That also helps to make the point that I made earlier, with the support of Alyn Smith MEP in word if not in deed, about the possible downsides of the European youth guarantee and an overly rigid, one-size-fits-all approach. By contrast, I am sure that the work done by Sir Ian Wood and his colleagues over recent months will provide a rich seam of ideas to inform the debate. Like others, I very much look forward to seeing his final report in the coming weeks.

When faced with difficult issues such as youth unemployment, we should resist the temptation to reach for overly simple solutions. That is why, to my mind, the minister’s case regarding the European Union guarantee is not wholly persuasive. I think that she oversells its value while underselling the value of what she and her counterparts at UK and local government levels are delivering.

I welcome this latest opportunity to debate these important issues, to which I know we will return

many times in the months ahead. That is entirely right and proper if we are to do all that we can do to help our young people play their full part in not just our economy, as the motion suggests, but our society.

16:03

**Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP):** It is important that the youth of today are recognised as a valuable asset in order for them to contribute to the country in a positive way in later years. In light of that, it is imperative that the Parliament recognises the role that young people will play in delivering long-term economic growth. I would like to see cross-party support in the Parliament for that vision, but from what I have heard in the debate it seems that that might be unlikely. However, it is a positive vision that would offer opportunities for all our young people to move from education to employment.

The European youth guarantee is one such vision that the European Commission attempted to establish across all member states. It would have seen 16 to 24-year-olds offered support to access an offer of a job, an apprenticeship or a place in education or training within four months of becoming unemployed. Despite that, as has been said, the UK coalition Government refused to endorse the programme.

I believe that employment services in Scotland should be built on the principle of early intervention and should seek to prevent young people from becoming long-term unemployed. I am sure that we all agree that long-term unemployment brings a wide range of problems for the individual and for society as a whole. Due to those problems, it is particularly difficult for people to find employment once they have been unemployed for a significant period.

Scotland is making good progress on youth unemployment, but we must not rest on our laurels. We must make the best use of all the resources that are at our disposal, and the European youth guarantee will help us to go further. With the economic crash, the number of youth unemployed across Europe has soared, and of particular concern in many European countries are the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training. That, in turn, raises concerns about the possibility of a lost generation, with many young people struggling to develop the necessary skills and experience. I believe that the Government is doing all that it can with its limited powers to aid Scotland's youth.

The European youth guarantee aims to ensure that young people aged between 16 and 24 are given a good-quality job offer within four months of leaving formal education. That would ensure that

young people, who are a vibrant hub of Scotland's economy, are able to gain the necessary skills to contribute to the nation's economy over the long term.

It is not expected that every case will require the same amount of support, so the European youth guarantee has been tailored to ensure that young people have access to the support that they need. The support that is offered varies from general careers advice and labour market and training information through to support for individuals who face greater disadvantages and require more complex interventions and job or training guarantees.

**Jenny Marra:** The member can correct me if I have misunderstood, but my understanding is that the SNP Government's policy is to concentrate on 16 to 19-year-olds, whereas the EU youth guarantee is for under-25s. How about the age gap in the middle? Where is the provision there?

**Richard Lyle:** Again, Ms Marra comes in and brings in figures that I do not necessarily agree with.

As I said, I hoped that, in today's debate, cross-party support could be gained for the initiative, as there is evidence from other countries such as Austria, Finland, Denmark and France that investing in young people pays off. However, the initiative will work only if it is used as both a relief measure to tackle the current levels of youth unemployment and a preventative measure that minimises the risk of future generations becoming unemployed or inactive.

When I left school, I was lucky enough to enter the workforce the very next week, but today there are more hurdles for young people to overcome. Places of work have evolved, and it is now imperative that we do all that we can to ensure that young people are given every opportunity to overcome those hurdles and succeed in the workforce. The youth of today are Scotland's future and, whatever political party we are part of, we should all strive to ensure that our youth have the necessary tools at their fingertips to make them fit for the work ahead.

As a local politician, I listen to and learn from the youth in my area. With the right policies, and by listening to young people, we all can develop their potential. It is a hard, unforgiving world out there, but I am sure that the youth of Scotland—if they are given the opportunities, and with the vote in September and with independence—can face up to the challenge of today and make us all proud in the future.

16:09

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):**

For many young people, the transition from education to employment can seem long and difficult. Every member in the chamber will know of young people who simply cannot get a leg up on to the employment ladder despite numerous applications for all manner of jobs. Indeed, Ken Macintosh, who is not in the chamber at the moment, very vividly described his own constituency experience in that regard.

For those who cannot get work, further education or training, the transition from economic inactivity to unemployment can be lonely, demoralising and disheartening. Across Scotland, 34 per cent of all young people are economically inactive. That figure can be explained partly by the 23 per cent or thereabouts of 16 to 24-year-olds who remain in education; however, when they finish their studies, they will all face the same problems of what to do and where to go next that are already faced by the approximately 21 per cent of young people in Scotland who are unemployed.

The important question, therefore, is how we address that situation, prevent long-term unemployment and maximise the life chances of the individuals concerned. As others have said, the Scottish Government made a good start with the opportunities for all scheme, upon which the European youth guarantee can build. Scotland needs young people in work and training, because we can ill afford to have scores of young people unable to find employment.

According to the latest employment figures from the Office for National Statistics, youth unemployment and inactivity rates in Scotland are improving, especially compared with the rest of the UK, but there is no doubt that they could improve further and that the rate of youth unemployment, though far from the horrible rates in Spain and Greece, remains too high.

At 28.6 per cent—or approximately 13,000 people—the economic inactivity level in my North East Fife constituency is the highest of any constituency in the Mid Scotland and Fife region. Of course, students account for the majority of young economically inactive people, and that is also the case in North East Fife, with the high number of students at the Elmwood campus of Scotland's Rural College and at the University of St Andrews.

Accordingly, a large number of people who are currently economically inactive in North East Fife, and in Scotland more widely, will soon be joining the school leavers and other young people who are already in the jobs market. Even if we accept that graduate levels of employment in Scotland

are comparatively high, the fact is that many graduates could also be assisted by the youth guarantee scheme.

The scheme will also be able to assist young people as soon as they finish their education at school or elsewhere and will ensure that Scotland's young people are supported in trying to find a job, if they need it, and have a safety net if they are unable to find suitable work, training or further education for themselves within the four-month period after leaving education or becoming unemployed.

Although the scheme is designed to help young people to be responsible for their own future, we as a society must take the first steps by ensuring that they are not excluded from society because of a lack of opportunities. As other members have suggested, the Finnish have shown what can be achieved with a programme designed to meet the needs of young people who are entering the jobs market. Youth unemployment in Finland is falling and an average of 83.5 per cent of young people have, courtesy of the youth guarantee scheme, received successful offers within three months of registering as unemployed.

**Liam McArthur:** Although I acknowledge the success that Sweden and Finland have had in tackling youth unemployment, I refer Mr Campbell to my earlier point that the evidence suggests that the youth guarantee has not worked as effectively for those furthest from the labour market as it has for those nearer to it and that lessons also need to be learned from that experience.

**Roderick Campbell:** I take the member's point on board. Undoubtedly, we should learn from other countries' experiences and not have a closed mind to such things.

Nevertheless, the Finnish experience certainly shows that early involvement is essential in securing a long-term future for our young people. Nobody should leave education facing the prospect of long-term unemployment, and we in Scotland should be looking to replicate that positive vision and aim. Is it the commitment to giving young people an offer of work or training that has made Finland so successful? I am not sure, but Scotland certainly needs a programme to ensure that young people are offered opportunities for either work or personal development after education.

That will require close engagement with young people in schools, colleges, universities, youth clubs and societies. We can learn from the fact that, as Colleges Scotland has made clear in its briefing, 71 per cent of all hours of learning in colleges are now being undertaken by those aged 16 to 24. Clearly, colleges have a major role to

play in that respect as well as a key role in liaising with local businesses.

In addition, along with an easier lending policy by banks, the Scottish Government's continued support for business, including the small businesses that are the lifeblood of any community, with measures such as the small business bonus will help to create the financial background that will encourage businesses to recruit. All those matters need to be taken on board.

Some of our Tory colleagues might recently have applauded Ken Clarke for comparing Scotland with Malta, but I am sure that they are not laughing at the fact that Malta has the fifth lowest youth unemployment rate in the EU. I am also certain that references in the debate to our Scandinavian neighbours Finland and Denmark will have come as no surprise to many members. Given that those countries' youth unemployment rates are at a comparatively low 15.4 per cent and 12.2 per cent respectively, why should we not look to them for inspiration? Why is it that small independent countries can perform so much better on youth unemployment? I am not sure that comprehensive answers have been given today.

Why does the UK Government think that the youth guarantee is not the way forward? I would like to hear more about that from Liz Smith when she winds up. It seems to me that small countries that have responsibility for and control over employment issues can make major progress. Participation in the European youth guarantee will provide significant opportunities to achieve and even improve on the unemployment rates of Finland and Denmark. Perhaps it is no accident that measures to tackle youth employment came to the fore when the presidency of the Council of the European Union was held by a small country, the Republic of Ireland.

I take on board some of the points that Inclusion Scotland made in its briefing about the position of disabled people. I also accept that the number of females who undertake construction modern apprenticeships is low. However, we should accept that there has been a significant increase in the number of women entering into modern apprenticeships generally.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that the motion refers to the key role that young people will play in delivering long-term economic growth. That is absolutely right.

16:16

**Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):** I clarify that Labour has always supported the European youth guarantee, having voted for it in the European Parliament. As we heard, the aim is

to provide a good-quality offer of a job, apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education for all young people under 25—with the offer adapted to the individual's needs—within four months of a person leaving formal education or becoming unemployed, whether or not they are registered with employment services.

That is a great idea and one that I am sure that members whole-heartedly support, all the more because figures released today show that 19.1 per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds are unemployed. In one of the areas that I represent—north Ayrshire—9.6 per cent of people aged 18 to 24 were claiming jobseekers allowance at the end of last year. That is the second highest rate in Scotland, and it does not reflect the total, because more young people will be unemployed but not claiming.

I am not convinced of the Scottish National Party's commitment to the scheme. The motion states

"That the Parliament ... supports the principle aim of the European Youth Guarantee to reduce youth unemployment; endorses the aim of ensuring that all young people under the age of 25 receive a good quality offer of employment"

and so on but, as Jenny Marra and Liam McArthur said, SNP MEP Alyn Smith called the guarantee "a knee jerk reaction" and "window dressing". The SNP cannot lambast Westminster for not implementing the European youth guarantee and then refer to it as "window dressing". Which is it?

If the Scottish Government is committed to the scheme, it needs to work harder to deliver it. The current strategy is directed at 16 to 19-year-olds. What is the Scottish Government doing to offer the same opportunities to young people between 19 and 25, as is envisaged in the scheme?

**Angela Constance:** I stress that, despite our key focus on 16 to 19-year olds in the context of education, and despite our not having all the powers that Westminster has, we have introduced the youth employment Scotland fund for young unemployed people up to the age of 24 and our support for graduates is for young people up to the age of 30. We are doing as much as we can do within our powers.

**Margaret McDougall:** I thank the minister for that intervention, but I think that more could be done.

It is all well and good for the Government to lodge a motion that says that it supports the European youth guarantee, but I am afraid that young people in Scotland need action, not just rhetoric. The Government tells us that it is doing all that it can, that the situation is not its fault and that Scotland simply does not have all the economic levers that are required to offer opportunities to people aged between 16 and 25. I



would argue that the Government does have the power and could be doing more with our colleges and our modern apprenticeships, and yet college places are being cut and our modern apprenticeship programme is not as effective as it could be.

The Government has presided over massive cuts to colleges, which has meant that the number of part-time college places has dropped by 140,400 since 2007. How can the Government provide opportunities for all when there are not enough places? If we really want to build a stronger economy, we should be opening the doors to colleges in Scotland, not slamming them shut.

The same strategy is adopted in our modern apprenticeship programme, which is directed at 16 to 19-year-olds. Although the Audit Scotland report "Modern apprenticeships", which was published just last week, tells us that the number of MAs in Scotland has increased, it also points to underlying flaws in the process. For example, the report tells us that

"existing performance measures do not focus on long-term outcomes, such as sustainable employment... More specific long-term aims and objectives, along with information on their benefits and appropriate outcome measures"

are needed to assess value for money.

That is a key point. It is great to give young people an opportunity such as a modern apprenticeship, but what is next for them? What follows? I would argue that, if we are to improve the lives of our young people and Scotland's economic outlook, we should support Audit Scotland's call for more outcome-based measures to assess the long-term benefits and for those benefits to be published. We need to be clear about what modern apprenticeships achieve for young people.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission's report into MAs also argues that the uptake of modern apprenticeships in Scotland is typified by significant gender segregation, with ethnic minorities and disabled people also appearing to have low levels of access to all forms of apprenticeships. For example, less than 0.5 per cent of all modern apprenticeship placements are taken by someone with a declared disability and less than 2 per cent are taken by ethnic minorities, while 98 per cent of construction placements are still taken by men. Equality should be at the heart of our legislation, and MAs should be no different. What is the Scottish Government doing to tackle the problem?

I find it concerning that figures that were released following a freedom of information request in December last year showed that there are 15,000 school leavers that the Government

cannot find. Those 15,000 young people have not been given the same opportunity of a job, training or education because they have been lost from the system. That is simply unacceptable. Will the Government explain today why that was allowed to happen?

The Government could be doing more with the powers that it has to provide a better future for our young people. We should be looking at the long-term outcomes of modern apprenticeships, tackling the equality issues and making sure that our colleges are properly funded. If the Government is serious about the European youth guarantee, it should target opportunities for all at 16 to 25-year-olds now instead of telling us that it can do that only after independence.

16:24

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** The youth guarantee that has been proposed by the European Commission is based on the experience of Austria and Finland and highlights the fact that investing in young people at an early stage has the beneficial effect of reducing long-term youth unemployment. With a youth unemployment rate of 7.5 per cent, Austria has one of the lowest rates among European countries.

In the Nordic countries, where the first youth guarantees were introduced in the 1980s and 1990s, Denmark's youth unemployment rate is 12.2 per cent and Finland's rate is 15.4 per cent, so both countries have substantially lower levels of youth unemployment than either Scotland or the UK.

The Scottish Government is supporting economic growth and creating jobs by investing in schools, hospitals, roads and other projects, such as new college campuses and medical centres. Companies are supported by the business rates relief package, the Scottish Investment Bank and the Scottish loan fund aimed at supporting companies to export. Consequently, Scotland has the highest employment rate and the lowest inactivity rate of the four UK nations. Scotland also has the joint lowest unemployment rate with Wales, which in part is because we have record levels of female employment.

From January 2013 to January 2014, the number of Scots on jobseekers allowance fell by 27,000, which is the largest 12-month drop since March 1998. However, our youth unemployment is far too high. In order to tackle that, the Scottish Government has in place a range of measures including opportunities for all, increasing the number of modern apprenticeships and the make young people your business campaign, which highlights the benefits of employing young people.

In addition, the youth employment Scotland fund provides incentives to employers to employ a young person who has been unemployed for up to six months. That measure is expected to create up to 10,000 jobs.

**Jenny Marra:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gordon MacDonald:** No thanks.

Opportunities for all's single focus is to increase young people's participation in learning, training and employment by offering every 16 to 19-year-old who is not employed a suitable place where they can learn new skills. For the second year running, the modern apprenticeship scheme has surpassed the 25,000 target, and the Audit Scotland report found that, in the past four years, the number of females in modern apprenticeships has gone up from 3,000 to 11,000. Furthermore, Skills Development Scotland found that 81 per cent of 16 to 19-year-olds and 91 per cent of 20 to 24-year-olds are in work six months after leaving their apprenticeship.

The make young people your business campaign highlights to employers why they should employ young people. Scotland's young people not only have energy but have a wealth of talent that will help them to grow their business. The outcome is that the proportion of school leavers in a positive initial destination has reached the highest level on record and, at 90 per cent, the rate of those staying in employment, training or education up to nine months after leaving school is higher than it has ever been.

The City of Edinburgh Council introduced the Edinburgh guarantee to ensure that more school leavers moved into work, education or training. Since August 2011, as a result of the partnership between the council and the private sector, more than 1,000 job, apprenticeship and internship opportunities for school leavers have been created. The study into Edinburgh school leavers achieving and sustaining a positive destination shows that that rate continues to rise and is at the highest ever rate of 91.4 per cent.

It is not just with school leavers that progress is being made. Across the EU, only nine of its 28 countries have a lower youth unemployment rate than Scotland, and most of them are small countries. If we are to drive down youth unemployment to the levels reached in Austria or Finland, we need to learn from their example.

The EU's youth guarantee is based on the Finnish model. The aim is to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 are offered a job, an apprenticeship or continued education within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed. That is to avoid the possibility of a lost generation stretching across Europe

struggling to develop necessary skills and experience in order to find employment.

Early intervention and assessment are key in providing support to young people, to ease their school to work transition, or to the young unemployed, ensuring that under-25s remain active in the labour market or continue in further education.

I welcome the Scottish Government's support for the principal aim of the European youth guarantee to drive down youth unemployment rates in our towns and cities. If employment services could work on the principles of early intervention in partnership with employers and tailoring support to the individual's needs, that would prevent many young people from becoming long-term unemployed.

It is disappointing that the UK coalition Government has failed to endorse the European youth guarantee. A yes vote will be required in September to implement the policy in full.

There will of course be other gains from a yes vote. The financial benefits of successful employment initiatives by the Scottish Government will mean savings in welfare payments and increased tax receipts, which will flow into the Scottish exchequer and not Westminster, as at present. That will mean that the increased revenue can be reinvested in the people of Scotland to fund more employment initiatives and develop more targeted labour market policies that suit Scotland. Who knows? We might even achieve the Nordic countries' higher standard of living, as well as their lower youth unemployment rates.

16:30

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

Despite a few spats across the chamber, the debate has been interesting. It has proved that it is universally accepted on all sides of the political divide that the domestic and international unemployment problems of recent years have had a profound effect on the whole country and that one of the greatest impacts has been felt by our young people.

The youth unemployment rate in Scotland and in the UK as a whole has not reached the exceptionally high levels that some parts of Europe have experienced, which one or two members have mentioned, but it remains far too high. Notwithstanding the encouraging signs for the economy today, the unemployment level among young people who are aged 16 to 25 is still high in comparison with the unemployment level for the rest of the working-age population. That has a profound impact on many young people, in the way that Ken Macintosh described. I do not agree entirely with the economic basis of his

assessment, but I accept the social difficulties of what he described.

If we are to ensure that Scotland's economy is stronger in the future, the onus is on all of us to help not only to boost the jobs market but to equip our young people better with the skills and training that they and their employers need. Liam McArthur made the good point that the issue is to do with not just the jobs market but reforming the tax base and policies, particularly on things such as national insurance. We need to ensure not only that the right skills are available but that employers feel very encouraged when they advertise posts and apprenticeships for young people. It is a sharp reminder to all of us that we have one of the highest proportions of disengaged groups among members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and that that figure has increased significantly in the past decade.

**Clare Adamson:** Does Liz Smith recognise that the work to evaluate the Finnish model shows the strength of early intervention as key to tackling the problem, before disengagement takes place?

**Liz Smith:** I accept that entirely. The Conservative Party in the Parliament has argued strongly about models in the Scandinavian countries, although we worry slightly about the high tax rates in those countries. I take the point, and we have had many debates about the assertion that such skills are essential and that we should start at the youngest possible age.

The key issue is to decide what action we must take. I do not think that there is a contradiction between the approaches of the UK and Scottish Governments. I beg to differ with those—perhaps on both sides—who take a slightly different view. We all have the same essential aims of increasing the number of young people who are in work and ensuring that youth unemployment is reduced and that long-term—not just short-term—safeguards are put in place. The debate is not about opposing forces; it is much more about technical points of policy making and the timescales that will bring lasting benefit to our young people.

I was asked about some of the issues by Christina McKelvie and one other member—I think that it was Rod Campbell. When it comes to the economics, one of the key defining issues is flexibility. It does not matter whether one views the issue from a centre-left perspective or a centre-right one, time after time the economists say that one of the key advantages of the UK labour market is its flexibility. We have to accept that. Even if we have different political views about how we would change the policy focus, there is relatively unanimous agreement on that flexibility.

It is because of that flexibility that different countries have taken different approaches to the

issue. There is therefore an argument—perhaps a very technical one but nonetheless an important one—about whether the timescale should be four months or six. I do not entirely agree with the argument about a UK Government or a Scottish Government doing something differently. I do not accept that. Good economics, and good politics, involves taking up the issues that are specific to demand and supply in the labour market.

I compliment the Scottish Government on the Wood commission—it is one of the best things happening in this session of Parliament. Ian Wood has been careful to say in all his deliberations that there is not only a demand side to the issue, which is about how employers, colleges and universities view young people and the work that they will do, but a supply side. They are two completely different issues, although obviously they come together in the labour market. What is important about this afternoon's debate is that we must accept that there are policies that will be directed more at the demand side and other policies that will be directed more at the supply side. We have to ensure that those come together.

As my colleague Mary Scanlon rightly argued, the European youth guarantee is best understood as a measure designed to address the specific problems in different eurozone economies. While we most certainly have our own challenges in that respect, the labour market very much thrives on the kind of flexibility that the guarantee may not offer. That is why there is a debate about the right timescale.

We fully support the drive to tackle youth unemployment and we recognise that there is a role for Government support—of course there is—but with youth joblessness at 20 per cent and falling, the situation in the UK is not directly comparable to that in Spain, Italy or Portugal, in the way that some might suggest.

I know that the temptation is great on all sides of the referendum debate to make the issue a political flashpoint between Westminster and Holyrood, but that would not be particularly helpful. It is essential that the two Governments complement each other, which means taking on board some of the other issues that we have discussed this afternoon.

Stewart Maxwell made an interesting point in relation to the college sector. I think that at one stage he discussed measuring apples against pears. He was absolutely correct in that, but there is still an issue about the college sector. It is absolutely clear that it is a Government priority to ensure that the college sector is part of the policy on 16 to 19-year-olds. However, that is not reflected in some of the spending decisions that have been made in previous budgets, in which the colleges have had severe cutbacks.

It has been an interesting debate for all sorts of reasons, but I would urge members as far as possible to see it as an economic debate rather than just a political knockabout, because that is better for our young people and will be expected by all the people who will hopefully be ready to employ them. I am happy to support the amendment in the name of Mary Scanlon.

16:39

**Jenny Marra:** I start by addressing a specific point that the minister raised in her opening remarks about the UK Government's lack of engagement with the EU on finalising our implementation plan, which would gain us access to youth employment funding for the south-west of Scotland.

I share the concerns voiced by members from across the chamber and other colleagues who are losing out because of the British Government's lack of action. Indeed, my colleague at Westminster, Stephen Timms, has on several occasions urged the British Government minister to speed up the submission of an implementation plan to secure the funding, to which the UK Government seemed to agree in an answer to a question on 5 December, although not—I understand—in a way that endorses, or meets the criteria of, the European youth guarantee.

The situation is frustrating not only for Scotland but for all the areas in the UK that are at risk of losing out. Together with colleagues in London, Durham and the West Midlands, we see it as a reason to win the argument, secure funding for regions throughout the UK and campaign for a more progressive Government that will make youth employment and the implementation of the youth guarantee a priority.

**Liz Smith:** Will Jenny Marra give way?

**Jenny Marra:** Not at the moment, thank you.

Labour voted for the European youth guarantee because of the impact that youth unemployment in any part of Europe has on our economy. We continue to support the guarantee. Indeed, the idea came not from the European Commission as cited in the debate but from the Party of European Socialists, of which the Labour Party is a member.

Ed Miliband has outlined an ambitious policy to implement a jobs guarantee for long-term unemployed young people paid for by a tax on bankers' bonuses. However, so far, I have not heard the SNP support the taxing of bankers' bonuses as a way of ensuring that those who have benefited most from the labour market give back to young people who have yet to embark on their careers.

Stewart Maxwell asked how the SNP could answer my question on that because it does not have the power yet. However, the SNP spent thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money in the white paper setting out what it would do if it had the powers of independence, so why not answer the question and commit now to taxing the bankers' bonuses and making youth employment—a jobs guarantee for young people—a priority if there is a yes vote in September? I would be very happy if the minister matched the commitment in her closing speech, but the truth is that the SNP has been reluctant to match it or the pledge on the 50p tax rate. Perhaps that is instructive of its priorities, but I would be very pleased to be proved wrong by the minister making the same commitment.

In education and training—the two other fundamental policy delivery mechanisms for youth employment—we have the powers and obligation to ensure that Scotland's young people get the opportunities that they deserve now. We cannot talk about quality education as an end of a youth guarantee when college places have been cut as far as they have been.

There has been much debate among members from right across the chamber—Mary Scanlon, Liz Smith, Stewart Maxwell, Ken Macintosh and Clare Adamson—about college places. We can trade the figures as much as we like, but the Education and Culture Committee—I sat on it when it got the evidence—the college sector and the Scottish Government know that the truth is that the college sector continues to get a raw deal under the SNP Government. As Liz Smith says, the Government's funding commitments do not match its rhetoric on training, college places, women in college and getting people back into the labour market.

Stewart Maxwell contested full-time hours with Ken Macintosh. It is the case that the SNP cut the number of hours that constitute a full-time college course from 720 hours a year to 640, so it is disingenuous to cite full-time places and it is much better to talk about the numbers of people at college.

**Stewart Maxwell:** The SNP's commitment in that area was to an overall number of FTE hours, and that has been not only matched but superseded. We said that we would meet our commitment to 116,000 or 119,000 hours—I cannot quite remember the figure—and we have done so. It is disingenuous to subdivide the figure in some way to try to prove a point, because we made a commitment on the total number of hours and we have met it.

**Jenny Marra:** Stewart Maxwell is trying to remember the figures, but we know that the First Minister talks about full-time equivalents at college. We also know the truth: not as many

people are getting college places today; places and part-time places have been cut; and not as many women are attending college. That is the reality in Scotland.

**Clare Adamson:** Will the member give way?

**Jenny Marra:** No thank you.

We cannot talk about a four-month window for getting young people into work or training when—as I said in my opening remarks—15,000 people in Scotland are lost from the very system that is supposed to give them that opportunity. We cannot blame others when we are not prepared to take bold steps by legislating in our own Parliament to embed apprenticeships in the vast array of Government contracts that we commission every year.

The SNP must be genuine about its commitment on that, and vote to match its rhetoric. We must work harder and smarter to better integrate our skills services with our education services and with local employers on the supply and demand sides—as Liz Smith rightly pointed out—in order to ensure that we get it right for young people in Scotland. We cannot debate the merits of one commitment over another without taking stock of our whole employment landscape and the way in which we currently provide opportunities to young people.

The Wood commission—as cited by Liz Smith—has been a useful tool in refocusing our attention on some of those issues by making some quite innovative interim recommendations, and I look forward to the publication of its full report in the coming weeks.

The minister cites the lack of powers to explain the absence of a plan for 19 to 24-year-olds, which are perhaps the missing group in today's debate—we know that the Government's priorities fall on 16 to 19-year-olds, but the European youth guarantee covers people up to the age of 25. However, the minister fails to say what initiatives she would take with those absent powers, and what purpose they would serve. Would there be a radical new strategy for 19 to 24-year-olds? How would the powers that she so desires feed into that strategy and make a difference for 19 to 24-year-olds? If the minister can tell us in her closing remarks how, specifically, those new powers would serve a plan for 19 to 24-year-olds, that would shed a little light on the missing aspect of the debate.

We have the means to make a real difference to the lives of young people, and we must not sacrifice the responsibility and the power that we have by lamenting that which we do not have. We must find a way to innovate and work smarter and harder for young people and to overcome the obstacles that we think we face by having Governments work together rather than working

against one another. In that task, Labour will always play its part.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** That is remarkable timing. I call Angela Constance, who has 11 minutes or thereabouts.

16:48

**Angela Constance:** The debate has been wide ranging, and we have covered some old and new territory. The old territory has been that we have touched once again on many of the debates in and around the college sector. I am proud that the Scottish Government has ensured that, in a tough economic time for young people in particular, there are more young people on full-time courses that lead to recognised qualifications, and the course completion and retention rates among those from our most disadvantaged communities have increased.

The new territory has been that, like Liz Smith, I think there has been far more of a focus on what works in intervening to help young people. We know that not all young people have had the same experiences or face the same challenges in the transition from education to school. However, I cannot accept the Tory amendment. I have looked at it clearly, but, ultimately, despite the consensual tone of the contributions from Liz Smith and Mary Scanlon today, the Scottish Government—unlike the UK Government—supports the implementation of the European youth guarantee now. I believe strongly in the merits of early intervention, which I believe prevents long-term unemployment. When we weigh up the costs of not acting, the case for the European youth guarantee is overwhelming.

**Liz Smith:** I want to be absolutely clear that our disagreement is not about the principle; it is about the details of the policy and specifically the four-month period. That is where we differ—we are not against the principle.

**Angela Constance:** I understand the member's position. I will go through some policy areas and, I hope, give practical examples of where the European youth guarantee would make a difference to some of the policies that people are trying to deliver.

Before I do so, I point out again that, in the current claimant count, a third of young people who are claiming jobseekers allowance have been unemployed for six months or more. We must bear that in mind, as it is an imperative to act. Clare Adamson and Christina McKelvie mentioned the evidence from Finland where, as Eurofound has shown, the youth guarantee has secured positive destinations for nearly 84 per cent of jobseekers within three months. Achieving that within three months is far preferable to doing it within six months.

**Liz Smith:** We can argue in both directions, but there is compelling evidence that those who have gone through a six-month period have a greater degree of employability and for a longer period of time.

**Angela Constance:** The member fails to acknowledge that a third of those who are on the claimant count have been unemployed for six months or more and, alarmingly, even though the claimant count is going down, the number of young people who have been on it for more than 24 months continues to rise. I know from all my experience in my post that, with those who are furthest away from the labour market, we cannot afford to leave our interventions for one day, never mind months.

**Liam McArthur:** Will the minister take a brief intervention?

**Angela Constance:** No, but I will come to the member.

Like Margaret McCulloch, I think that the youth contract is well intentioned, but we could deliver it earlier. Why wait six months? The indications are that the budget is underspent, so let us deliver the youth contract along with the apprenticeship scheme and the youth employment Scotland scheme, for which young people are eligible from day 1 of unemployment. That is a positive suggestion about how we could make progress.

Margaret McCulloch also mentioned the work programme. The best thing that I can say about it is that it is better than doing nothing, but it is quite simply not good enough. Given the outcomes of the work programme, we all have to be deeply concerned. Only one in 10 people on employment and support allowance and only one in four young people are getting into employment as a result of the work programme, so we need to be concerned about that. Yesterday, Labour proposed that the work programme should be the province of the Scottish Parliament, but our ambitions on welfare and employment need to be far greater than that and should not just be about managing a contract over which Westminster ultimately has control.

I will continue to press the UK Government and to push for the implementation of the European youth guarantee. In the first discussion that I had with a UK Government minister on the matter, I was struck by the fact that his principal objection to the guarantee seemed to be based not on its merits or otherwise but on the fact that the suggestion was coming from Europe.

I stress to Liam McArthur that the European youth guarantee is not a one-size-fits-all approach. There is always the challenge of delivering the most effective intervention to those who are furthest away from the labour market. For those who are harder to reach, it must be much better to

intervene early than to leave it six months, nine months, a year or two years.

**Liam McArthur:** The minister referred to a discussion with the UK minister, who appeared to have misgivings about the idea emanating from Europe, but those misgivings seem to be shared by her colleague Alyn Smith. Does the minister share those misgivings too? The motion asks that Parliament “supports the principal aim” but does not ask it to support the implementation of the European youth guarantee.

**Angela Constance:** With respect, I just think that I have a more in-depth understanding of what the European youth guarantee is about. It is very flexible. I know that all my colleagues on SNP benches here and elsewhere are very proud and proactive Europeans.

On that point, we have a lot to learn from some other European countries and we have a lot to contribute from our early experiences of leading the way with opportunities for all. We are getting a better handle on the success of that policy and how to improve it.

I also say to Liam McArthur that, although the national insurance holiday for employers that was announced last year but will not be introduced until next year is indeed very welcome, it needs to be introduced now.

Although there is much in the Labour Party amendment that I could have agreed with—in its spirit and some of the issues that it raises—my big difficulty with it in essence is that it would delete the very last sentence of the Scottish Government motion, which would in effect delete the commitment for the Parliament to deliver the European youth guarantee.

I am very surprised that members have not spoken about the necessity for the integration of skills and employability services. We need Skills Development Scotland and Jobcentre Plus not just to work together—they already work closely together—but to provide an integrated service in which our young people are not passed from pillar to post.

It seems that the Labour Party always proposes that we in this Government and this Parliament should have all the responsibility but only some of the powers. Yes, Jenny Marra is right: we do indeed have control of education policy and legislation in this Parliament, but what about some control of the economy, thanks very much? We have control of agencies such as Skills Development Scotland, but how about Jobcentre Plus and the failing work programme?

**Jenny Marra:** Will the minister take this opportunity to commit to the tax on bankers

bonuses and to match our jobs guarantee in the event of a yes vote?

**Angela Constance:** We on the SNP benches are always very clear that those with the broadest shoulders should bear the biggest responsibility.

Apart from Ken Macintosh and Jenny Marra, in her latter comments, Labour members did not make much mention of Labour's jobs guarantee. My issue with Labour's jobs guarantee is not that it is giving a guarantee to young people—I am all for guarantees for young people; I want a written constitution that will guarantee young people a right to free education, a job and training—but that Labour wants young people to wait one whole year. It wants to abandon young people on an unemployment queue for a year before it will give that guarantee. The issue about the European youth guarantee is that we act now.

**Jenny Marra:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Angela Constance:** No, not just now, thank you. I have taken plenty of interventions.

My other concern about Labour's guarantee is some of the language around it. Ed Balls has talked about it being a "tough", "compulsory" guarantee. I believe in reciprocity. I believe that young people have rights and responsibilities, and we have a responsibility to act now for our young people and not abandon them on the dole queue for one year before we have the temerity to act and intervene in their lives.

I am sick of listening to Westminster parties bicker among themselves about who will do least. My granny has a great phrase: "You're only young once"—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Ms Marra!

**Angela Constance:** That means that we have to act quickly to ensure that no young person in this country is left behind. We have an opportunity—

**The Presiding Officer:** To wind up.

**Angela Constance:** —to align services. That, indeed, is called independence.

## Business Motion

16:59

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-09377, 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 25 March 2014

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Young and Novice Drivers and Graduated Driver Licensing

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Immunisation Programme

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 26 March 2014

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
Education and Lifelong Learning

*followed by* Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 27 March 2014

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Question Time

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Child Poverty

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 1 April 2014

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 2 April 2014

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
 Finance, Employment and Sustainable  
 Growth  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 3 April 2014

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  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions.

I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-09378, on the designation of a lead committee for the Food (Scotland) Bill; motion S4M-09380, on the approval of the draft Budget (Scotland) Act 2013 Amendment Order 2014; and motion S4M-09381, on approval of the draft Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 (Consequential and Saving Provisions) Order 2014.

*Motions moved,*

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

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2013 Amendment Order 2014 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 (Consequential and Saving Provisions) Order 2014 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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



## Decision Time

17:00

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

The first question is, that amendment S4M-09376.2, in the name of Jenny Marra, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09376, in name of Angela Constance, on the European youth guarantee, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

### Against

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)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)

Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 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)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)

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

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 42, Against 77, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S4M-09376.1, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-09376, in the name of Angela Constance, on the European youth guarantee, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)  
Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

#### Against

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, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)

Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)

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

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 19, Against 100, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-09376, in the name of Angela Constance, on the European youth guarantee, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

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, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)

MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**Against**

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)  
Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
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)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 104, Against 15, Abstentions 0.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises the critical role that young people will play in delivering long-term economic growth; recognises the disadvantage that young people face in the labour market and the negative impact of allowing long periods of inactivity; accepts the principle of early intervention to offer young people a positive destination; supports the principle aim of the European Youth Guarantee to reduce youth unemployment; endorses the aim of ensuring that all young people under the age of 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education, and agrees that, to deliver this, delivery agencies must align skills, employment, taxation and benefit policy to better support young people into education, training or employment.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-09378, 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 Food (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-09380, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2013 Amendment Order 2014 [draft] be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-09381, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 (Consequential and Saving Provisions) Order 2014 [draft] be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

## Traditional Housing Stock

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

The final item of business is a debate on motion S4M-09069, in the name of Nigel Don, on Scotland's traditional housing stock. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that Scotland's traditional housing, including that in Angus North and Mearns, which was constructed prior to 1919, is the group of dwellings most likely to be in disrepair; recognises that Historic Scotland's strategy for sustaining and developing traditional building skills focuses on promoting a better understanding of the value of traditional building skills; welcomes what it sees as this emphasis on traditional building skills in Scotland; notes the Scottish Government's traditional building health check pilot scheme, which aims to address the state of the country's housing stock, and considers that quality repairs will also tend to reduce fuel poverty.

17:06

**Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** I was pleased, yesterday, to be able to sponsor an event in the Parliament on behalf of Construction Scotland, which brought together many people who are involved with traditional building skills and materials to show us what they do. The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs kindly graced the event with her presence, and I think that a good time was had by all.

It was particularly good to meet a number of apprentices and to see examples of their handiwork. Those of us who hesitate to climb a ladder, never mind work on a roof, are grateful to those who can and will and who bring professional skills with them when they do.

Our buildings are, obviously, a significant part of what makes Scotland the place that it is. Many of our buildings are old and are constructed in ways that are now regarded as old-fashioned, and are built from materials that are now either difficult or expensive to source, or are simply no longer used, given modern construction methods. However, buildings are not only part of the landscape; in many contexts, the buildings are the landscape.

It is also the case, unfortunately, that many of the older properties—usually defined as those that were constructed before 1919—are in some disrepair. That is an understatement, actually, because the latest figures suggest that three quarters exhibit some disrepair to critical elements, and that about half need urgent repairs. Many of the buildings are in private hands—indeed, most of them are, although some of the very large ones are in public care.

Most worryingly, a survey has indicated that, although more than £2 billion was spent between 2009 and 2011 by 732,000 private owners or

tenants to improve the state of their properties, there was a minimal change to the overall state of the buildings across the country. It seems that we are content to put in a new kitchen and ignore the leaky roof, or repaint the lounge while the chimney pots are waiting to be blown down and the masonry needs pointing.

Quite apart from the long-term deterioration of the fabric, there are significant implications for the energy efficiency of properties as a result of that kind of behaviour. Homes that are not wind and watertight are not good places to live in general. Clearly, they are not good places in which to bring up children and, equally clearly, they are not good places for those with health problems. In short, warm homes that are wind and watertight are a basic necessity for a healthy society. Of course, energy efficiency helps to reduce fuel poverty, which is often a problem for people in traditional housing, and it also reduces our carbon footprint. I suspect that my colleague, Mike MacKenzie will say more about that later.

It is good to know that Historic Scotland is on the case. It funds refurbishment projects across the country through its conservation areas regeneration scheme. As far as I can see, it has awarded more than £12 million between 2007 and 2013, and another £13 million or so is available up to 2018. Historic Scotland has produced highly respected free guides and, as yesterday's event demonstrated, it is clearly engaged with the building industry. It has also produced a very helpful analysis entitled "Establishing the Need for Traditional Skills", which is an exemplary document, and "Traditional Building Skills: A strategy for sustaining and developing traditional building skills in Scotland", which is, of course, the Government's main document. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will want to refer to it.

The Scottish Government has funded an increasing number of modern apprenticeships; there are around 25,000 per year currently. Over 3,000 of those are in the construction and related fields. With that number of modern apprenticeships, it is clear that there is plenty of scope for traditional building skills to be incorporated.

I recently visited Forth Valley College to see its new facilities. I was even allowed to try my hand at masonry. Once again, a wee try was enough to remind me that those who have had some practice have the real skills and it would be best if I kept out of the way. I have also visited the engine shed nearby, in Stirling. I share the excitement that it will provide a centre of excellence in design.

Historic Scotland has also created a traditional building health check pilot scheme, which began in April 2013. That is a subsidised subscription scheme that provides independent inspections,

which then provide the stimulus for repair and maintenance and thereby increase the demand for traditional skills. I note that the scheme has already raised approximately £2.9 million for projects.

There is no doubt that the continuing imposition of VAT on building repairs is not helping. Essentially, a building needs to be being converted into residential accommodation to attract a zero or reduced rate of VAT. It is widely held in the industry that reducing VAT on repairs would provide a welcome stimulus to our economy and work to address the backlog of necessary repairs. I note—and have checked—that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has once again failed to take the opportunity to do that in his budget today. I say to the cabinet secretary that I hope that we would look at that matter very quickly post-independence.

Finally, I note that building work has a high economic multiplier. That has been estimated at 2.84, which somehow seems to be slightly too precise a number, but it is the one that I have. That means that, for every pound that is spent on such work, £2.84 is generated in the wider economy.

The huge advantage of capital investment in general is that the money that is spent not only delivers a tangible project of economic value—we all know that we simply do not have the money to waste on projects that do not have that—but maintains construction skills and provides training opportunities. Given the large number of traditional buildings that we have and will need to maintain, everything that we can do to encourage owner-occupiers and landlords to get on with the job would be good. There must be a building equivalent of "A stitch in time saves nine."

In summary, our traditional buildings are a national asset, but they need to be looked after. The challenge is to get those who are responsible for their upkeep to rise to that challenge. It seems to me that the Scottish Government is doing all the right things and is heading in the right direction. I look forward to other members' comments on what else we should be doing.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Alex Johnstone, to be followed by Mike MacKenzie. *[Interruption.]*

17:13

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** Excuse me, Presiding Officer. You surprised me.

I welcome the debate and congratulate Nigel Don on bringing it forward.

As someone who was brought up in a 200-year-old farmhouse, I am used to the cold and am well

aware that the wind can sometimes blow between the stones. However, we have to take the matter seriously in the future if we are to bring our traditional housing stock up to the standard that is required in order to achieve energy efficiency standards in the longer term.

Although the 2012 Scottish housing condition survey threw up the rather alarming statistic that 92 per cent of homes that were built prior to 1919 had some disrepair, we should take into account the fact that very minor faults can put them in that category, so we should perhaps prioritise the 27 per cent that have serious disrepair.

Maintaining property of such age can be a daunting and expensive duty. The situation is made worse by the fact that many such buildings are listed, which gives rise to confusion and uncertainty about what can and cannot be done. For that reason, it is essential that we understand the needs of the individuals who live in such properties and are able to fund the necessary repairs, but who find themselves simply not knowing what they can and cannot do.

There is another problem that takes us into employment and training, but which is also a geographical problem that fits with something that I have stated in the chamber many times before. We know from what we discovered at last night's event in Parliament that there is a need—that is to some extent being satisfied—to train young people in the jobs that have the traditional skills that are necessary to maintain property. However, there are areas across Scotland where there are extreme shortages of such skills. In addition to training young men and women to take on traditional skills roles, we must ensure that we encourage and support individuals to move around the country and take their skills with them. For that reason, it is extremely important that we consider how we make the skills available.

Nigel Don raised VAT in his opening speech—it is an issue that I am keen to address. I realise that house repairs and upgrading of property would be significantly facilitated by a reduction in VAT on such work. I am prepared to continue to lobby for that and will happily work with other members to ensure that we get some movement on that in the longer term.

**Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I am sure that Alex Johnstone is aware that one of the things that George Osborne did in a recent budget—it might have been the most recent one prior to today's budget—was to make it more difficult to apply the dispensation in favour of older listed buildings whereby approved alterations to them could be zero rated for VAT. I understand that the sense of that dispensation was to help to give new life and new use to older buildings. Unfortunately, Mr Osborne is travelling in the

opposite direction to the one that Mr Johnstone suggests.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will, of course, reimburse Alex Johnstone's time.

**Alex Johnstone:** When we are talking about Mr Osborne, we must remember that he is the Chancellor of the Exchequer who has taken us from a position where this country was on the verge of economic ruin to a position where we now have the fastest-growing economy in the developed world. As a consequence, the money and the opportunity to take forward major changes such as the one that we are discussing in this debate are far more likely to happen under George Osborne's tenure than they are under any of the alternatives.

That is the line on which I will close. As with so many other things that we have discussed in the chamber, the line that comes from the Scottish National Party—that somehow in an independent Scotland every tax will be halved and every budget will be doubled—is one that simply has no credibility.

17:17

**Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I congratulate Nigel Don on securing this debate and on sponsoring the excellent event in the Parliament last night, which I thought was really terrific. I know that a lot of other members enjoyed it and felt the benefit of it.

I am pleased to speak in the debate because I spent much of my previous career as a builder renovating, repairing and improving traditional buildings. I am glad to say that over my lifetime we have learned much about how best to treat and deal with our older buildings. That knowledge could be spread more widely, because the problem is not lack of knowledge but lack of dissemination of that knowledge. Perhaps the most important of the lessons that have been learned is one that Nigel Don touched on earlier, which is that it is critical to attend first to the exterior fabric of a building. Too often the priorities of householders and building owners are new kitchens and bathrooms, for example, so much less of our attention and resources are directed to the external fabric of our homes and other buildings.

A lot of the important external fabric of our built environment has been neglected, including that of some relatively modern buildings—it is not all about pre-1919 buildings. That situation is not helped by the United Kingdom Government's long-term insistence on maintaining at 20 per cent VAT on repairs and improvements. An iron-clad case has been made for a reduction in VAT on building repairs, and fiscal modelling strongly suggests that

that would give rise to an increase in the overall tax that would be raised, and in employment.

However, there is an important point about taxation that the Opposition parties should consider. The financial modelling suggests that not all the return would come through a change in VAT, although there would be a Laffer curve effect. Much of it would be recouped through taxation on employment. I hope that the Opposition parties will bear that in mind.

I must touch on the related issue of fuel poverty, which afflicts Scottish islands at the wholly unacceptable level of 50 per cent—in some cases, in excess of that. That does not sound to me as though we are better together. The reason for that level is largely that there is a much higher proportion of traditional housing on our islands and there are profound difficulties in properly insulating those hard-to-treat properties, not least because there is no “magic wallpaper” insulation solution—if I understand physics correctly, there may never be one.

To place the matter in context, it is appropriate to make a comparison with modern dwellings and the building standards that pertain to them. For a new home to meet the energy efficiency standards that are demanded, it needs to have a whole envelope of insulation, with insulation not just in the roof and the walls, but under the floor as well. To give members an idea of what that means in real terms, I point out that it requires about 8 inches of loose-quilt insulation all round the house, or about 6 inches of more modern rigid-board insulation.

We talk a lot about insulating cavity walls, and that is certainly a good thing to do. It is worth people's while to put 2 inches of polystyrene beads into cavity walls, but that does not come close to the insulation standards of a new home. If we are to deal properly with fuel poverty, we must not just take buildings and their occupiers out of fuel poverty today—we must introduce an element of future proofing through insulation.

If insulation is difficult, we are forced to look at other innovative measures. That entails a flexible approach from those who produce and administer building regulations, from planners and, most important, from those who are responsible for fiscal policy.

We are replacing our housing stock at a rate of 0.5 per cent per annum. At that rate, it will take 200 years to replace the whole stock. We therefore need our traditional buildings to remain in use, and to achieve that will require a Government that recognises where market failures lie, and that provides appropriate fiscal corrections and a supportive policy framework. Unfortunately, I see little sign that the UK Government

recognises or has registered the problem, so the sooner the Scottish Government has the full powers that are necessary to drive meaningful solutions, the better.

17:23

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** I thank Nigel Don for raising this important issue and for his recognition of Historic Scotland's efforts.

This month, alongside introducing to the Scottish Parliament the Historic Environment Scotland Bill, which will build resilience, sustain the functions of Historic Scotland and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and create new opportunities for collaboration and partnership across the sector, I published “Our Place in Time – The Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland”, which is the first such strategy. It is an exciting move that will help to ensure that our historic environment is cared for, valued and protected in a sustainable way.

The strategy, which was developed following a long process of intensive stakeholder discussion and engagement, recognises the importance of traditional skills and identifies skills and capacity as one of the key cross-cutting priorities for the sector to address over the next 10 years. In particular, it makes it clear that, in order to ensure that there is appropriate care, management and promotion of our historic environment, we need to support the many professional and specialist skills that are required to carry out the work, upgrade existing skills, and develop, deliver and accredit new skills across the public, private and third sectors. I am excited by our new strategy and confident that it will deliver positive outcomes for the care and management of our historic building stock.

Scotland's traditional buildings make an enormous contribution to our economy and our national identity. Around 20 per cent of Scotland's buildings are traditionally constructed; although those buildings include iconic sites, the majority are the buildings that we live and work in and love. The 450,000 traditionally constructed buildings in Scotland form a rich backdrop to our lives, but they are so much a part of our environment that they sometimes go unnoticed by many and the evidence shows that too many such buildings are being taken for granted by too many people. We have long suspected—and have now identified—a clear market failure in relation to the repair and maintenance of traditional buildings. However, although that situation presents a bleak picture for the future of our traditional buildings and all they contribute to Scotland's character, it also presents a good opportunity.

The richness of Scotland's historic environment draws millions of tourists to our shores. The repair and maintenance of the traditional buildings that form the fabric of our streets, squares, towers, castles, tenements and houses are often seen as a specialist and expensive activity, but the fact is that the heritage construction sector supports up to 20,000 full-time equivalent employees and generates up to £1 billion gross value added for the Scottish economy. As a result, the proper maintenance and repair of our traditional buildings provide an ideal shovel-ready project as well as being of benefit in themselves, and the opportunities for stimulating demand in construction maintenance can have pay-offs in youth training opportunities and skills development and can engage a new generation in the training of essential building traditions.

We in the Scottish Government and its agencies are doing all we can within our current powers to strengthen the economy, to create and bring jobs to Scotland, to stimulate growth and to create the most supportive business environment in the UK. Measures that create demand for routine maintenance will also help to stimulate the economy and safeguard jobs. Securing the swiftest possible economic recovery is the key priority for this Government.

In the spirit of consensus, therefore, I want to take up Alex Johnstone's offer to work with those of us who are trying to achieve a reduction in VAT on repairs. Mike MacKenzie was absolutely right to point out that George Osborne has recently gone in the opposite direction, but the economic and financial case can be made that such a cut in VAT would provide more income by stimulating growth and the economy and by ensuring that money could be recouped through different types of tax returns to the Treasury.

The issue is certainly worth looking at, and I will send Alex Johnstone information that I hope will make him decide to be part of the collective approach that is being taken to tackling the matter. As I have said, the case has been made, but there needs to be either a change in the Westminster Government or a vote in September to give powers to this Parliament.

The Scottish Government's sustainable housing strategy, which we published last year, sets out our aim to create warm, high-quality and affordable low-carbon homes across Scotland's housing stock. For houses in the social sector, we will work with the Scottish Housing Regulator to monitor landlords' progress towards ensuring that social rented homes meet the Scottish housing quality standard by April 2015.

For houses in the private sector, we have introduced amendments to local authorities' powers to address disrepair in private rented and

owner-occupied homes and we are looking at how we might set minimum energy efficiency standards in existing private sector housing. We will encourage home owners to work together to improve and maintain their properties and, as part of that approach, we will publish proposals for a forum on the development of a cross-tenure housing standard.

Sustainability, energy efficiency and carbon reduction principles shape our attitudes to the upkeep of traditional buildings. Historic Scotland is breaking new ground in developing more effective insulation of traditional buildings, but there is universal agreement that there is little or no point in insulating a poorly maintained building. Most of the traditionally constructed buildings that we are talking about have been in place for more than 100 years. They have stood the test of time and popular approval; I predict that most of them will be among those that are still here in 2050, and ensuring their sustainability will be a key part of achieving our carbon goals for 2050.

In November 2012, I held a summit meeting to agree a joined-up approach to stimulating demand for people with the appropriate skills to repair and maintain our historic environment. Since the summit, Historic Scotland has continued to work with many partners to deliver hands-on skills training, support a range of projects through grant funding, and deliver education and outreach events. It has recruited an additional 30 apprentices and remains the largest trainer and employer of stonemasons in Scotland.

The experience in other countries convinces me that we do not need to accept the inevitability of deteriorating building conditions. As the motion states, Historic Scotland, in partnership with the Construction Industry Training Board Scotland, has developed a pilot project for a traditional buildings health check scheme for Scotland. Nigel Don talked about the scheme. The pilot in Stirling aims to promote proactive building repair and maintenance and stimulate demand for skilled tradespeople.

The aim is to establish a model for the rest of the country to follow, with inspections due to start this summer. The new Historic Scotland national conservation centre in Stirling will be at the forefront of the approach, creating a hub that brings together the construction and heritage sectors to inform and enthuse people from all sectors of society about the importance of conservation, repair and maintenance.

We have a long-term commitment to tackling the issue. The key to success will be a co-ordinated approach. This is a long-term endeavour; there are no quick fixes. The evidence suggests that home owners do not prioritise maintenance of what is probably their biggest asset, although



maintenance makes good sense in the long term. There is evidence of a complex set of interlocking circumstances, but if we do nothing we face an ever steeper downward spiral of decay. We need to stop the rot—literally, in some cases—before it is too late.

*Meeting closed at 17:31.*

If something is complex, that does not mean that it is impossible. There are opportunities for growing the existing market for repair and maintenance work and for partners to work together. I am delighted that the traditional buildings health check scheme is taking off this year. We are committed to the process, and if Scotland embraces the challenge and sees the opportunities, we will see benefits for many years to come.



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