



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 14 May 2014

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 14 May 2014

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Education and Lifelong Learning

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

Good afternoon, everyone. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio question time. To get as many members in as possible, I would appreciate short and succinct questions and answers.

#### Attainment Gap

**1. John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to address the attainment gap between children from the poorest and wealthiest homes. (S4O-03206)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's report on closing the attainment gap in Scottish education, which was published last week, confirms that the attainment gap between children from high and low-income households has begun to narrow. The report also recognises the potential of key Scottish Government policies such as curriculum for excellence and the early years collaborative to make a significant impact on further reducing the gap.

I whole-heartedly agree with the report's conclusions, but there is still much to be done. The reasons for the attainment gap are complex and include, as the report notes, factors in a child's home background, and they will require partnership working over a range of policy areas. We and our partners are strongly committed to tackling this and we are supporting a range of activities at national and local level that will make a difference and help to make Scotland the best place to go to school.

However, I am sure that the member will allow me to say that closing the attainment gap also needs to involve tackling the root causes of poverty, which only independence will give us the economic powers to do.

**John Lamont:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his response, but I question whether the Government is doing enough. Figures that were obtained by the Scottish Conservatives last month revealed that, in 2013, 2.9 per cent of children from Scotland's most deprived homes achieved

three As at higher compared with 20.3 per cent of children from the most affluent. That gap is a vicious circle that prevents children from realising their full potential. Although the cabinet secretary is fully aware of that fact, he seems very reluctant to consider any fundamental changes to our system of schooling to resolve the problem. Surely in the name of equality of opportunity we need a much bolder agenda that empowers headteachers, increases autonomy and gives parents and pupils a real choice when it comes to schooling.

**Michael Russell:** I certainly agree with the member that we need to take every possible action to improve the situation in Scotland, and that is what the Government is attempting to do. It does not mean tinkering with the system in the way that the leader of the member's party has suggested; what it means is fundamental and radical change to society. That comes about, for example, by ensuring that the powers to set taxation and to deal with welfare and labour market regulation lie with this Parliament, which would make a significant difference. What it also means is that we do not do things to make the situation worse and that we do not, for example, create welfare policies that, according to the Child Poverty Action Group, mean that 100,000 more children will be in poverty by 2020. The biggest contribution that the Tories could make would be to understand that and to stop penalising the poor in Scotland.

**Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** Has the cabinet secretary seen "Mind the Gap: Tackling Educational Inequality in Scotland", Labour's social justice sounding board paper on tackling educational inequality? Is he aware that there are 12 recommendations in the report that do not require independence? Has he read the report and is he willing to do some cross-party work in that area?

**Michael Russell:** I did read that report and I am delighted to say that that work is already under way. If the Labour Party wants to support that work, I am thrilled. I read the report with a little curiosity, because it is not a manifesto, a set of pledges or even a pre-manifesto—it is apparently a paper to inform the debate before the pre-manifesto process. I am not entirely sure how that works. However, the first recommendation refers to

"preventative spending on the crucial early years",

which I absolutely agree with. We need to do that and more. The second recommendation refers to

"Building relationships between families, schools and communities",

which I would have said is axiomatic and which is being done. The third recommendation refers to

“engendering a positive and welcoming atmosphere in preschool and school settings.”

I go to lots of schools and pre-schools and can say that they have a positive and welcoming atmosphere. I am glad that that is now recognised by Labour. The fourth recommendation refers to

“high quality, flexible and affordable childcare”.

That requires, in the end, the full powers of independence. I could go on.

We are doing a great deal. I would be delighted to do it cross-party. If we could do it cross-party, then we would do everything that we could do but there would still be a gap to close: the gap of poverty. That gap gets closed once this Parliament has the powers of a normal, independent Parliament.

### **Mental Health Problems (School Pupils)**

**2. Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether teachers and school nurses have the appropriate skills to notice the early signs of mental health problems in primary and secondary school pupils. (S4O-03207)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** Education authorities and other agencies have duties under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended, to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of their pupils. An additional support need can arise for any reason and can be of short-term or long-term duration. Additional support may be required to overcome needs arising from the learning environment, from health or disability issues, from family circumstances or from social and emotional factors. That includes mental health.

**Dennis Robertson:** The minister is probably aware that I have a particular interest in eating disorders. At the end of last year, I was privileged to open a conference raising awareness of eating disorders in schools, which was attended by school nurses and teachers. A programme was subsequently rolled out at Moray House. Does the minister believe that such programmes would enable our teachers and school nurses to be more aware of mental health problems among school pupils? Would he commend that programme to schools?

**Dr Allan:** It is greatly to the member's credit that he raises the issue with such persistence. I certainly acknowledge that the issue of eating disorders and their early detection is profoundly important in schools. Such programmes are therefore encouraged, and nurses are prepared through the competency framework for nursing in

schools. Increasingly, teachers are prepared so that they are aware of the needs of all learners. I commend all those involved in the early detection of eating disorders in schools.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** If mental health issues are identified at nursery, primary or secondary school that require more additional support than what can be given at school—diagnosis, support and treatment—and the parents do not agree with the identification of those mental health issues, what can education authorities do?

**Dr Allan:** One of the focuses of the Government when it comes to dealing with those and other issues among young children is getting it right for every child. It is a matter of ensuring that the relationship between professionals and families exists to overcome early problems. Every school now has a named contact for specialist children and adolescent mental health services. Teachers are increasingly trained to be able to refer people in those sensitive situations to professionals and specialists, who are there to help.

### **Additional Support Needs (Increase)**

**3. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it is having with local authorities about the increase in pupils in primary and secondary schools with additional support needs. (S4O-03208)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** The implementation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 is discussed regularly with local authorities through contact with the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, the Association of Support for Learning Officers and the advisory group for additional support for learning.

The increase in the number of pupils in primary and secondary schools with additional support needs is a result of an extension in the recording and reporting of statistics, rather than a change in the number of pupils receiving support. This year, the advisory group for additional support for learning will consider how to ensure a continued improvement in the way in which we collect additional support needs statistics and in how we can use that information to ensure that the needs of children and young people are met.

**Liz Smith:** The minister will have had sight of a letter that I wrote to the cabinet secretary on Monday this week, reporting back on the seminar that we had on Friday, in which key stakeholders in additional support for learning identified one of the main issues as the insistence by some local authorities that children with additional support

needs have to be in mainstream school when, in fact, that is not in their best interests in every case. What is the Scottish Government doing to influence decisions so that special schools, particularly those in the independent sector, can use their expertise?

**Dr Allan:** The member raises an important issue around the question of inclusion. There is certainly an injunction to include, but the Government has never said at any stage that all children can be included in all mainstream classes. A mixed economy is therefore available. However, it is important to include where inclusion is possible.

To return to a point that I made earlier, we anticipated that there would be an increase in the number of children recorded as having additional support needs because of the way in which the statistics were collected.

There is an injunction to include but not a compulsion to do so in every circumstance.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** The minister will recall that these figures emerged in response to a question that I lodged with him. He will also be aware of wide disparities in the figures for different local authorities; he alluded to that slightly in his response to Liz Smith. What is the thinking about how we can achieve greater consistency in how the figures are collected and how we can ensure that appropriate training is in place for teachers, particularly when the additional support needs are complex in nature?

**Dr Allan:** As I mentioned in my responses to earlier questions, there is increasingly a focus on initial and on-going teacher training to recognise a variety of additional needs and to respond to them. Different local authorities might take different approaches; that is a feature of such services being run locally and of local decision making and local democracy. I am more than happy to discuss any local concerns that the member might wish to bring to me.

#### **Horizon 2020 (Universities)**

**4. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how Scotland's universities will benefit from the European Union's €80 billion horizon 2020 programme. (S4O-03209)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** Scotland's universities and research organisations benefited from the previous research innovation programme, framework programme 7, to the tune of €538 million. With an even larger budget than FP7 had, of around €80 billion, horizon 2020 offers vast opportunities for our world-class universities to benefit to an even greater extent than before. I am therefore encouraging as much engagement with

the programme as I can. I encourage every university and every further and higher education institution to engage, and I encourage members to become familiar with the programme so that they can encourage participation wherever they can.

**Bob Doris:** I am sure that the cabinet secretary will agree that Scotland's universities outperform those in the rest of the United Kingdom in research and innovation and are well placed to benefit from that €80 billion fund. However, is he also aware that the application criteria require partners from three different EU member states to apply for those funds and that, as a consequence of our close partnership with the rest of the UK's academic institutions, an independent Scotland would be able to maximise our ability to reap the benefits of that €80 billion pot of cash, as would England's universities?

**Michael Russell:** Surprisingly, I hear some Labour members laughing at that, but it is yet another wonderful example of the benefits that independence would bring to Scotland. With Scotland as an independent member of the EU and the rest of the UK as an independent member, we already have two countries that could participate. With the addition of a third country, we would have viable programmes.

One of the difficulties with getting three member states to participate is often—[*Interruption.*] Mr Bibby is clearly not interested in this answer; he is talking to someone else. If he were to pay attention, he would discover that one of the difficulties that have existed with this programme has been that we could not make our voice heard over that of the rest of the UK. If we were an independent member state working with the rest of the UK, we would be in an even better situation. I can hardly wait.

#### **Gaelic-medium Schools (Speech and Language Therapy)**

**5. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made towards ensuring that speech and language therapy is available in Gaelic-medium schools. (S4O-03210)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** Good progress has been made recently. That includes an audit commissioned by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the preparation of Gaelic resources for schools, and plans are now in place for an additional support needs speech and language therapy seminar in June for those who work in Gaelic-medium education.

**Angus MacDonald:** I am aware of the Gaelic research conference that will be held at the University of Edinburgh in June, which I hope to

attend. I am also aware that work is being done with NHS Scotland and local authorities. However, it is fair to say that the provision of speech and language therapy for Gaelic pupils around the country is patchy. Will the minister give an assurance that work will continue to ensure that, if required, SLT is available in all GME schools?

**Dr Allan:** I certainly agree about the importance of the issue. With the Government looking at guidance for Gaelic-medium education more widely, I am sure that the issue is one of those that will be covered. It is also relevant to say that although services might not always be provided in Gaelic, a discussion is being held about new resources and the best way of ensuring that Gaelic is used wherever possible.

### University Estate (Investment Plans)

**6. Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what investment it plans to improve the learning experience in its university estate. (S4O-03211)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** Through the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, the Scottish Government is providing £34.8 million of capital funding for our universities in the financial year 2014-15. Total sums invested in university estates this year will be a matter for dialogue between the funding council and individual institutions.

**Christina McKelvie:** The cabinet secretary will agree that the best environments for young people to learn in are the most innovative and most flexible learning environments. Will he agree to meet me and the innovative team at the University of the West of Scotland's Hamilton campus? They have some amazing and aspirational ideas with regard to creating that innovative and flexible learning environment.

**Michael Russell:** I am always happy to meet the local member about the issue and I would be happy to take her up on that offer.

I spent part of Monday afternoon with the leadership team at the University of the West of Scotland, at the facility on the Crichton campus in Dumfries. I was impressed with the work that they are doing, and with their ambitions. I am sure that they have similar ambitions for Hamilton.

We are constrained in terms of capital expenditure, which is one of the prices that we pay for being part of the union. I hope that that will change over a period of time.

I understand that the member has a meeting with representatives of the funding council next week to discuss the Hamilton campus. Following

that, I would be happy to meet her and the team from UWS.

### Curriculum for Excellence (Scots)

**7. Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in support for the use of the Scots language in the curriculum for excellence. (S4O-03212)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** Our ambition is for Scots to be recognised, valued and used in Scottish life and in schools. The teaching and learning of Scots is included in the curriculum for excellence and provides opportunities for children and young people to become confident individuals, giving them knowledge of cultural heritage and a national perspective.

The role of the recently appointed Scots language co-ordinators at Education Scotland will help to support practitioners in teaching Scots while developing Scots in the curriculum and resources.

**Rob Gibson:** I welcome the Scots language co-ordinators to their posts.

Since opportunities to read and use the Scots language can help to develop enthusiasm and motivation for learning, openness to new ideas, self-respect and respect for others—all attributes that fit the curriculum for excellence—are the curriculum for excellence guidelines available to teachers in a clear form that sets up the Scots language in its own right?

**Dr Allan:** The Scots language is located in the languages curriculum area of the curriculum for excellence and, within that, in the literacy and English sections of the experiences and outcomes. Therefore, yes, Scots is identified in that context.

Specific mention is made in the curriculum for excellence of the importance of engaging with a wide range of texts. One of the things that has come to pass without some of the predicted disaster is that young people in Scotland are now quite used to sitting exams that contain Scottish literature and are increasingly enthusiastic about awards in areas such as Scottish studies.

### Independence (Universities)

**8. Colin Keir (Edinburgh Western) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how universities could progress in an independent Scotland. (S4O-03213)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** In an independent Scotland, our excellent and world-



beating higher education sector could further extend its already considerable reach.

Gaining control over the financial levers that drive growth will support more world-class research and innovation. In addition, framing our own immigration policies would help ensure that the brightest international talent is attracted to, and retained by, Scotland's universities.

**Colin Keir:** Does the cabinet secretary agree with Professor Paul Boyle, of Research Councils UK, that international collaborative research is extremely important and that, after independence, that should continue?

**Michael Russell:** I certainly agree with Professor Boyle that an international collaborative approach is extremely important. At the same meeting of the Education and Culture Committee, Professor Petra Wend of Queen Margaret University said:

"academic research is collaborative by nature ... Research does not stretch only to the rest of the UK or Europe but is truly international".—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 25 March 2013; c 3884.]

That is a fair point.

Our universities already have a number of high-profile partnerships with many prominent European partners. For example, the Scottish universities physics alliance has launched the first international Max Planck partnership; the University of Strathclyde is in partnership with the Fraunhofer institute; and the University of Dundee, with its innovative medicines initiative, is in the European lead factory programme.

With independence, we would seek to continue the continuity of a single research area in the United Kingdom, maintaining long-term stability and research funding and systems that support initiatives of scale for Scotland and the UK, collaborating in and supporting what is, and will remain, a world-class research base.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** On what criteria does the Scottish Government judge that the subscription model of university research would be superior to the present UK structure and the amount of money that can be maintained through it?

**Michael Russell:** It is absolutely axiomatic that the excellence of Scottish higher education will win out no matter what. It is desirable that we take part in research councils on the basis of equality and that we keep decision making on research under the Haldane principle—that is a key point.

In all those circumstances, we are talking about an enhancement of a system that has worked so far. There are some elements in the system of which we are critical. Liz Smith will be aware of the way in which drawing postdoctoral research hubs

together in one or two places may damage some of the excellence in Scotland. There needs to be a discussion and an exchange of ideas.

The people who know best about the matter are often those who are doing research. I was immensely heartened to see in *The Herald* just last week 102 or 103 Scottish academics—I am not entirely sure because there were so many—argue that independence was required for Scotland's research activity to achieve the full potential that it can achieve.

## Rural Schools (Supply Teachers)

**9. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that there are enough supply teachers available for rural schools. (S4O-03214)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** It is important that we have the right number of teachers with the right skills in the right places. With that in mind, the Scottish Government undertakes an annual teacher workforce planning exercise, in consultation with other relevant stakeholders, to determine the requirement for newly qualified teachers. The exercise includes provision for supply teachers.

The recent involvement of the University of the Highlands and Islands in teacher education will help the situation. I welcome the decision by the Scottish negotiating committee for teachers to amend the pay arrangements for teachers who undertake short-term supply work, which will also help. However, ultimately, as Rhoda Grant knows, the sourcing of appropriate supply cover is a matter for individual local authorities, as the employers of teachers, to address through their own workforce planning measures.

**Rhoda Grant:** The cabinet secretary will be aware that, due to the shortage in supply teachers, education officials in Moray are having to return to the classroom to teach children. Those shortages are due to some of the issues that he highlighted, such as fewer teachers being trained, so perhaps he will review his workforce planning to ensure that sufficient teachers are being trained. Also, when he reviews the salaries that are paid to supply teachers, will he take into account the rate of salary that would make it attractive for supply teachers to travel to rural and remote schools?

**Michael Russell:** Both those issues have been covered. There being fewer supply teachers is a problem for some local authorities, but that is being addressed by ensuring that more teachers are being trained. I have brought that forward—indeed, this morning, I met representatives of the University of the Highlands and Islands to talk

about its teacher training activity—and I hope that we will be able to continue to take that trend forward.

The problem is also being addressed by ensuring that the change that came about in 2011 with the agreement of the trade unions—Rhoda Grant somehow omitted to say this, but it is important to stress that the SNCT agreement in 2011 was an agreement between all three parties that are part of the negotiating committee—was changed this year in light of the new negotiation to ensure that any disincentives to undertake supply work that existed for some teachers were removed.

Those things are definitely happening and will continue to happen. The situation is beginning to ease and we have managed to resolve the difficulty of the oversupply of teachers—a problem that, as Rhoda Grant knows, can largely be placed at the door of a previous Administration, which trained too many teachers without being able to pay for them.

#### **Childcare Support (Parents Returning to Education, Training or Employment)**

**10. Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to people returning to education, training or employment who have very young children. (S4O-03215)

**The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell):** The Scottish Government is taking a range of action to support parents of young children who are returning to education, training or employment. High-quality flexible, accessible and affordable childcare is a vital source of support for parents who are working, studying or training. That is why the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 will deliver increased and more flexible early learning and childcare. We are also providing record levels of financial support to college students and ensuring that our training programmes are developed to include the support that is necessary for those with very young children.

**Margaret McCulloch:** Parents of children with disabilities face particular challenges when they try to go back to work or education in the early years of their child's life. Can the minister explain why Scottish National Party members of the European Parliament voted against extending maternity leave for parents of disabled children? Does she accept that the SNP's poor voting record in Europe on the rights of working parents does not bode well for the convention on employment—*[Interruption.]*

Does the minister accept that that does not bode not well for the convention on employment

and labour relations that the SNP proposes to create in the event of a yes vote in September?

**Aileen Campbell:** It is important for Margaret McCulloch to recognise that, following a yes vote in September, we will have control over levels of maternity and paternity leave and will be able to ensure that they work in the best interests of children and families.

On the important point about ensuring that we support families with disabled children, I am happy to discuss any points that Margaret McCulloch wishes to raise, or any specific issues that she is tackling on behalf of her constituents. However, her question relates to a reserved issue. That is the crux of the independence argument, which is about ensuring that we in this Parliament have the proper powers to support parents and families, rather than simply making snide political points from the sidelines as Margaret McCulloch does. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Quiet. Can we all calm down a little?

**Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** As an SNP member and the parent of a disabled child, I am very disappointed by the comments that Margaret McCulloch makes in trying to politicise the issue on the grounds of who cares about the parents of disabled children.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A question.

**Mark McDonald:** Does the minister agree that, in order to deliver the transformational flexible childcare that is required, we need—as Professor Sir Donald MacKay has pointed out—control of both sides of the balance sheet? Otherwise, the Scottish Government cannot retain the income that is generated from encouraging people back into the workforce and reinvest it in the way that we would like.

**Aileen Campbell:** Absolutely—the points that Donald MacKay raised are very pertinent indeed, as is the similar point that was made by Bronwen Cohen, the former chief executive of Children in Scotland.

The fact of the matter, as Mark McDonald points out, is that unless we have control of both sides of the balance sheet, we cannot retain the money that will be generated from increased participation in the workforce as a result of providing childcare for those parents who are otherwise unable to get back into work. We will therefore not be able to reinvest that money to create the type of childcare system that will emulate the best in Europe, which is what we will get if we have a yes vote in September.

### **Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Studies (Impact of Decreasing Numeracy)**

**11. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of what impact the reported decreasing levels of numeracy in schools will have on the uptake of so-called STEM subjects in further and higher education. (S4O-03216)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** The Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy is an important addition to our picture of learning and teaching of numeracy in Scotland. Much has been and is being achieved, but there is still progress to be made. We all want every learner to achieve the best possible outcomes.

We are therefore continuing to support the improvement of numeracy levels. We recently announced an extra £1 million funding over three years to expand the local authority numeracy hubs programme, which includes East Lothian's numeracy academy work. That is in addition to on-going support on numeracy for teachers and schools from Education Scotland.

We recognise that a strong grounding in numeracy underpins learning across science, technology, engineering and mathematics—STEM—related subjects. We continue to see high uptake and attainment in science and mathematics qualifications in our schools, which enables young people to make strong transitions to further learning or employment.

**Iain Gray:** In 2011 Skills Development Scotland's "Skills Investment Plan for the Energy Sector" put the issue very succinctly. It said:

"Engineering sectors were more likely than average to report issues in attracting skilled staff".

It stands to reason that fewer pupils doing well in numeracy—which was the finding of the survey that the minister mentioned, although it was hard to make that out from his answer—will mean fewer pupils pursuing science and maths through their academic careers and into their working lives.

The additional Scottish Government funding that was announced is of course very welcome, but it will amount by next year to a 0.0001 per cent increase in the schools budget.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A question, please.

**Iain Gray:** Does the minister really believe that that is an adequate response to such a serious problem?

**Dr Allan:** I hesitate to pick up the member on matters of maths or arithmetic, but he will appreciate that the money concerned is focused

specifically on numeracy, which is important. No one could take away from the fact that the statistics show a dip in performance in second year in schools—I certainly acknowledge that. We have to take that seriously and look at issues to do with the structure and progression in the teaching of numeracy and maths in schools.

However, the member's argument does not stand when he goes on to talk about qualifications, because there has been an increase in the number of school leavers coming out of school with, for instance, higher maths—the figure went up from 19 per cent in 2007-08 to 24 per cent in 2011-12. There is a great deal for us still to do, but the evidence from the qualifications is that the work on numeracy is having a positive effect.

**Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP):** What improvement has there been in pupils' maths performance by the time that they reach the end of their secondary education, and what impact will that have on the uptake of STEM subjects in further and higher education?

**Dr Allan:** I mentioned the improvements in the proportion of school leavers who come out of school with higher maths. It is also worth saying that pass rates for higher maths have remained consistently high. The rate was 72 per cent in 2007-08, which increased to 73 per cent in 2012-13. As I say, I do not take away from the importance of ensuring that we get over the dip in performance in second year, but I stress that the evidence is there in the qualifications that teachers are teaching numeracy, and teaching it well.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 12, in the name of Fiona McLeod, has been withdrawn and a satisfactory explanation has been provided.

### **Independence (University Research Funding)**

**13. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether Scotland's universities will continue to benefit from research funding from outside the country in the event of a yes vote in the independence referendum. (S4O-03218)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** An independent Scotland would continue to attract funding from the research councils into which it had paid as well as from Europe and international sources, based on the international excellence of our universities and our world-class research base. Indeed, we believe that independence will bring opportunities for increased research funding through collaborations with the private sector and with partners in Europe and beyond, which will be facilitated by access to additional financial levers and our greater presence and profile on the world stage as an independent nation state.

When Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski gave evidence to the Education and Culture Committee, he discerned—correctly, I think—the Government’s objective as being to ensure that

“a significant research fund is available to Scotland, equal to or better than what is available now.”—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 25 March 2014; c 3896.]

**Maureen Watt:** The cabinet secretary has alluded to the recent letter to *The Herald* from more than 100 academics, including Professor Bryan MacGregor, the vice-principal of the University of Aberdeen, claiming that independence will allow research to thrive. Is it the case that the no campaign has failed to acknowledge the cumulative erosion of science funding in recent years and its impact on university research, and will an independent Scotland seek to rectify that?

**Michael Russell:** Yes, very much so. One of the fallacies of the no campaign is to try to present a picture in which everything is rosy in the union, when it is far from rosy. Let us look at the issue of pensions, for example, which are being eroded all the time by the union, or let us look at defence jobs, which are being eroded all the time by the union—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Would you like to answer the question?

**Michael Russell:** Presiding Officer, you are quite right—let us look at research. In research, it is the pressure on UK Government spending and the constant pressure from Westminster that are the real threat. People who are cleverer than I am, such as Professor Bryan MacGregor, the vice-principal of the University of Aberdeen and 102 other academics—[*Interruption*.]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please allow the cabinet secretary to be heard.

**Michael Russell:** They are people of real experience in the field, and they have pointed out that the threat to higher education research is indeed from the union and not from independence. The Government has shown our long-term commitment to research and knowledge exchange activities in Scotland by investing £364 million in 2013-14, which is a 38 per cent increase in funding for research and knowledge exchange since 2007. Two thirds of that funding supports the research base in our universities, and it is the type of thing that would be under threat from the union.

#### **European Union Membership (Benefits to Education Sector)**

**14. Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what the benefits to Scotland’s education sector are of being part of the European Union. (S4O-03219)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** Taking higher education as an example—I shall stick to higher education, Presiding Officer—Scotland’s world-renowned universities play an active part in EU programmes such as Erasmus+. Institutions derive benefit from collaborative relationships. The European arena is one where the quality of teaching, learning and research in Scottish universities can be promoted and advanced to extend our global reach and influence.

**Sandra White:** The cabinet secretary and my colleague, Maureen Watt, mentioned the letter signed by more than 100 highly respected academics that rejected the no campaign’s scaremongering on the continuation of cross-border research and funding.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that, given that funding to Scottish universities from Europe has been worth more than €500 million since 2007, and given that we now have the €80 billion horizon 2020 programme, the real threat to research is the United Kingdom Government’s obsession with leaving Europe, rather than playing an important part in it, as an independent Scotland would do?

**Michael Russell:** I whole-heartedly agree with Sandra White. Where wisdom is spoken by Sandra White we should all agree, and she has been very wise on this. We have made it clear, as she has made it clear, that an independent Scotland will want to continue as a committed member of the European Union, which will give it access to those opportunities. The rest of the UK would seek to drag to Scotland out of the EU, which—I have to say yet again—would be an unacceptable price of staying in the union.

#### **Erasmus+**

**15. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** I agree with the cabinet secretary that my colleague, Sandra White, is indeed a very wise woman.

To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had regarding the Erasmus+ programme, which supports young people into lifelong learning and was mentioned in his response to the last question. (S4O-03220)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** Scottish Government officials are working closely with colleagues in the United Kingdom Government and the national agency for Erasmus+, which is jointly run by the British Council and Ecorys UK, to ensure that Scotland’s interests are well represented in delivery of the programme. In recent weeks, Scottish officials have participated in the first cross-governmental programme board

meeting, attended the launch of Erasmus+ and met national agency leads for Scotland.

**James Dornan:** A lot of organisations, including Exchange Scotland, which I have had the pleasure of meeting on a few occasions, support young Scots who want to access opportunities through Erasmus+. What further assistance will be provided to the sector, to ensure that the take-up of those opportunities continues to increase?

**Michael Russell:** Of course, direct representation in Europe would help us on that matter, but we already provide significant support to the voluntary sector, including youth volunteer organisations such as Exchange Scotland.

We will continue to support YouthLink Scotland, the national agency for youth work in Scotland, to work with the British Council and partners to promote international and European youth work and provide guidance on Erasmus+ and other European opportunities for youth workers and young people.

We have also funded the National Union of Students Scotland with £200,000 over the past two years, to deliver a project that worked to increase awareness and uptake of student outward mobility opportunities, including those offered by Erasmus+, and we now have a scheme that supports students to study in Europe.

#### **Independence (Research Councils UK Network)**

**16. Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on Professor Paul Boyle's view that Research Councils UK "strongly supports" an independent Scotland remaining part of the network. (S4O-03221)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** I may have mentioned this earlier this afternoon.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** No!

**Michael Russell:** Indeed—the member says no, but I distinctly remember doing so.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No need to repeat yourself, then.

**Michael Russell:** We welcome the comments from Professor Boyle, chief executive of the Economic and Social Research Council. His comments are consistent with our proposition to maintain a common research area with the rest of the United Kingdom, as outlined in "Scotland's Future" and in the paper "Higher Education Research in an Independent Scotland", which I had the pleasure of launching on 30 April.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Does the cabinet secretary agree with the academics he mentioned earlier—I believe that there were 103 academics—who signed an open letter that highlighted the advantages to university research of a yes vote? They deliberately and clearly pointed out that the only threat to funding for our universities comes from Westminster's cuts agenda.

**Michael Russell:** Yes, I agree.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** It is deeply regrettable that Professor Paul Boyle and Research Councils UK had to issue the following statement:

"The way that the quote attributed to Professor Paul Boyle has been used is misleading in suggesting that the Research Councils support an independent Scotland remaining part of the UK Research Council system. Should there be a vote for independence the current system could not continue."

Does the cabinet secretary regret misrepresenting Professor Boyle, and will he apologise to him for that?

**Michael Russell:** No, I—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can we have a little calm from everyone, please?

**Michael Russell:** I checked the record. Professor Boyle said what he said he said, and the implications of that have been drawn out by a range of people.

What I regret is that Mr Bibby has so little confidence in the research excellence of Scottish universities that he wants to undermine those universities by implying that their excellence would not win out in competition for funding. That is the problem that we have.

I am sure that the professor can speak for himself—indeed, he did so at the Education and Culture Committee, and he said what he said.

#### **Educational Attainment Gap**

**17. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to address the educational attainment gap between children from different social backgrounds. (S4O-03222)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell):** As I said in my response to John Lamont earlier, only with the full economic powers of independence will we be able to do everything that is required to tackle the root causes of poverty and close the attainment gap.

Our commitment to improving attainment has a firm foundation in all our key policies and programmes that affect children and young people, including curriculum for excellence,

teaching Scotland's future, getting it right for every child, the early years framework and opportunities for all. Those policies clearly set out what needs to be done—and is being done—to support every child and young person's successful learning journey.

We are working to ensure that teachers and school leaders have the right skills and experience to deliver improved outcomes for all children and young people, including those who are most disadvantaged.

**Kezia Dugdale:** I was disappointed by the minister's response to the report, "Mind the Gap: Tackling Educational Inequality in Scotland", given the calibre of the people from across the education community who were involved in it. Earlier, the minister selectively quoted recommendation 3, which is about the link between the educational attainment of the parent and the development of the child. What work is the Scottish Government doing on the area, given that he said that work is going on?

**Michael Russell:** I encourage the member to go to, for example, Bellshill academy, where I went some weeks ago and where I saw excellent work being done, involving parents and the whole school, to bear down on the issue of attainment and ensure, by using data and working with individual young people and parents, that we make a difference.

I encourage the member to reflect on what is actually happening, instead of talking about the issue while not knowing what is happening. If she reflects on what is actually happening, she will see that huge progress is being made.

I would welcome the support that would come from the Labour Party in that regard. If the Labour Party wants to support what is taking place to improve attainment, I will be delighted to see it on side—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Michael Russell:** If the Labour Party were on side with that, we could do even more than we are currently doing. That would be a prize to have.

Let us observe what is happening, and then let us work together to ensure that even more of it happens. Producing a report that simply talks about things we might want to happen, without reflecting on what is actually going on, is not a very good idea.

## **"Time to Shine" Youth Arts Strategy**

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

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-10033, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the "Time to Shine" youth arts strategy.

14:42

**The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop):** I am pleased to open this debate on Scotland's first ever youth arts strategy.

I strongly believe that music, dance, art, literature and theatre are all keys that unlock profound human understanding and accomplishment in our young people, and offer them an opportunity to see life with a wider perspective and through a different lens.

Even more important, the creative arts are the measure and reflection of our nation. The moral values that we treasure are reflected in the beauty and truth that are emotionally transmitted through the arts. The harshness and, at times, cruelty of life can also be expressed. The arts say something to future generations about us and about what kind of nation we have been and want to be.

In November 2013 we launched "Time To Shine: Scotland's Youth Arts Strategy For Ages 0 to 25". The strategy is comprehensive and practical. It is centred around three key themes: creating and sustaining engagement, nurturing potential and talent, and developing infrastructure and support. It was developed for young people and is heavily influenced by their experiences and wishes.

The strategy reinforces culture's wider benefits for, and positive impact on, the development of our young people and their communities. It makes explicit the already well-established links between culture, education, youth employment and personal development. It will not only enhance access for all Scotland's young people, but will create career pathways for Scotland's talent of the future—be it on stage, on the screen, behind the scenes or in our world-leading creative industries.

Most important of all, this engagement with culture will nurture personal qualities that will help our young people to grow confidently as citizens, and to realise their ambitions, wherever they may lie.

The strategy builds on the strong foundation of a vibrant and forward-thinking youth arts sector that is already the envy of much of Europe. We are exceptional in having a range of national youth

arts companies for theatre, music and dance, and we benefit from many energetic and visionary stakeholders including Sistema Scotland and Fèisean nan Gàidheal.

Curriculum for excellence recognises that the expressive arts provide opportunities to underpin and enrich learning in all other curriculum areas. Indeed, many young people learn their own traditional music, dance and stories within the curriculum or through other more informal projects.

Creative Scotland, which is our national agency for the arts, screen and the creative industries, is not taking forward the work in isolation. The “Time to Shine” strategy builds upon and draws alongside itself two already exceptionally successful youth arts programmes. Cashback for creativity is part of the Scottish Government’s cashback for communities programme, which reinvests the proceeds of crime into communities to benefit Scotland’s young people. In the past three years, the programme has invested £2.25 million to provide opportunities to participate in arts activities for young people who would not normally have access to them. I recently saw an excellent example of that at the Howden Park centre, as young people showcased a film that they had made. It was an A to Z of Broxburn detailing things that they like about the town, things that they like to do, things that they do not like and would change, and some of their aspirations. It was a wonderful illustration of the power of culture to engage and inspire young people, to encourage them to look beyond their boundaries and to raise their expectations and ambitions.

Creative Scotland has also recently announced the launch of the youth music initiative’s 2014 programme. I have once again prioritised and maintained the funding for that important initiative with an overall fund of £10 million for the coming year. It will support Scotland’s children by fostering and developing their musical skills and unlocking their creative potential.

The broader youth arts sector is also doing much to engage with and develop young people. Starting this month, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra will provide a comprehensive orchestrated music access programme to primary and secondary schools throughout Scotland. In terms of scale and choice, RSNO engage for schools is the first programme of its kind in the UK.

Another exciting project is Sistema Scotland’s big noise orchestra, whose projects in Raploch and Govanhill continue to be successful. Members will recall that, when Maestro Abreu, the founder of the El Sistema movement in Venezuela, visited Raploch with the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela for the big concert in 2012, he invited big noise to visit Venezuela.

Following that, 52 children visited Caracas in January 2014, where they studied alongside their Venezuelan contemporaries and performed a live concert in one of the city’s foremost concert halls. An excellent BBC documentary about that visit was shown recently.

We must not forget our wonderful national youth performing companies. The National Youth Choir of Scotland enjoyed another strong season and, this Saturday, will take part in the “Going for Gold” concert at the Glasgow royal concert hall. That will be a wonderful musical celebration of inspiration, ambition and talent ahead of Glasgow 2014.

The National Youth Orchestras of Scotland enjoyed another very successful summer tour. They were joined this time by the distinguished conductor Christopher Seaman and the brilliant award-winning violinist Alina Pogostkina. I am sure that they not only brought great joy to their audiences, but will have developed as musicians by working with such world-class talents.

The national youth jazz orchestra of Scotland has also gone from strength to strength, with storming performances at the London jazz festival in November and a sophisticated interpretation of the work of Miles Davis at the Aberdeen jazz festival in March.

We want every young person to benefit from and to be enriched by culture, which is why we conducted a national discussion on the youth arts. The expertise, knowledge and sheer passion of the nearly 2,000 stakeholders who contributed were critical in shaping the “Time to Shine” strategy. Their views were varied and there were areas of contention, yet there was also a clear consensus among all those whom we consulted—the young people, supporters, artists, organisers, deliverers and funders—that to become an international leader in youth arts we must put young people at the heart of what we do.

“Time to Shine” seeks to achieve that by removing the barriers—physical, social or economic—that prevent young people from growing, developing and realising their potential through the arts as creators, professionals or young enthusiasts. I am pleased to note the progress that “Time to Shine” has made in the short time since its November 2013 launch.

Last month saw the announcement of £3.1 million funding for a network of regional youth arts hubs across the country, which delivers a manifesto commitment. That is part of the £5 million funding that has been awarded to Creative Scotland from the Scottish Government’s young Scots fund and will, over the next two years, support initiatives based on the key “Time to Shine” objectives.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** The cabinet secretary has—quite rightly—drawn attention to the big noise projects in Raploch and Govanhill. However, she will recall that a while ago the Education and Culture Committee took evidence from Creative Scotland in which it conceded that difficulties exist in expanding access to the broad range of arts and culture beyond those who already have such interactions. Can she point to any examples that suggest that the new initiatives might make more progress than we have been able to make to date?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Yes, I can. The youth arts hubs will be driven by young people; there is something about peer-to-peer encouragement. We can incentivise and encourage young people—I mentioned a lot of our national companies going into schools—but young people's enthusiasm in working with each other will make it easier to build bridges to communities that would not otherwise experience the arts. Perhaps more is going on than most of us in the chamber realise; indeed, we might not describe some of the initiatives as “art” or “culture”. I look forward to Patricia Ferguson's speech, because a deep range of initiatives exist—we just have to make sure that we provide the energy, the commitment and the resource to help to make better connections. I will come on later to ideas about how we will do that.

Acting as focal points for regional youth arts delivery, the hubs are intended to nurture and celebrate ambition, enthusiasm and talent by improving the regional infrastructure. Young people will be central to the decision-making process and to development of the youth arts hubs.

As I have said, the strategy builds on a strong and flourishing sector. Creative Scotland, in considering hubs, was faced with many difficult decisions. Such was the interest in the new youth arts hubs that not all applications could be accepted. I am aware that Creative Scotland has plans for a regional intervention fund to be used to address geographical gaps in national coverage of the hub funding, for example in the south of Scotland and the Western Isles. Creative Scotland will continue to engage with all the partners. The quality of the bids means that many will come back as mainstream applications to Creative Scotland. The youth arts hubs are most definitely designed to enhance what exists and to fill gaps in provision, to create great connectivity and to build a voice for youth arts. I hope that they will also grow an appetite for enhanced provision.

Central to delivery of the strategy is the understanding that young people must be at centre of the process. However, we must also adapt to the new and different ways in which they live their lives. Young people communicate and

express themselves in ways that are, I am sure, beyond the ken of a few members of the Parliament. We have to be attuned to the social media that they use and how they are shaping the internet according to their own means and values in cultural matters. Therefore, I am pleased that the strategy places such a strong emphasis on using new and emerging technologies to create virtual as well as physical ways to connect young people to projects, activities, events and initiatives that will inspire and invigorate.

I am pleased that the strategy is moving so quickly. I have mentioned that the £3.5 million youth arts development fund is exploring new and innovative models of youth arts provision across a range of art forms. In Edinburgh and the Lothians, the creative mix/youth hive hub will develop creative apprenticeships, traineeships and work experience opportunities for young people, alongside a hive of networked and staged multi-arts activities.

Meanwhile, Fèis Rois will work with partners to deliver the highland youth arts hub, which will include the development of a new youth arts strategy specifically for the Highlands. Creative Scotland has also appointed a youth arts programme manager who will manage the creation of the youth arts programme management team. The team will co-ordinate the implementation programme of the “Time To Shine” strategy over the two-year scope of the youth arts hub development fund.

I am also pleased to be able to announce today that Creative Scotland is working in partnership with Young Scot to establish a national youth arts advisory group that will be made up of young volunteers aged from 14 to 21. Young Scot is recruiting and will support a core group of 15 young people from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds across Scotland, who will represent the core youth art forms in “Time to Shine”. That group will meet for the first time in August. Those young people will be provided with a training programme to develop and enhance their leadership skills, and they will work with Creative Scotland to advise on the implementation and development of “Time to Shine” and provide a direct peer-to-peer link with the regional youth engagement initiatives that are being led by the youth arts hubs.

As I have mentioned, our youth arts sector is already the envy of much of Europe. However, I am happy to see that there has already been further international interest in “Time To Shine”. In fact, just last December, I met officials from the Danish Ministry of Culture who were very impressed with “Time To Shine” and, in particular, with the innovative and ambitious way that we are



communicating it, including our well-received graphic novel.

The Scottish Government believes that our culture is of us all and for us all, and that we should all have the opportunity and the enthusiasm to participate in art and culture. Our duty is to encourage our young people and children, regardless of their class, their background or where they live, to learn a love of culture, a curiosity about culture and the value of culture. As we know, immersion in cultural activity can help to bolster the resilience and wellbeing of communities and individuals, and nowhere is that more important than in our children and young people—in our future.

This is investment that we are only too happy and pleased to make. After all, a nation that treats the arts as the province of a few gifted children, or that views them only as recreation and entertainment, is a nation that does not care for its future. Culture is a nation's most precious heritage, because it is in our works of art that we reveal to ourselves and others the inner vision that guides us as a nation.

I firmly believe that, when it comes to the future of our young people, it is better for political parties to reach a consensus, so I look forward to hearing members' views on this most important of issues.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of *Time to Shine*, the arts strategy to support Scotland's children and young people to flourish through culture and creativity; recognises the excellent work carried out across youth arts to support young people engaged with culture and creativity; congratulates Scotland's youth arts organisations and companies, in particular the National Youth Choir of Scotland, the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland, Y-Dance, the Scottish Youth Theatre, the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; also recognises the many young people involved in the work of Scotland's national performing companies, the National Theatre of Scotland, Scottish Ballet, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Scottish Opera, and notes the continued importance of collaboration, working with local government and other parties to ensure that participation, creativity, talent development and cultural expression are developed now and in the future.

14:56

**Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab):** Although it has been quite a long time in gestation, I very much welcome "Time to Shine: Scotland's Youth Arts Strategy for ages 0 to 25". I believe that the strategy is good, but I wonder whether it goes far enough and whether it adequately reflects the ambition and dynamism that Scotland's young people so often demonstrate and which the young contributors to the consultation clearly exhibited. However, I will come back to that.

First of all, I want to look at where we are and at the support that exists to encourage young people to start out on a lifelong journey with the arts. As we know, children who were born in Scotland over the past twelve years or so are likely to have been supplied with a bookbug bag—I always find that phrase slightly challenging—to encourage their parents to begin their interest in words and pictures and the sound of the spoken word at an early age. They should also have had the opportunity to try out a musical instrument while at primary school in order to begin to nurture a lifelong interest in music and, we hope, to encourage them to be active listeners or, where they have the talent or interest, active participants in the performance or production of music. Equally, they might have enjoyed dance or drama as part of their active schools experience and found it to be something that they wished to pursue.

For many years, young people with particular interests or talents have had the opportunity to play or perform with the National Youth Choir of Scotland, the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland, YDance, the Scottish Youth Theatre or the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland. Those organisations, many of whose performances I have taken great delight in, have helped to develop their talent in those media.

We are fortunate in Scotland to have so many dedicated organisations that can help to nurture such talent and ensure that young people who have access to them can develop their ability. The national performing companies also do excellent work by going into schools and developing a love of music and drama in the young people with whom they work. Anyone who has witnessed the resulting performances cannot fail to admire either the dedication of the professionals or the sheer joy of the pupils who participate.

Ultimately, of course, we have the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, which helps to hone the skills of those whose talents will lead them to the performing arts. Seats of learning such as the conservatoire build the confidence of their students not only by exposing them to opportunities that will help to develop their talents but by offering them the best possible education in their chosen field.

In addition—perhaps uniquely—we have Fèisean nan Gàidheal and Sistema Scotland. Fèisean nan Gàidheal nurtures and promotes our native instruments, music and language and helps to ensure that they continue to be relevant. As the cabinet secretary has rightly identified, the work that is being done in Raploch and now in Govanhill by Sistema is also excellent and reaches young people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to enjoy and be involved in the making

of high-quality music. As the cabinet secretary knows, I would dearly love to see Sistema's big noise orchestra being rolled out across other communities in Scotland—beginning, of course, with mine. That is an aspiration that I am sure many members share, such is our admiration for the project, but as Liam McArthur rightly pointed out, it might not be practical to do that. We must consider how we can give other young people such important opportunities.

The strategy barely mentions the work that is being done by Scotland's colleges and universities. Many colleges are working in music and drama and in the practical subjects that support performance, such as sound engineering, to name but one, although as college places have been cut in recent years, many of the courses that specialise in the arts have, unfortunately, suffered.

Similarly, the colleges and universities that support students of the visual arts do not seem to merit much of a mention in the strategy either, despite the fact that many of our Scottish institutions have excellent reputations and are renowned internationally. It seems to me that we are missing an opportunity to encourage those institutions to collaborate with one another and to ensure that they all contribute to the agenda.

Local arts organisations such as Toonspeak Young People's Theatre do marvellous work in Glasgow, often with young people for whom going to the theatre would not be a regular occurrence. They produce marvellous, inspiring, challenging and sometimes wacky but always interesting performances in which some of the most enthusiastic and talented actors take part—many of whom had no idea until a few short weeks before they took to the stage that they had an interest, never mind a talent, in that direction.

Depot Arts in my constituency provides a safe space for young people to meet and to create, but it does so such that I am sure that most of the young people who are involved do not immediately think of it as an arts organisation; it is simply a place that they enjoy going to, where they will be sure of a warm welcome and the opportunity to do something that is interesting and fun. Depot Arts is an arts organisation but, at its heart, it is a community arts organisation that is firmly rooted in its community and which is acutely aware of what its audience needs and how best that should be delivered. On the surface, it can sometimes look as though that is easy to do but, in fact, it takes great skill to pull it together and to make it a success.

I recently had a very interesting meeting with people from Depot Arts. They told me that they hope to provide a forum in which issues to do with the referendum could be discussed in the form of a rap battle. I think that they took one look at me

and thought that I believed that that was a crazy and dreadful idea. Frankly, I did until I realised that they did not expect me to participate—or, at least, I do not think that they do.

My point is that such organisations should be part of the educational offer that is available to our young people. They can sometimes approach issues in ways that the rest of us and the other institutions in Scotland will miss, not because they are negligent or deficient in any way, but because not everyone fits a particular mould. To me, that explains the joy and the wonder of organisations such as Depot Arts and Toonspeak. There are many others like them up and down the country. They must be part of our strategy because as they have a unique insight into the lives of many of our young people—in particular the young people whose opportunity to enjoy the arts would otherwise be extremely limited. They do a wonderful job in performing as they do.

My point is that our national youth performing arts companies are excellent organisations, but they are not the only ones that work with young people. If the strategy is to work, we must ensure that it is as inclusive as possible. I think that the performing companies would agree with me; they recognise that talent and interest must be nurtured and that all young people should be involved.

The strategy document makes the point that gender, race or circumstances should not prevent young people from having opportunities. Unfortunately, gender, race and the many other issues that beset our country prevent too many of our young people from having their fair share of what is available to their peers.

Scottish Labour firmly believes in the concept of art for art's sake, but we also recognise that exposure to and immersion in the arts can help to ensure good mental and physical health, break down barriers between groups of young people and help our schools and colleges to be the exciting and dynamic places that we all want them to be.

Some young people's involvement in the arts will provide a lifelong opportunity for enjoyment and challenge. For those with a talent or a skill, it might also provide a career. We should consider how we can encourage artists and performers to mentor young people who have an interest in the arts in order to allow them to achieve their full potential.

This morning, the cabinet secretary and I took part in a question and answer session about independence with the publishing industry. I say to her that, before the contribution from the floor that questioned whether we are doing enough to encourage young people to look towards a career in the creative industries, I had already planned to

talk about the issue. That questioner had a valid point. Is it possible to provide more apprenticeships in the arts? I know that there are 22 across Scotland, but given how vibrant our arts sectors are, surely we can do better, especially when we have identified that the creative industries are very important to our national economy.

Anyone who knows me will know that I firmly believe in the arts as a force for good in Scotland in many areas. I very much welcome the strategy as a contribution to the effort, but I would like us to be a little more ambitious.

I move amendment S4M-10033.1, to insert at end:

“; considers that all young people, whether engaged with arts organisations or not, should have the opportunity to achieve their potential and to enjoy the transformational nature of the arts, and welcomes the contribution made by local arts organisations to the lives of young people and to their communities across Scotland.”

15:06

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** We thoroughly agree with the cabinet secretary that this is a seminal moment in the arts for young people. We fully support the “Time to Shine” strategy and the accompanying investment from the Scottish Government, plus the Young Scot initiative that the cabinet secretary has announced. We will support the motion and the amendment in Patricia Ferguson’s name.

For many years, Scotland has been renowned for its arts and culture. Notwithstanding some important questions—the cabinet secretary is aware that I have concerns about the strategic direction of one or two of our senior arts bodies—it is encouraging to see the progress that is being made with the youth bodies.

We have an impressive youth arts structure, which encompasses bodies such as the National Youth Choir of Scotland. I heard the choir recently in the Usher hall; it is on a par with and is probably better than many of its senior counterparts, not just in Scotland but around the world—it is phenomenal. We also have the Scottish Youth Theatre, the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland, Scottish Youth Dance and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, which all facilitate young people’s engagement with the arts on a professional basis.

Patricia Ferguson makes a good point that the whole responsibility must not fall just on those bodies; it should also fall on local arts bodies and schools. She also made a good point about colleges and universities. The cabinet secretary mentioned that the imagination, creativity and communication that young people have are not

necessarily for other generations. We must listen carefully to what they are saying.

The strategic review offers the opportunity to plan for the longer term and to ensure that children and young people from all backgrounds have the opportunity to express themselves artistically and to engage with Scotland’s rich cultural heritage. I note that participation, progression and provision are the three main themes of “Time to Shine”. They are all laudable, but I cannot help feeling that their order is a little jumbled. Increased participation would follow better from improved provision—otherwise, we run the risk of trying to broaden engagement without first expanding the facilities.

I hope that the nine youth arts hubs, which I understand will span the length of Scotland from the Highlands down to Ayrshire in the south-west, will be created as soon as possible and will provide youngsters with a platform to explore a range of arts within a clearly articulated national and regional policy. That is a crucial point.

The rich diversity of Scotland’s cultural landscape is much to be cherished and celebrated, but I think it is fair to say that, in terms of raw opportunities, people in Edinburgh, Glasgow and the surrounding areas have often had access to a much broader range of cultural organisations and performances than people in other areas. Although there is much to celebrate, we must do everything that we can to ensure that the arts in the broadest sense of the term do not become the preserve of our major cities but instead have a strong presence right across the country.

That is difficult because there are economies of scale and a high concentration in the cities has led to some notable successes. We all take immense pride that three of the four nominees for this year’s Turner prize, the shortlist for which was announced just a few weeks ago, studied at the Glasgow School of Art. That outstanding achievement is made all the more remarkable by the fact that it merely cements Glasgow’s reputation as the pre-eminent centre for the visual arts in the UK. Three Turner prize recipients in the past decade, Simon Starling, Richard Wright and Martin Boyce, are Glasgow School of Art alumni, and two more, Martin Creed and Susan Philipsz, were brought up in the city—something that I note has not been lost on the organisers of the Commonwealth games cultural programme.

The broader point is that academic research consistently reveals a strong link between exposure to the arts and participation in them in the longer run. Published in 2010, “Starting Young? Links Between Childhood and Adult Participation in Culture and Science” was a literature review, commissioned by the Scottish

Government, of how early exposure is connected to long-term participation in cultural and scientific activities. Several reports, including the “Taking Part” survey commissioned by Department for Culture, Media and Sport, have found strong links between childhood involvement in the arts and participation as adults.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am pleased that the member cited that research. The key thing is that this is about participation. It is not just about people being audience members when they are young; it is about participating, which means that we need to take a far more hands-on, participative approach to our youth arts strategy.

**Liz Smith:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that intervention. She is absolutely right. If I am not mistaken, I think that that was also reflected in the findings of some Dutch research that was done on the issue.

That suggests that, in order to meet one of the “Time to Shine” strategy’s key aims, which is to address cultural inequalities, the focus needs to be just as much on parents and families as it is on children. Last night in the Parliament, we heard strong evidence about the success of young people in sport where there is a commitment between them and the whole family to a particular activity—in that case, it was swimming—especially in our most deprived communities. Given the outstanding success of Sistema Scotland, which the cabinet secretary spoke about, that is perhaps one of the biggest lessons that we can learn for the overall strategy. Although there are merits in innovations such as the proposed youth arts ambassador scheme as a tool to encourage broader participation in the arts and encourage peer engagement, we need to add on that family dimension, because it certainly gives youngsters confidence.

In order to address cultural inequalities, the appeal of the arts has to be broadened. That is about not just families but the whole community aspect. That community engagement is one of the things that I have been most encouraged about recently, particularly in the non-city areas of Scotland. It is all about Scotland’s civic wellbeing, which Richard Holloway brought up at the Education and Culture Committee on 22 April. He spoke very meaningfully about the intrinsic value of the arts, which the cabinet secretary has mentioned in several key speeches, and trying to balance that when there are potential economic benefits.

We fully support the stated goals of the “Time to Shine” strategy. Particularly when it comes to broadening engagement, it is important that youth arts are not treated in isolation but are part of a bigger national strategy. We are happy to support both the motion and the amendment.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** We turn to the open debate. I can give members up to seven minutes for speeches.

15:14

**Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):** Last week, we celebrated the value of our fantastic youth workers in improving young people’s life chances across Scotland. Today, I am delighted to speak on the arts strategy to support Scotland’s children and young people to flourish through culture and creativity.

In recognising the positive impact that the arts and creativity can have, the Government is working in collaboration with many others to achieve the aims of the youth arts strategy. The cabinet secretary spoke about the network of regional youth arts hubs across the country. That collaborative approach works through partnerships between local and national arts and youth services providers. Access to youth arts for all across the many communities of Scotland—remote, rural and urban communities—is vital for our young people.

A lot is happening at national level, and we punch well above our weight in the arts, culture and creativity. The decision of the National Theatre of Scotland to have no stage of its own has created a spirit of freedom of space that redefines what national theatre can be about. Scotland is the stage for the national theatre, and that has pulled down barriers and allowed more creative thinking about how we can develop the arts in Scotland.

Like many in the chamber, I dragged my children to see a play that has been seen by tens of thousands of people across three continents and which has won 22 awards, including four Laurence Olivier awards—for best director, best theatre choreography, best play and best sound design. In fact, the National Theatre of Scotland won its first US award when the New York Drama Critics’ Circle named that play—“Black Watch”—best foreign play.

At last year’s festival of politics here in the Parliament, I saw the Scottish Youth Theatre perform “Now’s The Hour”. I know that other members present in the chamber went to that performance. We were very touched by it and surprised by its quality, the quality of delivery and the creativity and imagination of the young people involved. In the past few years, I have participated in many debates to inform the people of Scotland about the decision that they will make on 18 September this year, but none of those debates were as inspirational or informative as the play “Now’s The Hour”, which was created by our young people.

The “Time to Shine” youth arts strategy recognises the fantastic input of our young people and builds on it. Like the National Theatre of Scotland, the Scottish Youth Theatre is working with local government and other parties to ensure that participation, creativity, talent development and cultural expression are developed now and in the future across Scotland. The Scottish Youth Theatre is particularly best placed to work on curriculum for excellence as the company’s ethos is focused on creating confident individuals, successful learners, effective contributors and responsible citizens. Of course, many of our young people, some of whom are here today, will have the right to contribute as responsible citizens when voting in September.

For people in the north-east, which is the region that I represent, the Scottish Youth Theatre is holding weekly classes at His Majesty’s Theatre in Aberdeen. The sessions are open to anyone regardless of previous experience, and they are a fantastic way to build self-confidence, which like creativity and partnership is a quality that our young people need whether or not they will be involved in the arts in their working lives thereafter.

In particular, marginalised young people and children from diverse cultural backgrounds—like me and my children—will use the new youth arts hubs for Aberdeen and the north-east. I agreed with Ben Torrie, director of programming and creative projects for Aberdeen Performing Arts, when he said that the new hub will harness the energy and creative potential of young people in the region through an inclusive, innovative and engaging programme of youth arts activity that is shaped and driven by the participants. It is very important that it is shaped and driven by the young people.

Another local partner in the north-east hub is the Station House Media Unit, which is called SHMU in the north-east. This charity, established in 2003, is one of the core cultural organisations in Aberdeen and is at the forefront of community media development in Scotland, supporting residents in the seven regeneration areas of the city in radio and video production, traditional and online publications, music production and digital inclusion.

The organisation supports marginalised young people through its employability and training arm. It runs positive transitions, an employability course open to 16 to 19-year-olds from Aberdeen city who are not in education, employment or training. The course runs for 12 weeks. I have been twice to listen to young people who went through the course, and they made their families very proud and proved that arts, culture and creativity can change our young people’s lives for the better.

There is a lot of good work to build on, and efforts are being made to recognise the importance of collaboration—working with local government and the third sector to ensure that participation, creativity, talent development and cultural expression are developed now and in the future.

The Government is putting the young people of Scotland at the heart of Scotland’s creative future. I could give many examples, but I do not have time to do so. I will, however, speak about Woodend Barn in Banchory, whose creative learning programme provides opportunities for development across a broad range of social groups, with events ranging from film-making workshops for young people to arts-and-crafts workshops. Such initiatives are very important. They are community based, and they respond very well to the needs of young people in rural areas. I am pleased to use them often—not to participate, unfortunately, but to see what young people are providing in our rural areas.

Scotland also has a global reach, and we want our young people to learn from other cultures and to perform across the world. At Aberdeen’s Beach ballroom in March this year, I was invited by Aberdeen councillor Jim Kiddie to the fundraising dinner held by Friends of Aberdeen International Youth Festival, which has been running for more than 40 years and which is another partner of the new youth arts hub. The money that was raised went to support not only young artists from across the north-east of Scotland but also those from developing regions in Africa, Asia and South America.

“Time to Shine” is Scotland’s first-ever youth arts strategy. It is further proof that the Scottish Government believes that public funding of the arts is fundamentally good.

15:21

**Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I thank the Scottish Government for holding this debate on the “Time to Shine” strategy. For generations, the arts, alongside education, have been the great equaliser, which have allowed people to prosper on merit and on talent rather than by their background. The benefits of that go beyond making a career in the arts. Taking part in an artistic pursuit allows a young person to grow and to develop skills—the soft skills that we talk about so much—which stand them in good stead for later life.

I note that the substantive recommendations of the report total only two pages. I look forward to hearing more about the detail. For contrast, the Northern Irish equivalent, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland’s “Youth Arts Strategy 2013 -

2017", totals more than 30,000 words, including eight pages examining our system here in Scotland. It is an analysis of the Northern Irish cultural situation in comparative perspective, and it is perhaps something that we could have pursued further.

Although I will welcome many of the aspects of the "Time to Shine" strategy in my speech, I wish that the Government had provided more information about how the initiatives will take shape over the two years, and especially about how the strategy's goals will interact with the curriculum for excellence.

In Fife, a participative approach is being taken to developing the arts. Having listened to feedback from children, Fife Council has recently approved a match-funding agreement, working alongside voluntary organisations and charitable trusts, to further the work of the ground-breaking Alhambra theatre in Dunfermline. The theatre now employs a dedicated youth development officer. It has doubled the capacity of its annual summer stage school and is maintaining regular drama classes, which will support 180 young people every week.

The Alhambra's focus is entirely on promoting confidence, teamwork, equality and social skills among young people. Crucially, its classes are entirely flexible to fit in with the varying ways of life of different young people across Fife. That is the perfect example of how the arts should be supported by government. We should be working in partnership with organisations that are already rooted in our communities, rather than adopting a top-down approach with rigid guidelines. I am glad that the Scottish Government's "Time to Shine" strategy reflects my concerns in this regard and that it gives a lot of leeway to groups to shape their own strategy.

I will talk a little about the value of musical tuition. My own area, Fife, has a long-standing tradition of supporting youth orchestras and groups, and I hope that the proposed national youth arts consortium will offer a way of sharing that expertise with other areas.

One of my proudest moments as a councillor was when I was present for a performance by the Kelty and Blairadam pipe band at the highland games in Pitlochry. It was through tailored support from Fife Council that those young people were able to get the tuition and mentoring that enabled them to perform on a national stage. I am glad to see that local authorities will be key partners of the youth arts hub, as the experience and knowledge that they can provide is truly valuable.

Recently I have learned of the work of pioneering organisations such Create at Cloud, which is based in Dunfermline and which does excellent work in supporting young people's

involvement in new creative industries such as film production. As that demonstrates, culture is no longer static; it is inherently interactive, and I will closely follow the Government's exploration of how technology can be used to further engagement with the arts. I note the aim to set up a national digital platform, and again I look forward to seeing the detail on the exact role that that will play in furthering the cultural offering for young people in Scotland.

I am also glad to see that national bodies such as Theatre Workshop Scotland will be included as partners of the youth arts hubs across the country. Theatre Workshop Scotland produced the excellent "The Happy Lands" film in Fife with support from Creative Scotland through the national lottery, with funding from Fife Council, and in association with BBC Scotland. I visited the set of the film and was struck by the range of skills and experience which local people of all ages were having the chance to show. As well as performance skills, local people were involved in technical and production skills such as set building, make-up and costumes. It was a great experience for everyone who took part, and they produced a film that went on to be successful on the world stage.

The skeletal proposals to establish an arts award scheme and a national mentoring programme are to be welcomed, and I am sure that members will join me in supporting the Scottish Government proposals that should have social mobility and equality at their core. I hope that the Scottish Government ensures that those programmes will work together to properly concentrate support where it will provide the most benefit. I also call on the Government to ensure that any roles that are created through the new youth employment initiative are paid roles to make sure that they are available to all. I am sure that I have the support of many members in making a call on the Government to have social good in mind when it is putting some meat on the bones of these proposals.

Beyond that, one point about the entire strategy has been troubling me, and I would like the minister to address it either when she concludes the debate or in writing later. At various points of the strategy, the minister has identified that one of the priorities of the "Time to Shine" report was to enable participation in the arts to lead to professional careers. I whole-heartedly support that aim, but is it not true that many people get involved in the arts through college courses? Does it not strike the minister as a little odd to have that as a priority at the same time as chipping away many of the chances that individuals have to turn their love of the creative arts into a career? I would appreciate it if the minister could clarify whether she sees any contradiction there and will work with

us to ensure that links from hobby to career remain through the further education sector.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before we move on with the debate, I take this opportunity to remind members that they should be in the chamber for the majority of the debate and, at the very least, for two speeches after their own speech.

15:27

**Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the publication of the youth arts strategy, which the cabinet secretary has highlighted as the first ever publication of such a strategy in Scotland. It is a comprehensive and ambitious document that matches our ambition for young people in the arts.

I am sure that we all recognise that we already have a successful and thriving youth arts culture in Scotland. Perhaps the fèis movement is the best example of work that is already being done in Scotland. However, the strategy takes us far further. It recognises the social, economic, and health benefits of the arts, which can be life changing for our young people.

I will concentrate on Scotland's future, so members will not be surprised if I turn to the section of the strategy document that is entitled "How We'll Get There". There are seven principles listed in that section. I might not be able to speak to them all today, but they set out very well how the strategy can be taken forward. Principle 1 is:

"Place young people at the centre of the strategy's aims and ambitions, but also at the centre of plans to deliver the strategy."

We have already demonstrated that principle by developing the strategy, and I commend the work that Creative Scotland did in engaging with stakeholders on the strategy, and in inviting young people from across Scotland to contribute to and engage with that development and to do an animated presentation on their contributions, which can be seen on the Creative Scotland website. I therefore have every confidence that the principle will bear fruit, and that our young people will continue to be at the heart of how we implement these policy priorities.

Principle 2 is:

"Work within the curriculum for excellence and the other policy frameworks that support young people."

That is key. Curriculum for excellence will be transformational in how we deliver education to our young people. I believe that keeping what we are doing at the heart of curriculum for excellence will be a great asset to Scotland's future.

I have to disagree with Patricia Ferguson, because the strategy says under principle 2:

"Further and Higher Education have a similarly important role in deepening and extending the skills and thinking of our young people."

That demonstrates that, far from our colleges and higher education institutions not being included in the strategy, they are key to it.

**Patricia Ferguson:** The point that I made was that they did not rate much of a mention. They are mentioned once, and that point is not really developed and followed up. All that I was saying is that I would like that to be much more integrated into the strategy. I appreciate that the strategy is only just kicking off, but that needs to be developed, and all those institutions need to be involved.

**Clare Adamson:** I thank Patricia Ferguson for that clarification, but I think that, as well as being an ambitious and comprehensive document, the strategy is also quite concise. The fact that colleges and higher education institutions are mentioned under principle 2 is important.

In 2012, I highlighted some of the curriculum work that has been done in North Lanarkshire schools' music groups, which give young people an opportunity to develop their musical talents at Coatbridge high school where, every Friday evening, an incredible array of talent is brought together in the wind ensemble, chorus, symphony orchestra, junior and senior string orchestras, jazz orchestra, wind band, prep band, pipe band and traditional music group, and the pupils get to showcase their work in a performance at the end of the year.

Principle 3 is:

"Work collaboratively; create mechanisms for better information sharing, peer support and networking."

That is extremely important. Young people embrace social media and the opportunities to share what they are doing far more than we do. Capturing the good practice that is out there and letting young people showcase their skills to one another is important.

Principle 4 is:

"Be proactive in using digital technology."

Members will know that I have a keen interest in this area, as chair of the cross-party group on games technology. I am always telling young people I meet that, if they are interested in technology and in winning a BAFTA, the Scottish games industry is where they should be, as it supports musicians, voice-over artists, graphic designers and an array of creative talents, including story writers and scriptwriters.

Principle 5 is to

"Work with national and local government."

As has been mentioned already, that is key to how we go forward. We have to work with all the organisations and partners in Scotland. Some of the collaborative work that the Scottish Government has already demonstrated with local government is important.

Reeltime Music, in Newarthill, is a local charity that I became aware of when I was on North Lanarkshire Council. It works to bring about a positive change in the lives of disenfranchised young people through the provision of affordable recording and rehearsal services as well as workshop and training provision, volunteering and partnership projects. It has found that, through the informal service that it provides, music becomes a great way to break down barriers, learn new skills, increase aspirations and develop a more active lifestyle. It is an excellent example of the partnership working that I am talking about, because its funding has come from the cashback for communities scheme, the North Lanarkshire partnership, North Lanarkshire Council, the Scottish Government, Creative Scotland, Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, YouthLink Scotland and the Scottish mental health arts and film festival, among others. It was also grateful to receive additional funding from Creative Scotland for the provision of instruments and recording equipment.

I do not have time to touch on the strategy's other principles, but principle 6 is about tackling inequalities, which I think is the most important part of the strategy, so I will finish with a quote from the chair of Sistema Scotland. Last month, at the Education and Culture Committee, he said:

"we could recognise all round that the total health of the nation is tied up with the arts. My experience of children's orchestras in Raploch and Govanhill is that everything gets better with them. The children become more determined and studious as well as happier and healthier. I would hope that the new Scotland could somehow recognise that."—*[Official Report, Education and Culture Committee, 22 April 1014; c 4016.]*

That is where we want to be with this strategy.

15:34

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I, too, welcome the publication of "Time to Shine". With its themes of participation, progression and provision, it may, if nothing else, have rehabilitated the notion of PPP for some of us.

The strategy has also stimulated a fairly constructive debate, and I add my welcome to the announcement on the national youth advisory group. The cabinet secretary is right about the need to ensure that young people are at the heart of the implementation of the strategy. Clare Adamson was also right to remind us that we

move forward from a position of relative strength in many respects.

We all accept the wider benefits of a vibrant cultural community, but we are focusing on the impact on children and young people and how they can flourish through culture and creativity. Building self-confidence, teamwork and communication skills are all faithful echoes of some of the benefits that, as Christian Allard said, we heard about during the youth work and volunteering debate last week.

Fiona Hyslop was right to pray in aid the ability of the big noise project to transform lives in Raploch through music. Richard Holloway's remarks have been quoted by various members, but his evidence to the Education and Culture Committee a few weeks back was telling. He pointed not only to the esteem, pride and aspiration that the individuals involved in the project experienced but to the effect that that had on their families and the wider community by osmosis, which was telling indeed.

The approach in the strategy places heavy emphasis on collaboration. That is critical. The motion talks about the collaboration between the Scottish Government, national bodies, local government and others. However, Patricia Ferguson is right to emphasise in her amendment the role of local arts organisations. Also, as she mentioned in her interventions, colleges and universities need to be played up a little further. We also need to emphasise the crucial importance of widening access and participation. I am not sure whether Fiona Hyslop and Patricia Ferguson engaging in a referendum rap is the key to unlocking that, but all ideas are welcome.

We also need to recognise the role of major funding bodies in facilitating youth arts. For example, the UK Big Lottery Fund has had an important role to play, not least in winding up Christine Grahame with the number of motions that are lodged—

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** I do not know whether Liam McArthur is coming on to the Orkney folk festival, but I would be interested to hear how young people are encouraged in the organisations that are involved in it. If he would tell the rest of the members, that would be useful.

**Liam McArthur:** Rob Gibson makes a fair point. I should declare an interest as the brother of somebody who is heavily involved in organising the festival. Like all the festivals in Orkney, which are a reflection of the cultural vibrancy of the community, those involved in the Orkney folk festival have recognised that, if it is to continue in the long term, it absolutely needs to build children



and young people into pretty much everything that it does.

Orkney is very well served. It is an exemplar for the collaborative approach, bringing together national and local organisations, the diversity of art forms, the commitment to access and participation and putting children and young people at the centre. That speaks to quality of life, as it enriches the lives of individuals and the whole community. In many respects, it helps to address the population decline that was a threat not so long ago.

The debate is timely in that the annual instrumental course is taking place in Orkney this week. Again, I declare an interest, as I have two children on it. It brings together youngsters from across the county, including the outer isles. The youngsters receive intensive tuition from some of Orkney's phenomenal music teachers, who also support the Orkney Traditional Music Project, and the course culminates in an exceptional concert at the end of the week, which I very much look forward to attending.

An aspect of the instrumental course that probably bears emphasising is the council's commitment to free music tuition, which is not the case throughout the country. Without it, an initiative such as the instrumental course would struggle to survive in anything like its current form. How does the success of that present itself? There are young Orcadians who attend the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland or Plockton high school's national centre of excellence in traditional music, but such an achievement is not necessarily an end in itself. The real sign of the initiative's success has been the exposure of children from all backgrounds in all parts of the county to the benefits of music and instrumental tuition.

The success in Orkney is not just about music. The Pier arts centre, which is internationally renowned, contributes a great deal to Scottish arts and culture, and it is linked with the Tate gallery. Again, there is a commitment, through the leading lights workshops, to inspire and involve children and young people. I visited Stromness primary not so long ago, where the children were all enthused by an exhibition that they were putting on in the Pier under the banner "Inspired by ...", which demonstrates that commitment.

The same is true for community drama. It is no accident that the Palace Players youth team has made it to the national finals of the one-act play festival, which again shows the strength of the arts in Orkney.

National bodies are also demonstrating a commitment to the rural and more remote areas. Liz Smith made a valid point about ensuring that the initiative breaks beyond the bigger cities. In my

experience, the likes of Scottish Opera are committed to touring and travelling, and engaging with schools and young people throughout the country. Similarly, the National Youth Choir of Scotland does tremendous work at a national level—I should declare an interest as my son has attended a couple of its residential courses. NYCOS has been assiduous in supporting efforts to establish choirs throughout the country, and the Orkney choir is due to perform in Kirkwall next month.

All those aspects are reflected in the festival scene of which Orkney can boast. There was the one-act play festival back in March; the Orkney folk festival takes place later this month; and the St Magnus festival is on next month. Later in the year there is the Orkney blues festival weekend and the storytelling festival. Those events speak of a vibrant cultural scene, and they are all focusing on ways in which they can involve and inspire the younger generation; the wine festival is perhaps the obvious exception to that rule.

One of the most striking concerts that I have attended in recent times was by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra as part of the St Magnus festival. The orchestra not only went into schools during the festival but performed alongside local musicians in a side-by-side concert. The local musicians walked out of that concert hall 10 feet high—it was an experience that one would struggle to see anywhere else, even in the major cities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask you to draw to a close, please.

**Liam McArthur:** In conclusion, I could not be more supportive of the strategy, the collaborative approach that is being led by young people and the focus on access and participation. I need no persuading of the transformative effect that exposure to and involvement in music, art, drama and dance can have.

I pay tribute to those who make it happen; they deserve and should get our unfaltering support, for it is their efforts that will allow our young people to get the opportunity and the time to shine so that, as Richard Holloway said, our civil wellbeing is in the rudest of health.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that I require speeches of up to seven minutes.

15:43

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** I congratulate my colleague from Orkney. I remember that some years ago I attended the Stromness shopping week festival, which I thoroughly recommend. I turn from Orkney to

Kilmarnock, which members may be aware was last year's winner of the creative places award; everybody is very welcome to make a return visit.

The emergence of the first national arts strategy for young people is an important step for Scotland and a huge and exciting opportunity for all our young people. It sends out a message that in Scotland we view the arts as a fundamental part of our society that is just as important as any one of the many other public investments we might make.

I would not claim to be an expert by any means on the history of arts funding, but my impression is that, over the years, the arts have always been first to take a hit when budgets are tight; they are sometimes seen as an unnecessary luxury and have perhaps been first for the chop. I am therefore pleased not only that the strategy has emerged but that a £5 million tranche of funding will be supporting it to help Scotland to become the international leader in the youth arts.

What I like about the strategy is that it seems to strike a nice balance between setting clear themes and principles and providing an extremely flexible canvas for creative talents to emerge and find expression. You can tell from reading it that a huge number of ideas were raised during the national discussion in 2012. Nearly 1,000 young people contributed their vision to develop the strategy, which was launched last November.

Like my colleague Clare Adamson, I would like to pick out a few of the key principles. Those principles offer young people a wonderful chance, through the medium of arts, to develop themselves as individuals and to learn new skills. It is right to put young people at the heart of the strategy. They will help to determine what the priorities should be and will play a leading role in finding out what works and what does not. I am sure that there will be quite a few surprises along the way. It is also right to see how the strategy fits in the curriculum for excellence. Engaging with the arts is not an optional external bolt-on to a young person's learning experience—it can and should be at the heart of that experience. Schools have a crucial role in helping our young folk to embrace an arts perspective that they can carry with them throughout their learning journey.

I particularly like the focus on using new digital technologies—the cabinet secretary and Clare Adamson mentioned the importance of that. Anybody who takes the time to look at what young folk are creating, producing and sharing right now with their smartphones will be amazed by the originality of the ideas and the speed with which they spread and adapt. New styles of art, music and film are emerging because the technology is decent enough to allow that, although the technology is simply the enabling tool that allows creative thinkers and artists to express

themselves. What a fantastic opportunity we have to nurture that creativity. As superfast 4G services become more widespread, along with the scaling up of storage capacity, I look forward to seeing what might come out of that. Perhaps some budding new Scottish creative industry will emerge. That is not to mention the possible international collaborations, to which Christian Allard referred.

Some of the most worthwhile inclusions in the strategy are the thoughts and ideas about how we might balance participation and exclusion. For example, we know that youngsters from black and Asian communities and other minority ethnic groups are always underrepresented in the arts, so I welcome the commitments to try to address that. A striking comment in the strategy reveals that many children who live in poverty in Scotland have no access whatsoever to the arts, very often for the more obvious reasons of a lack of resources or transport. Also, in households with a disabled parent, youngsters and their families often simply cannot participate in the arts. If we make it easier for young disabled people to access culture and the arts, that can do so much to boost their confidence and self-esteem. I am therefore immensely proud that that is a key principle, and I look forward to seeing how the issue is tackled.

With that theme in mind, I bring to members' attention the work carried out by Centrestage Music Theatre in Kilmarnock in my constituency. I should declare an interest as one of its patrons. Centrestage is a social enterprise theatre company that offers a huge range of performing arts experiences to youngsters from a variety of backgrounds, many of whom are disabled or are struggling to cope with the pressures of society. About 1,800 people attend Centrestage, whose ethos is to provide opportunities to access the arts and to develop skills and leadership capabilities. Centrestage recognises and works hard on many of the inclusion and participation issues that are articulated in the youth arts strategy, so much of its work sits perfectly with the aims that are set out. I recall that the cabinet secretary visited the theatre company a number of years ago to see it for herself.

The strategy is a wonderful piece of work that deserves the Parliament's full support. It is innovative and exciting and offers young people fantastic opportunities to unleash their creative talents. It is also inclusive and reaches out to our most disadvantaged and disabled youngsters, whose talents will find expression beyond the limitations of their circumstances. I am confident that the strategy will be a huge success and I look forward with anticipation to seeing what happens once those creative doors are well and truly opened.

15:49

**Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I, too, am very pleased to speak in the debate, to highlight the excellent opportunities that are being provided to the young people of Scotland to meet their artistic goals—whether that is to be on the stage or the screen, behind the scenes or in one of Scotland's world-leading creative industries. "Time to Shine" comprehensively yet practically states strategic aims to enrich young people's lives through the arts and creativity by focusing on three key themes: creating and sustaining engagement; nurturing potential and talent; and developing infrastructure and support.

It is important to instil in our youth a love of and curiosity for culture, regardless of their class, background or where they live, as Willie Coffey said. It has been shown that immersion in cultural activity can help to bolster the resilience and wellbeing of communities and individuals. That is important to Scotland's children, and I am proud to support investment in the area.

In order to carry out the strategy, we will have to invest time and money. However, I am pleased to say that we will not be starting from scratch, as the strategy builds on the strong foundations of a well-established, forward-thinking youth arts sector. Scotland is already remarkable, in that we have a range of national youth arts companies for theatre, dance and music. Clare Adamson mentioned Reeltime Music, which is located in Newarthill in my region and is working hard to include and expand youth provision and encourage youths in the area to come into the basic forms of the arts.

The curriculum for excellence heavily features the arts and recognises that expressive arts provide opportunities to underpin and enrich learning in all other curriculum areas.

Despite having the strong bases on which to build, it is important that we do not grow complacent but instead look for new ways to improve provision in every community across Scotland, so that every young person can benefit from culture.

In my region, the North Lanarkshire creative residency provides opportunities to all secondary 4 and 5 pupils across all 24 of North Lanarkshire Council's secondary schools. The programme begins at the start of the calendar year and enables pupils to attend a series of taster sessions that highlight the various disciplines on offer. Following that, pupils can submit applications to participate in a week-long arts residency at Kilbowie outdoor centre in June—as we all know, Kilbowie is set in one of the most picturesque sites in Scotland. The same pupils are then given the opportunity to participate in a master-class that allows them to hone the skills that they learnt at

the outdoor centre. Finally, their work is showcased in an exhibition and event at Summerlee museum of Scottish industrial life in Coatbridge.

That is just one example of the excellent infrastructure that "Time to Shine" has to build on, so I am confident that it will be a success and will enrich the lives of the young people of Scotland. "Time to Shine" aims to be as inclusive as possible. It recognises the different needs of those in the large zero to 25 age group; it also recognises that the term "the arts" means different things to different people and can refer to activities well beyond the traditional definitions.

"Time to Shine" is a long-term strategy that is committed to developing opportunities for at least the next generation of young people. The consultation identified three main themes that should be incorporated into the programme so that it can achieve its full potential. Participation is all important, whether as an active participant or as a member of the audience. Both are of equal importance and each individual should determine how they want to engage with the arts. Many factors impact on how young people engage with the arts: where they live; their family environment; their peers; cost; and transport. "Time to Shine" will work to remove the barriers, so that young people can engage with the arts how they see fit.

Those involved, or those who wish to get involved, in the arts must be able to progress through their chosen field. For some, that means developing their skills to a recognised standard. For others, progression may mean that the arts help them to recognise personal qualities that let them grow in confidence and assist them in other areas of their lives.

Scotland is fortunate to have a pool of highly talented and dedicated artists, practitioners and organisations, who work hard to deliver high-quality activities for people who are interested in the arts. I pay tribute to those dedicated people, who seek to achieve the twin goals of engaging as many young people as possible and supporting the development of people who have a particular talent. The "Time to Shine" strategy encourages such work and proposes ways of sharing information and best practice, to foster collaborative working and sustainability.

I am sure that this Government recognises the positive impact that art and creativity can have. I pay tribute to the cabinet secretary, who has shown her commitment to widening opportunities for everyone to access and benefit from cultural activity, so that Scotland can be an international leader in youth arts. I thank her for all her hard work on behalf of the people of Scotland. This is her time, and she certainly shines with enthusiasm for the arts and for promoting Scotland's culture.

Scotland is steeped in culture and history. I commend her for bringing this debate and for her commitment to culture.

15:56

**Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

This time last week we were debating the youth work strategy. As I prepared for today's debate I reflected on the degree to which the two strategies are interlinked. There are references to the arts in the youth work strategy, but it is worth reminding ourselves how much of the work on youth arts is done by youth workers and community groups throughout the country. We should place a high value on such work.

At the most recent portfolio question time on culture, the cabinet secretary might remember my questions to her about support for piping in Scotland, which is mentioned in the motion. There is concern, certainly in Edinburgh, about the extent to which young people can learn the pipes, through music tuition in schools or through community groups, because the instrument tends not to get support from public funds.

Parents have expressed concern to me about the impact of that on our cultural heritage. For example, it might be harder to find pipe bands from state schools to play at the Edinburgh tattoo. The cabinet secretary will be aware that many of the categories at the recent Scottish schools pipe band championships were won by private schools. There is a feeling that if we are not careful only private schools will be able to offer piping. It would be a great shame if we allowed that to happen. I urge the cabinet secretary to look at the issue.

Parents are also concerned about how willing music teachers in schools are to let pupils pick the pipes as an instrument, as part of their Scottish Qualifications Authority exams. Parents say that there is a degree of snobbishness about the pipes, which are not seen as a classical instrument, given that much music tuition is geared towards playing in orchestras. I encourage the cabinet secretary to speak to her education colleagues about that. If she can give members an update on the situation, I would very much welcome that.

I have another ask for the cabinet secretary. My constituents come from various parts of Edinburgh. Will she meet me and them, to discuss what they think the Government could do on the piping agenda? They have what they describe as a pipe dream, in which every child in Scotland has the right to learn the pipes. I very much support and agree with my constituents, and I would like to bring them to meet the cabinet secretary, if she is willing.

That leads me to the wider issue of music tuition in schools. I am sure that the cabinet secretary is familiar with the *Scotland on Sunday* let the children play campaign, which did thorough work on the cost barriers around tuition and instrument rental. I would like to hear more from the cabinet secretary on what she is doing with Alasdair Allan, who I understand has ministerial responsibility for music tuition, to progress the issue.

Colleges have been mentioned in the debate a couple of times. Given that the opportunities for all agenda forces our colleges to focus on 16 to 19-year-olds, colleges' role in the youth arts strategy is ever more important. I want to talk about a couple of aspects of that.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that colleges provide a lot of courses and support around the technical skills that support the arts, particularly in relation to sound, lighting, film and so on. She will also be aware that those courses tend to be the most expensive courses for colleges to put on, perhaps behind only mechanical engineering, the costs of which are a little bit higher. Because of the core costs of those courses, it is easy for them to be cut and for the number of courses that are cheaper to run to be increased in order to produce the overall effect that the number of student places is being maintained at the same rate. I urge her to look carefully at the impact of the college cuts agenda on skills and the courses that are available in the creative sector.

Some excellent work is going on in our colleges, and it is important to highlight that. I encourage the cabinet secretary to look closely at what Edinburgh College is doing. She might know that it has three artists in residence at the moment: one film maker, one photographer and one artist. The film maker is a guy called Garry Fraser—I think that the cabinet secretary has met him—who recently won a Scottish BAFTA for his film work. He is from Muirhouse in Edinburgh and accessed college as a pathway out of addiction. Not only is he making groundbreaking, award-winning films; he is working with some hard-to-reach young people in Edinburgh, giving them the confidence and self-esteem that they need to access education and progress with their lives. That work should be particularly valued.

On Friday, Edinburgh College held a creative industries employability day and devoted the whole day to encouraging young people to consider the career opportunities that they could access in the arts. The college held seminars on how to work as a photographer, the events industry, the organisational versus the technical side of events, community arts, interactive media and freelancing in the music industry, which

covered the core skills that could lead to future educational opportunities for our young people.

This week, Creative Exchange, which is a partnership between Edinburgh College and the City of Edinburgh Council, was nominated for a Scottish business award for the work that it is doing in providing a state-of-the-art space, resources and business support for entrepreneurs and people who are interested in running a business in the creative industries. It narrowly missed out on that award, but in the first year of that organisation's existence it is a great achievement to have made it on to the Scottish business awards shortlist. We should welcome that.

All those are wonderful examples of work that is going on in our colleges against the backdrop of the Government's college cuts agenda. I do not know whether the cabinet secretary is aware of this, but, this week, Edinburgh College announced that it is going to have to make 70 voluntary redundancies between now and November. On the one hand, all that wonderful work is going on, but on the other hand, the college is going through a terrible time, there is really low morale and it is having to cope with redundancies that have been forced on it by—I am sorry to say it—the Government's focus on higher education at the expense of further education.

**Fiona Hyslop:** The matter is a responsibility of my colleagues in the Government but, as the member will know, we have managed to maintain the budget for colleges that we inherited in 2007. That is remarkable, bearing in mind the cuts that we have seen across the Government because of provision in the Westminster budget. Such debates are being repeated, but she must acknowledge that.

**Kezia Dugdale:** The cabinet secretary says that the amount of money that is going to colleges is the same as it was under previous Administrations. How, then, can she justify the fact that there are 140,000 fewer students studying in our colleges than there were in 2007? There are also 93,000 fewer women studying part time. Since the Government has been in power, almost 250,000 fewer people have been able to access further education opportunities. The cabinet secretary is shaking her head, but that is the reality of the figures that have been published by the Scottish funding council—they are not my figures; they are the Government's figures. She shakes her head, but she needs to look at the detail and accept the reality of what those figures tell her.

I close by mentioning community arts—in particular, Craigmillar Community Arts. I invite the cabinet secretary to come and see the drammie dodgers on a Tuesday night, which puts on work

specifically for 8 to 21-year-olds. There is intergenerational learning and loads of people in the Craigmillar community come together to develop their drama skills. It is a really positive bit of community development work and I encourage the cabinet secretary to attend.

16:04

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** I, too, welcome the "Time to Shine" strategy, which is putting young people at the heart of Scotland's creative future. I declare an interest, in that I have a daughter who benefited from the youth music initiative, through the Voice Factory choir in Glasgow.

I am well aware of the difference that the youth music initiative has made to the lives of hundreds of young people across the country, whatever their background. I praise that work and the new commitment to the youth music initiative. The initiative was started by the previous Administration, for which I congratulate it.

I will talk about access for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The youth music initiative does not charge a fee. Although my daughter probably would have had the opportunity anyway, a lot of people get access to the arts through the initiative because it is free. However, many other arts offerings charge.

We have got round that problem in Dumfries through a self-funding organisation called the Electric Theatre, which has a very popular adult community choir and adult theatre. There are charges, but the fees subsidise the main activities for children and young people in the youth theatre. That is important.

I think that it was Patricia Ferguson who mentioned that if young people are put at the centre of the arts, we sometimes get unusual approaches to big topics. The example that she mentioned was rap being used to debate the referendum. Last year, a Dumfries youth theatre and Electric Theatre workshop resulted in a collaboration on an extraordinary piece of physical theatre, "Blood Orange", that was commissioned by the environmental arts festival Scotland, which is based in the region. Some MSPs who attend the cross-party group on culture, which I co-convene, will have seen an extract from "Blood Orange" performed in the Parliament. Those who missed it will get the chance to catch it at the Edinburgh fringe.

"Blood Orange" is a very good illustration of young people taking an unusual approach to a big subject because the work was inspired, if that is the right word, by experience of a racist march held by the English Defence League—or the Scottish Defence League—in Dumfries in early

2013. The local trades council and the Educational Institute of Scotland teachers union organised a very effective cross-party and cross-community protest against the racist march, and the protest attracted many of the young people from the theatre who were at the time performing another play, which involved super heroes. They donned their super hero Lycra outfits and formed what was a very colourful front line in the fight against fascism—it was probably the first of its kind, and guaranteed great coverage in the local paper.

More seriously, the experience had a real effect on the young people, who went away and work shopped “Blood Orange”, which is a very serious and raw piece of theatre concerning the insidious nature of racism and how it can feed off envy and poverty. The other great thing about the work was that they held it in the local nightclub—Chancers is a place where young people in the town feel comfortable seeing a piece of theatre.

Patricia Ferguson also mentioned the need to concentrate on all parts of the country, and I agree. I am very pleased that, this year, the Scottish Youth Theatre is holding one of its summer courses for young people in Dumfries—it is also holding courses in Glasgow and Aberdeen. I praise it for that. I also praise the creation, as part of the youth arts strategy, of the youth arts hubs around the country that the cabinet secretary mentioned. I would have liked one of the hubs to be in Dumfries. The most southerly hub is in Ayr—I hope that the door is not completely closed, because the cabinet secretary knows that Dumfries is a Scottish leader in youth arts in terms of finding ways to pull into the arts young people who would otherwise be marginalised.

**Fiona Hyslop:** In my opening speech, I made a point about Creative Scotland’s recognition that the south of Scotland is an area where regional intervention will be needed with regard to hubs. I also mentioned that some of the applications were so strong that it expects them to come back for regular funding. The situation in the south of Scotland in particular will be addressed.

**Joan McAlpine:** I apologise if I missed that part of the cabinet secretary’s speech, and I welcome her intervention.

The Holywood Trust, which is a charitable trust that has a particular interest in young people in the arts in the south-west of Scotland, has played an important role over a long period. It is an another example of the collaboration that has been mentioned.

I will give an example of how just a small grant can make a difference. About 15 or 20 years ago, the Holywood Trust, which offers grants to individuals as well as large grants to organisations, gave an individual grant to a

teenager from the Lochside housing scheme in Dumfries, which has its challenges. Because the teenager could not study drama at the Saturday classes that were available in the town, the trust gave him money to travel to a college in another part of the country. That young man went on to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland—or the RSAMD, as it was known then—and then had a very successful career all over Europe, including in London, Ireland and Spain. In his 30s, he came back to Dumfries, where he established the Electric Theatre, which I have already mentioned, and the Big Burns Supper festival. Both initiatives have exposed a whole new generation of young people from different backgrounds to involvement in the arts and have had a huge economic impact on the town. That is a really good illustration of how quite a small grant—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** You must draw to a close, please.

**Joan McAlpine:** —that allowed a young man to travel to his classes on the train has had such a huge impact on many different lives, and why I welcome the collaboration that is inherent in the strategy and the motion.

16:11

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I support the “Time to Shine” youth arts strategy but, in order to get to my point, I need to go a roundabout way with a story. My dad loved music. He was part of the rock’n’roll generation; he saw Bill Haley and the Comets at the Odeon in Glasgow; and he was the first one up to sing at any event. He lacked only one thing: musical talent. He had absolutely no musical talent whatever. He could not sing a note or play a musical instrument. However, music and the arts made him extremely happy, and I note that the emphasis in the strategy is not on young people becoming professional musicians or even working in a certain industry in the arts but on their being part of the arts and how the arts themselves can make a difference to our lives. They can, for example, help our mental health and generally make us feel happy.

That has certainly rubbed off on me. I love music. Members will see me walking up to the chamber with my iPod on—I should point out that I do not have it on in the chamber, Presiding Officer—and I feel that such things can make a difference to people’s lives.

The Scottish Government’s aim is to put young people at the heart of Scotland’s creative future and give them the opportunity to design what we are looking for. That is how these things always work; indeed, Kezia Dugdale said as much in last week’s debate on the national youth work strategy. If young people are part of the programme and are

pushing it forward, they will always support it. That is an important part of this particular strategy.

Scotland is already doing really well on this issue but it is good that the Scottish Government wants to be an international leader in children and young people's arts by 2023. The Government should also be commended for its commitment to widening opportunities for everyone to access, engage in and benefit from cultural activity, because regardless of their background or where they come from no young person should think that certain parts of the arts are not for them. Indeed, as I have got older, I have started to appreciate certain things that I did not necessarily appreciate when I was a younger man.

I know what you are thinking, Presiding Officer. You know that when I talk about arts, creativity, culture and sheer talent I am at some point going to mention the great town of Paisley. How can I not mention the place that has given us Paolo Nutini, Gerry Rafferty, the actors David Tennant and Gerard Butler and many others? That talent does not come from nowhere; it comes from lots of groups in Paisley that work to ensure that young people get the opportunities that they need.

For example, there is Tommy McGrory, who founded the Loud 'N' Proud school of rock in Paisley. He was a B-flat bugler who wanted to start a marching band; eventually, he decided to start up the school of rock. Long story short—the marching band did not quite work out, but the rock'n'roll side moved on. Some who have left Loud 'N' Proud are now working as session musicians; their experience has not necessarily made them stars, but they have been able to become something in the industry.

Tommy McGrory offers an early years music club, beginners group lessons, one-to-one lessons and band sessions. Many of the bands have gone on to get access to competitions that they would not necessarily have had an opportunity to compete in, even if they had gone down the clichéd route of practising in their parents' garage. The problem that his organisation faces is one that, as I mentioned in last week's debate, is faced by many others: every year, it has an on-going issue with funding. It has to use a basket of funding measures to keep things going. If there is one issue that we must look at, it is probably that one.

The cabinet secretary will remember the Renfrewshire witch hunt 1697. [*Interruption.*] What I mean by that is that she was in the chamber when I spoke about the Renfrewshire witch hunt 1697 project, which was a ground-upwards project involving young people. Paisley has the unenviable record of being the last place in Europe to murder someone for witchcraft. That programme resulted in the creation of a curriculum

for excellence pack. One of the teachers who was involved, Claire Cassidy, created that pack and worked with the local authority to ensure that people knew about their area, what the story was about and why the horseshoe was at Maxwellton Cross. The fact that the strategy mentions that that will be an important part of the curriculum for excellence has been missed in the debate. The pack ends up asking children and older young people to draw their own conclusions on what happened. It opens up all sorts of questions, such as whether the woman who was accused really practised witchcraft or whether she had mental health issues, and gives them a chance to explore the issues.

In the past two years, we have had a dramatic re-enactment of those events in the town centre. We do not burn the witches at the end of it; it is just a re-enactment. As a result of that, people know the story of what happened and are familiar with that part of our history.

It is important that we remember the good stuff as well as the negative things. The PACE Theatre Company was formed by David Wallace in 1988. Its ethos is to educate and entertain. At the moment, it is doing a play called "I am Me", which is about a young man who has learning difficulties and how his neighbours treat him. It is about disability hate crime. As well as getting the chance to act, the young people who are involved get the opportunity to engage with local schools. Things have come full circle. The PACE Theatre Company has given the world Paolo Nutini, Gordon McCorkell from "River City"—I do not watch it—Shauna McDonald and the famous "Fame Academy" winner David Sneddon, as well as many other people who are working in the industry. However, the company's work is not all about providing work in the industry; it is about giving people opportunities.

There you have it. In Paisley, we are just getting on with nurturing talent and helping young people to explore their potential through the arts. We have been doing that for years. I commend the Scottish Government for encouraging the rest of Scotland to catch up with us.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much. I am pleased to hear that witches are no longer at risk of a fiery end in Paisley.

16:18

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** This has been a very interesting debate that has allowed us to discuss a range of issues to do with youth arts, such as what more can be done to promote them and what we can learn from different parts of Scotland and the UK and internationally; as we know, culture has no borders.

As my colleague Patricia Ferguson said, Scotland has a good record of participation in the arts. When Labour was in government, it played its part in helping with that. As the cabinet secretary acknowledged in her foreword to the strategy,

"We are not starting from the very beginning".

The previous Labour Government doubled investment in cultural activities, made entry to many museums and galleries free and introduced the groundbreaking youth music initiative to provide all pupils with music tuition.

All those things were welcome moves, but it is clear that we need to build on them and to consider how we can make the arts more accessible to young people, particularly young people in deprived communities. Not every young person will want to become a musician, a dancer or an actor, nor should they. I never had such aspirations; I was too busy playing football badly. The key is to ensure that the opportunities are available, that they are accessible and that young people are encouraged and supported to make the most of their potential. I am therefore pleased that inequalities are acknowledged in the youth arts strategy document, which mentions an inclusive approach to involving young people and a strategic objective of addressing inequalities and developing mechanisms that allow access for all.

I am pleased that young people are due to form a national youth arts advisory group, because I had intended to ask the cabinet secretary how the views of young people who are involved in community arts groups in Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire and elsewhere would be taken on board. I welcome what the cabinet secretary said about the involvement of Young Scot and working to ensure that people from all backgrounds are involved in shaping the strategy.

As members have highlighted, there are many excellent and inspiring youth arts projects across Scotland. As George Adam said, the situation is no different in Paisley and Renfrewshire, where we have great examples of such projects. One example is PACE Youth Theatre in Paisley, which has grown to become the largest youth theatre of its kind in the UK. It has a current membership of more than 2,000, and more than 200 young people are awaiting places at any given time.

A former provost of Renfrewshire, Nancy Allison, recently reminded me that the organisation has come a long way since she was involved in its formation in 1988, when just seven children turned up for the first meeting. The project then took its first steps towards its hugely successful aim of introducing young people to the arts—particularly those in deprived communities, who would not otherwise get such an opportunity.

Many of the theatre's initial aims are still apparent today. It runs weekly drama workshops for anyone from the age of three to 18, with the aim of increasing communication skills, confidence and self-expression. As George Adam said, a number of former theatre members have become well-known actors and performers who are working in theatre, television and film. Among them are Paolo Nutini and James McAvoy.

Education has always been a central part of PACE's work, in which it takes a number of forms. Participatory performance projects allow primary school pupils the opportunity to perform to their peers on important issues such as bullying, drug awareness and healthy living. PACE also undertakes hundreds of community workshops each year in schools, libraries and other venues.

PACE hosts a hugely popular school holiday performing arts festival called Fest! The events usually involve a cast of young people coming together for one week to devise and rehearse a new production that is based on a fun theme. They are designed to be challenging and fun, and they provide a great way for young people to get together, make friends and explore their creative side.

When I was younger, I attended a PACE youth club a couple of times. I very much enjoyed it although, as I said, I wanted to pursue other interests. However, it was great to have that opportunity. I have a number of friends who very much enjoyed being involved in PACE. Such opportunities should be available, affordable and accessible to all.

I will draw members' attention to other youth arts projects in Paisley and Renfrewshire. George Adam mentioned Loud 'n' Proud, which works with a range of local organisations, including Renfrewshire Council, to provide chances for children to learn how to play music from an early age. I have heard some of the musicians involved play at various events in Renfrewshire and they are a credit to the community.

I was delighted to have the opportunity to meet young people from Erskine Music and Media Studio when they performed in the Scottish Parliament last year and to hear about some of the excellent work that is being done there. The studio is run by and for young people and their success at the 2013 YouthLink Scotland awards was well deserved. That is another example of the positive and inspiring work that is happening in Renfrewshire. George Adam also mentioned the Renfrewshire witch project.

The strategy talks about promoting arts among looked-after children. Renfrewshire has the Kibble Education and Care Centre. Children from that centre came to the Scottish Parliament to do a



play about the experiences of looked-after children, which was not only thought provoking but a demonstration of the children's artistic talents.

I welcome the opportunity to praise those groups and highlight some of the important work that they do, which I am sure that the cabinet secretary will acknowledge. Scotland has a great deal of expertise in youth arts, which we need to build on. There are great examples of how to make youth arts more accessible to young people and particularly those who are from deprived areas. That must be the main focus of the strategy, and I will follow it closely to ensure that that is the case.

16:24

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** I have been interested to hear the various views of members of different parties about their areas and the overall strategy for the youth arts in Scotland. It is great to know that we have a strong base to work from, much of which comes from before devolution. The aspect that I want to speak about is the fèisean movement, which started with the first event in Barra in 1981, with Fèis Rois starting in 1986. They were residential learning events that used music and Gaelic to encourage community stimulus and give people a sense of belonging.

In 1991 those events developed into Fèisean nan Gàidheal, which is the independent umbrella organisation of the fèis movement. It is supported by Creative Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Highland Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and its reach is considerable. The 30 or 40 fèisean a year reach about 13,000 young people, according to its website, of which 6,300 take part in learning weeks, weekends or evening classes, and another 4,800 young people have taken part in the youth music initiative classes that are organised by the fèisean.

I want to make a point about concentrating on the expressive arts, and in particular music. The way in which Fèisean nan Gàidheal developed meant that it was looked at academically at a fairly early stage, and in the 1996 Comedia report "Northern Lights: The Social Impact of the Fèisean (Gaelic Festivals)", which was part of a wider European study of the social purpose and value of participatory arts, François Matarasso said that the central characteristics of the fèisean were community, the importance of Gaelic and the high level of artistic quality. According to him, they contribute to the following:

"Individual and personal development; Social cohesion; Community empowerment and self-determination; Local image and identity; Imagination and vision; Health and wellbeing."

Those were remarkable words at a time when people were trying to make sure that our traditional music was available to lots of youngsters in our part of the world, both in the Highlands and indeed in the cities.

I was interested to hear the oblique reference to that from Patricia Ferguson when she talked about the fèis movement and the fèisean ensuring the continued relevance of the traditional arts. I suggest that, in fact, many of the lessons that have been learned for the youth arts strategy came from organisations such as those, because they are rooted in the indigenous music of this country, but they are not in a cocoon. The fèisean movement has spread out to be interested in other forms of music, and people who have progressed through it have become more rounded adults. Some of them have become professional musicians, and they have come from across the spectrum of ability and across the spectrum of income. The likes of Fèis Rois, in my area, make sure that people who cannot afford to go away for two or three days get some help to do so. That inclusivity is an important part of the movement as well.

We would hope that as many of Scotland's children as possible are exposed to Scotland's indigenous folk music. I am concerned that, if it is only seen as a part of the wider music scene, we lose the centrality and the core value that François Matarasso stated. He stated:

"Rarely have I seen work whose quality and value spoke so eloquently for itself as that which I witnessed in Scotland ... I know how far it is from the committee room to the ceilidh, and I would urge all who want a more rounded understanding of the fèisean to see, to hear and to participate whenever the opportunity should arise."

Those were inspiring words in 1996. When the fèis movement turned 25 years old in 2006, many of those values had been developed even further, not necessarily through the medium of Gaelic, but spawning a lot of collaboration with the gathering in Gordon, the gatherings in the cities and various other groups in the towns. Those values have also meant that young people in the fèis movement have travelled to play music in Ireland, Brittany and Romania, where they are working with children who are blind and trying to get guide dogs from part of the fèis. I spoke to Fiona Dalgety, the director of Fèis Rois, at the weekend's performance of the music of blind 18th century musicians, played by two blind artists of today and other musicians. It was a fantastic offering that shows the range of interests that come from traditional roots.

The youth arts hub in the Highlands is curated by Fèis Rois and I suggest that there is no more appropriate body to do that job. However, it seems to me that we must recognise that children should have as much exposure as possible to music and

the other arts—the plastic arts as well as the expressive—because if they miss out on understanding their own indigenous music, they miss out on some of the richest tradition anywhere in the world. The opportunity to experience that music should be opened up to as many children in Scotland as possible. I hope that the youth arts strategy can in future expose as many children as possible to the traditional instruments, the traditional song, theatre and all the elements that make up a core part of the culture of this nation.

16:31

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

As a Highlands and Islands MSP, I thank Rob Gibson for his comments on the fèis movement. All of us who represent the Highlands and Islands area know the excellent work that is done by the fèis movement. I pay tribute to Rob Gibson, because I know that he has had a significant involvement with the fèis movement in the past.

There have been some excellent speeches in the debate, which have covered the length and breadth of Scotland. I was struck in particular by Patricia Ferguson's speech. She brings to the debate her experience as a former culture minister and she has continued her commitment to the arts in opposition. I very much welcomed her speech.

Presiding Officer, I will start with a quick anecdote and I hope that you will bear with me. We have been talking about inequalities all day and we have probably talked more about the arts of music and drama, but my anecdote is about dancing, particularly Scottish country dancing. At my time of life, I thought that I knew all about Scottish country dancing, having done it for more than six decades. When a friend of mine asked whether I would come along to a Scottish country dancing evening in Edinburgh, I thought about the exercise, development, wellbeing and social sides of it and felt that it ticked all those boxes, so along I went. The first dance was called "Hamilton House", but I had never heard of it. The next dance was called the "Duke of Perth", but I had never heard of it, although if I had known that it was "Broun's Reel" I might have had a go. There was also the "Reel of the 51st Division", which I had never heard of, and "Mairi's Wedding".

Of course, I went along armed with my knowledge of the "Gay Gordons", the "Dashing White Sergeant", "Strip the Willow" and the "Eightsome Reel". After thinking that I was perhaps the odd one out, I then discovered through speaking to cabinet secretaries such as Mr Russell and Mr Neil that they, too, did not know of "Hamilton House", the "Duke of Perth" or the other dances that I heard of at that event. On further investigation, I discovered that those who were privately educated were much more likely to

know those dances, but that those of us who went to the country schools in the Howe o' the Mearns have no idea of them.

I return to the issue of inequalities. After getting some coverage about that experience, I received emails from as far afield as San Diego in California that said the same thing: it is people in Scotland who are not being taught how to dance our own Scottish country dances, which are practised worldwide. I have got that off my chest now. We should not forget Scottish country dancing.

I very much welcome and endorse everything that Liz Smith said, and I commend all the organisations concerned, including the National Youth Choir of Scotland, the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland and the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland.

One of the great challenges is to ensure that all children, whatever their background, have the opportunity to express themselves through arts and culture. When I considered Scottish education in this context, I was surprised. Although the numbers of young people studying drama and music at higher level have remained stable year on year, there has been an 8 per cent fall in the number studying art and design.

There is reason to be concerned about the uptake of the expressive arts baccalaureate. Consisting of two advanced highers, a higher and an interdisciplinary project, the baccalaureate is designed to ease the transition into higher education or employment. However, the statistics published by SQA reveal that, in the first year of implementation, only five pupils enrolled in the expressive arts baccalaureate. Perhaps there was a lack of demand, or perhaps there was a lack of awareness. Whatever the case, it is worth considering that point if we want to realise the ambitions that are contained in "Time to Shine".

My next point is about local authority music tuition. Kezia Dugdale covered much of what I wanted to say; I hope that I can add to what she said. Last June, in the wake of the publication of the "Instrumental Music Tuition in Scotland" report, the Scottish Government formed an implementation group to work towards realising its recommendations. I appreciate that an update is due by the end of this year, and I look forward to seeing what is in it.

Various members have mentioned the financial pressures on councils and the financial constraints that prevent pupils, particularly those from deprived backgrounds, from taking up opportunities to learn through music tuition. Those opportunities are threatened by the prohibitive costs, particularly for pupils from a poorer background.

I am still gathering information, but it seems that most of the schools in Scotland that have their own pipe bands are private schools. I was pleased to hear what Jayne Baxter said when she mentioned that Fife Council had supported a pipe band. However, it is difficult to realise such projects. It is not just Scottish country dancing that is the preserve of the upper classes or those at private schools; it is also access to playing the bagpipes.

I offer a specific example. My office recently made a freedom of information request regarding access to and the cost of playing the bagpipes. A number of large local authorities, including the City of Edinburgh and Aberdeenshire, do not include bagpipes in individual instrument music choice. There are significant differences among council areas. For example, North Lanarkshire Council confirmed that, of the 121 primary schools in its local authority area, only 13 are able to access lessons in the bagpipes. In the interests of fairness, I also mention that lessons in piping are available in only three out of 16 secondary schools in Dumfries and Galloway. It is very much a case of postcode prescribing.

**Rob Gibson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mary Scanlon:** I am just winding up.

I have read the recommendations in "Time to Shine" very carefully, and I would have commended the Government on them. Willie Coffey made a very good point about access. I have read the strategic objectives, which are all worthy, but they are woolly, and I am not sure that they are sufficiently focused on inequalities and addressing the gap.

16:39

**Patricia Ferguson:** This has been a very interesting and, I think, a very good debate. I have very much enjoyed listening to colleagues' speeches, particularly when they have discussed matters in their own areas. One of the beauties of the Parliament is that we get to share that kind of information. We get to hear about other people's enthusiasms—and sometimes complaints. It has been really interesting from that point of view.

Liz Smith made a good point about the propensity of arts organisations to be congregated around Glasgow and Edinburgh—although Mr Adam would probably claim that they stretch out a little bit into Paisley, too. Of course, he is absolutely right about that. Some of that leakage from Glasgow into Paisley is obviously to be welcomed. I say that as someone who has enjoyed many performances in Paisley.

Joking aside, one of the wonderful things about the arts is that if we all stop to think about what is happening in our areas, we all have good stories to tell. What we are talking about today is how we take that one step further and then another step. It is genuinely interesting to hear what colleagues have to say.

Jayne Baxter eloquently demonstrated the point that many, if not most, young people access the arts through the work of local organisations, such as the work that is going on with the Alhambra theatre in her area, and that local authorities are vital in that regard. It is interesting to hear that, because it goes a little bit against what Willie Coffey said when he made the point that the arts are often the first thing to be cut. He is right about that, although it is fair to say that, within the lifetime of the Scottish Parliament, that has not been the case with any of the Governments that have had the opportunity to preside over the arts. However, it can be true of local authorities. It is a shame, and people should think again about it.

A number of our youth performing arts have found that their local authority funding has been diminished or ended altogether. We clearly want those organisations to thrive, and it behoves all members to talk to their local authority colleagues and to encourage that enthusiasm for the arts that they often have, even if they sometimes find it difficult to manage.

**Liam McArthur:** I entirely agree with what Patricia Ferguson says about the importance of local authorities supporting the arts. Does she share my concern that when pressure is placed on central Government to fill the gaps that are left, we sometimes risk rewarding bad behaviour and not necessarily celebrating, rewarding and supporting the good behaviour of local authorities that have not made such cuts?

**Patricia Ferguson:** I agree. It is a difficult judgment call and it is hard to get the balance right. We all have to stop and consider what is happening out there.

I was interested in some of the points that Clare Adamson made. She is absolutely right that peer support is important. Young people benefit from their friends and relatives telling them that they did well. We all like to be told that, even if, for some of us, it does not happen very often. It is nice when it does, and it is great for young people particularly. Ms Adamson also made my case for Sistema, the joy that it brings, and the way in which it helps young people with their learning and their lives as they go into their future. Sistema gives an all-encompassing opportunity and that is why I am such a fan of it.

My colleague Kezia Dugdale made a number of valid points. She talked about the fact that the

people who are delivering the arts in our local communities might not be trained artists; often, they are development workers who have an interest in or aptitude for the arts and bring all their skills and talents to their contribution. The point that Mary Scanlon and Kezia Dugdale made about the pipes is also important. It strikes me that the pipes are fast becoming culture's equivalent of rugby, in that players have to have gone to a certain school if they are to play the pipes. That is very sad and detrimental.

**Rob Gibson:** The Sutherland and Kintyre schools are small schools in the countryside, so having one pipe band in each school is almost impossible, but there are groups of schools that have pipe bands in the Highlands.

**Patricia Ferguson:** I thank Mr Gibson for that. I was coming to his speech next anyway, because I think that he might have misunderstood my reference to Fèisean nan Gàidheal. I have nothing but praise for Fèisean nan Gàidheal, but on top of all the things that Mr Gibson listed—and he was right to list them—it has helped to continue that interest in our traditional instruments, language and music, and it kept that flag flying when it was more difficult to do so in times gone by.

The fèisean have a fantastic reputation, particularly Fèis Rois, and have been really imaginative in the way in which they have used the youth music initiative to take that forward. One of the challenges that we have with the youth music initiative is that, if a young person wants to play the pipes or the bassoon, but goes to a school that happens to have six violins and two violas, it is difficult to meet their request. We must deal with that.

Neil Bibby was right to major on the idea of equalities. He is right to identify issues around looked-after children. We know the challenges that looked-after children face in all aspects of their lives. If we cannot deliver for them in this area, we need to think again. I am pleased that the strategy is going to do that.

I want to talk about equalities in a slightly wider sense, because there are now many communities in Scotland with their own cultures. In the Maryhill integration network in my constituency, people of all cultures come together to enjoy one another's art, dance, drama and music. That is a joy to behold, and it is a good way of breaking down the barriers that might otherwise exist in an area. It has done that pretty successfully for a number of years.

Liam McArthur drew attention to the value of festivals. He is right to say that festivals are a really important way of enabling people to come together to share an experience and of giving people a stage on which to perform. It strikes me

that, if we are talking about an arts award scheme, we might want to think about whether we should also have an annual youth arts festival in Scotland—perhaps at the same time as the Edinburgh festival or another existing festival or perhaps not. Bringing young people together in such a festival would be a creative opportunity that would help them all to raise their game and would give them new ideas about what to do with their futures. If we could harness that kind of potential, we would be doing the whole country a favour.

It is fair to say that everyone who has spoken today has been concerned to ensure that the strategy is for all of Scotland's young people, regardless of their circumstances. I particularly welcome that.

16:47

**Fiona Hyslop:** I will start with a quotation from Albert Camus, who said:

"Without culture, and the relative freedom it implies, society, even when perfect, is but a jungle. This is why any authentic creation is a gift to the future."

This has been a good debate. If it is possible to paint a portrait of a nation, I think that that has been done today through members' reflections on what is going on in the country. Their speeches have shown the strength of what is happening right now. I made it clear that the youth arts strategy is about building on the firm foundation that we already have and about taking us forward, with that geographic stretch.

We have heard a variety of enthusiastic and considered views. I particularly appreciated George Adam's point about the need to remember that the arts are about enjoyment. I reassure him that "Caustic Love" by Paolo Nutini—who is from Paisley—is on constant play in my car. It is a wonderful and magnificent piece of music—a musical triumph.

To Neil Bibby who was, perhaps, denied culture when he was younger—he said that he was focused on football—I say that one of the best cultural experiences that I have had was watching "Gemmill's Goal", which was part of the "Off Kilter" performance at the Theatre Royal in Glasgow. It was basically 12 dancers moving in unison to recreate Archie Gemmill's goal. The issue is partly about reaching and connecting with people. Art is everywhere—even in football.

**Liam McArthur:** Having witnessed at first hand Neil Bibby's goal celebrations, I can assure the cabinet secretary that dancing is alive and well in the Bibby household.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thanks for that.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Between Neil Bibby's dancing and Patricia Ferguson's rapping, members can

see that we can express ourselves in different ways.

A number of important points have been made. It is clear that across the chamber there is a shared passion about, and commitment to, ensuring that all our young people are given the opportunity to experience culture. The joy, the challenge, the energy, the expression, the understanding and the opportunity to question that the arts give to young people must be core to our story. Therefore, I am pleased that there is a consensus on how important culture is to our society and our young people. However, important points have been addressed, to which I will come.

Youth arts help young people to develop skills that are needed in the modern world: the ability to be flexible, to solve problems, to communicate, to learn new skills, to be creative, to be innovative and to strive for excellence. The enrichment that the arts provide for our young people is important.

There are also wonderful examples of culture making a difference to our young people. I stress again that the cashback for creativity programme is engaging with young people who are at risk of turning to crime and antisocial behaviour and is making a real impact on their lives.

Access has been a running theme. We should consider what Scottish Ballet is doing with its innovative project, the close, which provides a first-time ballet experience for young adults, some of whom are excluded from mainstream education. The project

“aims to empower participants by welcoming their creative ideas and building their confidence, communication, self-expression and creative skills”.

Liam McArthur talked about Orkney. He will be aware of the wonderful example of the Orkney peedie schools orchestra. Next month, for the third year, all the pupils in Orkney's smallest schools will come together to form an orchestra with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra musicians in a project that is delivered in partnership with Orkney Islands Council. The real challenge that we have in the youth strategy is to ensure that we can reach all geographical areas and the different groups in society.

I will address a number of other issues that were raised in the debate. There were questions about how we advance the Sistema project. Aberdeen City Council wants to do that. As part of our funding from across the different Government departments, we have also helped Sistema Scotland to think about what it should do next, in terms of development. We are also supporting the aspire Dundee programme, which involves different art forms. I am sure that Parliament will want to take a close interest in that.

Colleges and universities have also been mentioned, which is important. I will address the issue of the demand that we are creating collectively through the consequences of the YMI. The young people who have had the opportunity that the initiative provides in the early years now want to take it up in secondary school, which is creating demand. It is not always necessarily a demand for qualifications, although I am pleased to see that, in the last year for which we have figures, the number of advanced highers for expressive arts went up 8 per cent and, for music, 12 per cent. That demand means that orchestras are growing in terms of schools, different experiences and the demand to play different instruments. Sometimes, travel to another school causes problems with tuition payment. I will ask Alasdair Allan to update at the earliest opportunity members who inquired about tuition fees.

**Liz Smith:** Mary Scanlon made a point about the possibility of interdisciplinary work in the expressive arts baccalaureate, which leads to some of the issues about which the cabinet secretary is talking. That opportunity would, I presume, be beneficial, so it is a worry that more children are not taking up that course.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Part of the lead-up is to ensure that more people are able to do more highers and advanced highers. I will give an example of how we must manage the supply of what we provide from our colleges and universities in order to meet that growing demand.

There was a shortage of dance teachers to teach at standard and then higher grades, so I was instrumental in ensuring that the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council was able to provide funding to enable the then Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama to offer a degree in dance that would allow for more highers to be taught by teachers who are qualified with a degree, and would provide a professional career path for our dancers. We need to ensure that we have the necessary teachers and provision.

Kezia Dugdale knows that I have a keen interest in piping, and I am more than happy to look further into the issue with her and others. There is a challenge because there are good pipers and pipe bands in schools. James Gillespie's high school in Edinburgh is a great performer, as Kezia Dugdale will know. We heard from Rob Gibson about the Kintyre bands, which are doing fantastically well in competitions. The constituency that I represent is in West Lothian, and a West Lothian schools pipe band was created only in recent years.

I know that there is a bit of tension between the different types of band at junior and novice levels. Many of the pipe bands provide tuition for young people and see the school bands as competition.

We need a system that takes everybody forward. I acknowledge Kezia Dugdale's points and I will, although I do not personally curate the Edinburgh tattoo, see what I can do with regard to finding out from Brigadier Allfrey about how he chooses the bands.

I know that Mary Scanlon is passionate about the dance. She should come to Linlithgow in July and take part in the Scotch hop. If she feels that the dance places to which she has been going are rather exclusive, she is more than welcome in Linlithgow, where we join tourists to dance in Linlithgow palace during the summer months.

**Mary Scanlon:** Can the minister do the "Duke of Perth", "Hamilton House", the "51st" and "Mairi's Wedding"?

**Fiona Hyslop:** No, I cannot, but I am more than happy with the "Gay Gordons", "Strip the Willow" or a Shetland reel. Given my dancing capabilities, that is more than enough to get me by.

Liz Smith mentioned the Turner prize nominee list, which is an important reflection of the quality of teaching that takes place at the GCA in particular. We wish all the nominees well; I was pleased that we supported Duncan Campbell at the Venice biennale, where I saw his work last year. Liz Smith is also right to consider the role of families in encouraging participation in the arts.

Jayne Baxter mentioned "The Happy Lands" film, and emphasised the importance of providing a point of access to the arts for communities. Willie Coffey was right to say that the digital expression and creativity that we now see among young people is quite incredible. It will take the youth arts strategy into different areas. People internationally are very impressed with the work that has been carried out so far.

We want the "Time to Shine" strategy to develop. It is about creating opportunities and nurturing the fantastic talents that we have throughout Scotland. We need to involve people early and ensure that young people drive the policy; that is important.

Inclusion is a key aspect of our policy, and young people's voices must be found, nurtured and given support. However, we need to strike a balance between nurture and guidance and offering young people the space to allow them the independence and freedom to express their views, to which we need to listen with respect. That is a challenge. The "Time to Shine" strategy attempts to engender a sense of inclusiveness and responsibility. A theme that has come through in every single contribution to the debate is the idea that arts and culture can have a very beneficial effect on a young person's sense of belonging, place and community.

With regard to the issues around piping, the YMI has been used effectively in many ways. With regard to the youth brass band movement, there were six youth brass bands in the whole of Scotland in 2007, and now there are almost 200. That growth, which the YMI has supported, is quite incredible. It tells us that we are creating a demand that we must meet through providing support later on.

Arts and culture are fundamental to our quality of life, and everyone needs to benefit from them. The Government has worked hard—as I have personally—to defend youth arts and culture budgets. The arts are a response to individuality and to our nature. They help to shape our identity, and they transcend deep and stubborn differences and divisions. The arts have a wondrous universality and an enormous potential to unify. They can speak many languages across many cultures, and they do not discriminate.

The debate has been very good, and I will ask the team who are involved in the "Time to Shine" strategy to progress all the demands, including the invitation to do more work with our colleges and universities. I will reflect on the idea of new festivals, and I commend in particular the idea of a youth arts festival.

I began with a quotation from Albert Camus; I will end with a quotation from another Albert. We must bear in mind the words of Albert Einstein, who said:

"Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere."

I thank members for their contributions to the debate. The health of youth arts is strong in Scotland, and I believe that with the support of all members and the various agencies, we can be an international leader in youth arts. I thank Creative Scotland and all the agencies that are involved. I thank members for their support for the motion, and we are happy to accept the Labour amendment.

## Business Motions

16:59

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-10036, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 20 May 2014

2.00 pm Time for Reflection  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)  
*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Revenue Scotland and Tax Powers Bill  
*followed by* Financial Resolution: Revenue Scotland and Tax Powers Bill  
*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Disabled Persons' Parking Badges (Scotland) Bill  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.30 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 21 May 2014

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
 Commonwealth Games, Sports,  
 Equalities and Pensioners' Rights;  
 Training, Youth and Women's  
 Employment  
 2.40 pm General Questions  
 3.00 pm First Minister's Questions  
 3.30 pm Stage 1 Debate: Courts Reform  
 (Scotland) Bill  
*followed by* Financial Resolution: Courts Reform  
 (Scotland) Bill  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.30 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Tuesday 27 May 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 28 May 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 29 May 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.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-10037, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 1 timetable for the Food (Scotland) Bill.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Food (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 6 October 2014.—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-10038, on lodging and submission dates for various question times.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the period for members to—

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on 29 May should end at 9.30 am on 27 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on 4 and 5 June should end at 4.30 pm on 22 May; and

lodge a Topical Question for answer on 27 May should be 9.30 am on 27 May.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-10033.1, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, which seeks to amend motion S4M-10033, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on time to shine youth arts strategy, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-10033, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on time to shine youth arts strategy, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion as amended agreed to,*

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of Time to Shine, the arts strategy to support Scotland's children and young people to flourish through culture and creativity; recognises the excellent work carried out across youth arts to support young people engaged with culture and creativity; congratulates Scotland's youth arts organisations and companies, in particular the National Youth Choir of Scotland, the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland, Y-Dance, the Scottish Youth Theatre, the National Youth Pipe Band of Scotland and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; also recognises the many young people involved in the work of Scotland's national performing companies, the National Theatre of Scotland, Scottish Ballet, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Scottish Opera; notes the continued importance of collaboration, working with local government and other parties to ensure that participation, creativity, talent development and cultural expression are developed now and in the future; considers that all young people, whether engaged with arts organisations or not, should have the opportunity to achieve their potential and to enjoy the transformational nature of the arts, and welcomes the contribution made by local arts organisations to the lives of young people and to their communities across Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-10038, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on lodging and submission dates for various question times, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the period for members to—

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on 29 May should end at 9.30 am on 27 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on 4 and 5 June should end at 4.30 pm on 22 May;

and lodge a Topical Question for answer on 27 May should be 9.30 am on 27 May.



## Loneliness (Impact on Physical and Mental Health)

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

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-09775, in the name of Margaret McDougall, on recognising the impact of loneliness on physical and mental health. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

#### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes with concern the impact that loneliness can have on physical and mental health; understands that approximately 10% of people over 65 in the UK, including in West Scotland, say that they are lonely or very lonely and 20% consider themselves occasionally lonely; notes figures suggesting that loneliness is as bad for health as smoking 15 cigarettes per day, can increase the risk of developing mental problems, including depressive symptoms and obsessive compulsive disorder, can more than double a person's risk of developing dementia and increases the risk of suicide and depression among adolescents; believes that tackling loneliness and increasing social participation can reduce such problems and encourages healthy behaviour, such as stopping smoking, more physical activity and higher consumption of vegetables, and notes a recent VEnable report, which suggests that, when it comes to tackling loneliness, there is a major gap in services for old people that could be addressed by volunteering and befriending services.

17:03

### **Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):**

I thank the Presiding Officer and members of all parties for their support in bringing to the chamber this debate on the impact that loneliness can have on physical and mental health. I am leading the debate in my role as convener of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on volunteering and the voluntary sector, which recently received a presentation on the issue of loneliness and its impact on health and the associated financial costs from Liz Watson, chief executive of Befriending Networks. I thank Liz and the CPG for the support that they have provided for the debate. I also thank Macmillan Cancer Support and the Scottish Association for Mental Health for the briefings that they provided in advance of the debate.

Loneliness and social isolation are complex issues. They are difficult to measure but can affect anyone at any point in their lives. As I state in the motion, 10 per cent of people over 65 in the UK say that they are lonely or very lonely and 20 per cent consider themselves occasionally lonely.

The recent Volunteer Scotland VEnable report states that there is a "major gap" in services for older people and suggests that the gap could be addressed by volunteering and befriending services, which I will discuss later in my speech.

Loneliness does not affect just the elderly. Studies into the association between loneliness and sociality in middle age, childhood and adolescence show that loneliness in adolescence is strongly associated with suicidal thoughts and behaviours, independent of gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

In adults, loneliness can increase the risk of developing mental health problems, including depressive symptoms and obsessive compulsive disorder, and can more than double a person's risk of developing dementia. Worryingly, according to SAMH, isolation is becoming more common in adults. In SAMH's "Worried Sick" report, a family support worker from Fife stated:

"We've also got some clients who live in a local estate and there's no services there so that increases the feeling of isolation when people are stuck in their flat ... And that lack of network or support group just increases that feeling of isolation."

That can also be said of people in rural areas where there are very few transport links, and I am sure that some of my colleagues will mention that problem.

Macmillan Cancer Support recently warned that we are on the verge of a loneliness epidemic and that an estimated 60,000 people are suffering from loneliness as a result of their illness, with 31 per cent of Scots indicating that they are lonelier since diagnosis. It is clear from Macmillan Cancer Support's studies that loneliness can have a huge effect on the health and wellbeing of people living with cancer, with those who are lonely being three times more likely to drink more and five times more likely to skip meals.

Loneliness is a problem that can affect us all, whether young or old, rich or poor, sick or healthy, and it can affect us at any time in our lives. However, people with terminal illnesses or those who are elderly can be hit the hardest. When it comes to tackling the issue we need an all-encompassing strategy, because evidence shows that tackling loneliness is crucial to meeting the national outcome for people in Scotland to live longer, healthier lives.

I believe that the voluntary sector will be essential in helping us to deal with loneliness and social isolation. As I said, the Volunteer Scotland VEnable report suggests that gaps in services for older people

"are ones that would address loneliness and isolation; [this could be] a simple niche for volunteering."

I argue, however, that we should look into using volunteering to address loneliness and social isolation in all age groups.

Currently, there is a postcode lottery as to who can get services such as befriending. They are funded in a piecemeal manner and there is no

overall strategy in Scotland to tie everything together, hence the gaps in services. There may well be a cost associated with filling the gaps, but surely that is worth it when we consider that loneliness has a financial as well as a health cost, and that befriending and similar services contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of the population.

By tackling loneliness and promoting social participation we encourage healthy behaviour, such as stopping smoking, undertaking more physical activity and increasing consumption of vegetables. Dealing with loneliness has far-reaching effects on improving health and wellbeing. Only through a strategic and coordinated response to the issue of loneliness can we maximise opportunities for such activities as befriending for isolated people in all Scotland's communities.

I ask the minister what consideration the Scottish Government is giving to placing volunteering at the heart of our health and wellbeing policy to tackle loneliness. Volunteering does not just happen; it needs to be properly supported and funded. To assist in that regard, has the Scottish Government considered including the reduction of loneliness as a Scottish Government indicator, so that we can measure the effects of policy? If it did that, perhaps we would live not only longer and healthier lives, but less lonely lives, too.

17:10

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

I thank Margaret McDougall for securing the debate and for her excellent work as convener of the cross-party group on volunteering and the voluntary sector.

I have kept a fairly close eye on health issues since 1999, but I had never seen any research on the links between loneliness and physical and mental health, so I thank Margaret McDougall for sending me the slides from the presentation at the cross-party group. They are worth reading out, because they shocked me:

"A US study recently found that loneliness can increase the risk of death by almost 10 per cent."

I did not know that.

"Loneliness increases the risk of heart disease and puts people at greater risk of blood clots".

"Loneliness is estimated to be as bad for people's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day"—

I certainly did not know that.

"A 2006 study of 3,000 nurses with breast cancer found women without close friends were four times more likely to die than women with 10 or more friends."

I found that one really disconcerting.

"Around 10% of over 65s say they are lonely or very lonely, and another 20% are occasionally lonely"—

Margaret McDougall mentioned that one.

I always thought that dementia must be genetic, but according to research from 2005:

"The risk of dementia almost doubles in older people who are lonely".

I am not sure that many people know that. I certainly did not know. I am not a clinician.

We also heard at the cross-party group that there is a major gap in services to tackle loneliness and isolation. Margaret McDougall mentioned befriending. We heard that Kincardine and Deeside Befriending's hospital project reported that 100 per cent of service users felt more confident about going home from hospital, which led to a 14 per cent reduction in bed days lost to delayed discharge. By addressing one issue, we address another, which is hugely cost effective.

I am sure that Rhoda Grant will mention the wonderful befriending service that we have in Inverness, which is run by volunteers, one of whom, Alan Michael, reopened a day centre in Inverness, the Dunbar centre. Volunteering and befriending certainly provide one answer to the problem.

I would like the minister to consider the information that came from the research projects that we heard about at the cross-party group—I can pass it to him if he does not have it. Whether the research is about dementia, physical health, mental health or recovery from cancer, it should all be brought together in a single piece of research on the impact of loneliness on people's health.

There are other complexities. At the cross-party group we heard about the impact of bereavement. Many people who are lonely after losing their partner of 30, 40 or 50 years find it difficult suddenly to go out and join a lunch club or day centre. They need support in doing that. Last night, when I was in Tesco, I noticed an advert for a tea dance for over-65s. There are also walking groups—joining a group does not have to cost a lot of money—and befriending services. Although many of the council lunch clubs and day centres are closing down, there are plenty of residential care homes. If people could go into those for lunch clubs, using them as day centres, we could make more use of the existing network.

I was shocked by the information that came forward today, and I hope that the matter will be addressed in a positive way by the minister.

18:15

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** I congratulate Margaret McDougall on bringing this important subject to the chamber for debate this evening and I pay tribute to all the work that she does on volunteering, which is central to dealing with the problem that we are addressing today.

Just before the debate, I was quietly singing “Eleanor Rigby”, that great Beatles song about loneliness—that probably tells people what age I am. The song reminds us that people have been aware of the general significance of loneliness for a long time. As Mary Scanlon said, however, research has not related loneliness to physical illness and some mental illnesses until relatively recently. Mary Scanlon helpfully mentioned some of the research reports, and I will mention a couple.

Before I do that, I will cite some figures that back up what has already been said. The Mental Health Foundation says that 10 per cent of British people—it is a United Kingdom figure—feel lonely and that half of people think that people are getting lonelier in general. The figure that Age Scotland has given us for the debate is that more than 80,000 people aged 65 and over describe themselves as often or always lonely. We know that loneliness affects a great many people.

The first study to which I refer was conducted by Professor John Cacioppo of the University of Chicago, who is a world-leading neuroscientist, although I did not know that until this week. He undertook a longitudinal study that looked at a large number of people over time and he found a relationship between high levels of the distress hormone cortisol and time spent in isolation. He also suggested that people in isolation sleep a lot less well, which may have been one of the factors leading to the increased stress. He has done a lot of research on the issue, and that is a brief summary of his work.

I was also interested to read of a report that was featured in *The Guardian* on Monday, which was published by CentreForum and is entitled “Ageing alone: Loneliness and the ‘Oldest Old’”. The report points out that the over-85s are probably the most affected by loneliness, and it states that lonely adults are more likely to undergo emergency hospitalisation. Given the amount of time that we spend talking about emergency hospital admissions, that is significant. The report also says that lonely people are more likely to be admitted early to residential and nursing care. The issue clearly has great ramifications, not just for individuals’ physical and mental health but for the whole health and care system.

Margaret McDougall quoted what the VEnable report says about the “major gap” in services for older people. I do not have time to go into the issue of people who have identifiable mental health conditions, but in a previous mental health debate we explored the fact that services for older people with clinical depression, for example, are not so readily available as services for younger people. That is one dimension of the problem, but today we are talking more about older people in general.

As the CentreForum report puts it, the answer to how we combat loneliness lies in the community, which is where volunteering is absolutely central. The VEnable report talks about regular face-to-face contact being crucial, in which context I mention two initiatives in my constituency that are run by the Pilmeny development project in Leith. One is a group on older men’s health and wellbeing that has been running for several years. I have visited it and have heard men say what a big difference it has made to their lives. The other initiative is a community connecting project that is funded by the change fund—I give credit to the Scottish Government for that—for over-65s who are isolated. The project involves befriending whereby the befriender goes with the individual to various activities in the community. For a limited period of maybe six months, the befriender tries to introduce the individual to various activities in the community with the aim of finding a longer-term, sustainable solution to their loneliness.

My time is nearly up, but I should also mention two of Age Scotland’s initiatives—it has probably got a lot more. The first is its Silver Line. Telephone conversations are not as good as face-to-face contact, but they are better than nothing. Age Scotland also has 850 member groups. The more activities and connections we can create for older people in the community, the more the problem of loneliness will be solved.

17:19

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I congratulate Margaret McDougall on securing valuable debating time for what is an important but perhaps overlooked issue: the impact of loneliness on physical and mental health.

Mental health is the one aspect of our own health that most of us are guilty of ignoring and neglecting, assuming that our brain will never let us down and needs no care or attention to ensure that it functions as it should. In view of that falsehood, I have always been hugely supportive of campaigns and organisations that raise awareness of mental health issues and seek to assist those in need of information or assistance

about their own mental health or that of someone they care for.

While the stigma of mental illness is being challenged and the public are becoming more aware of the conditions affecting us, understanding how our mind works and how to keep it healthy remains minimal. Reducing alcohol consumption and keeping an active mind through learning, reading or physical activity remain important lifestyle choices and techniques to ensure the maintenance of good mental health. However, it is clear that loneliness and its impact on our mental wellbeing are sometimes and somewhat disregarded.

The Scottish Association for Mental Health offers a five ways to better mental health guide on its website. Top of the list is “Stay connected”. That prominence is evidently warranted, with a litany of studies showing that loneliness and social exclusion are linked directly to a number of mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. As a number of members have mentioned, it also has a severe impact on physical health.

As Margaret McDougall points out in her motion, loneliness is disproportionately felt by older people in our society. There are a variety of reasons for that. For example, the death of a partner or close friend, as Mary Scanlon mentioned, or retiring and leaving the working environment can cause loneliness. Simply becoming frail and finding it difficult to go out alone can cause an individual to become secluded and lonely. However, being alone and loneliness are quite different and merely being surrounded by people will not guarantee a feeling of camaraderie, connectedness or integration.

That said, even the smallest interaction can help us connect and interact with the world around us. Striking up a conversation with the cashier at a checkout, going along to a local football match, attending church or even joining a slimming club all give a sense of belonging and allow us to feel connected to the community, help us feel more grounded and offer perspective on issues in our lives.

It is important to remember that loneliness does not only cause mental illness in some people. All too often, those who struggle with mental illness feel stigmatised or are excluded from social activities, thus exacerbating their pre-existing condition. Therefore, we must also ensure that those with mental health issues are not marginalised or allowed to feel that they cannot participate and be an active and effective member of the community, sports team or volunteer group.

A variety of groups and facilities across communities in Scotland are open to those looking

to meet new friends and interact with their neighbours and surroundings. When I carry out my surgeries in Beith community centre, a group of around eight older men and women can be found playing carpet bowls in the main hall next door—usually laughing raucously while I am trying to address constituents’ concerns.

The people in that group spend a few pounds between them to play bowls in a local hall, but there are other, more structured groups such as Garnock Valley Allotment Association which, to my mind, perfectly exemplifies the idea of community engagement and interaction, with dozens of members—the young, the not so young and the old—working together to grow fresh produce and improve their community environment, all while managing to keep fit and healthy, learn new skills and make new friends.

There cannot be any doubt that the more people we encourage to become involved in such groups, the better. On my visits to the allotments, some of the older people there suggested that, were it not for the allotment, they would be at home, on their own, watching daytime television, and one in every two of them would be taking anti-depressants to boot.

Although progress has undoubtedly been made in tackling the stigma and in improving treatment, mental illness and maintaining mental good mental health remain hugely misunderstood subjects. Loneliness is at the forefront of that. I again congratulate the member for raising the matter and giving us the opportunity to discuss them in what is a very interesting debate.

17:24

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I, too, add my congratulations to Margaret McDougall on securing the debate. Loneliness is an important issue that we must tackle.

Loneliness is distressing and impacts on people’s mental and physical health as has been mentioned. We need to address it through preventative spend.

Loneliness is more pronounced in older people for a variety of reasons, including decreasing mobility; for those who live in rural areas, the loss of the ability to drive; and, of course, bereavement. Bereavement at any age is difficult, but for someone who has spent most of their life with a person who has just passed away, who depended on that individual for company and who is no longer active themselves, the impact can be catastrophic not only because of the grief that they feel but because of the loss of such company. After all, that person might have been the only one with whom they had any social interaction.

Esther Rantzen, who was instrumental in setting up the Silver Line Helpline, was recently in the Parliament, telling MSPs about how she wrote about her own loneliness following bereavement. She is an active, well-connected person who was devastated by the loss of her husband, and when her article was published, she was inundated with correspondence from others who had also experienced extreme loneliness. That prompted her to work alongside others to set up the Silver Line, whose telephone and online befriending advice service for older people has proved a lifeline for many. Indeed, Mary Scanlon mentioned the importance of the befriending services in Inverness, and I think that that is what makes the Silver Line so important. The volunteers themselves often benefit from providing the service as it gives them a purpose and helps them to establish friendships.

The point is that we need to tap into the army of volunteers that we have in our older generations; after all, these people have a huge amount of knowledge and the ability to help others, and they are looking for a purpose in their lives. A telephone helpline is an excellent resource, but many other organisations that are trying to tackle the same issue need volunteers to support them.

It is extremely important that people enjoy a social life, but that becomes harder as their mobility diminishes. I spoke recently to the Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company, which has recognised the problem and organises for its client group outings for, among other things, fish teas. In fact, Maggie Lawson from the company told me about one client who, as she pulled her curtains one cold winter night when it got dark really early, began to feel depressed, only to remember that she was going to be picked up in an hour or so to go for a fish tea. She went out with a spring in her step; she had something to look forward to and did not feel so isolated and alone.

We cannot really attach a cost to that sort of activity; it gets people out of the house to meet others and enjoy a meal. That improves health and wellbeing and keeps people more mobile and active, and I find it sad that the funding for such organisations is under threat. If they lose that funding, the service will end, and the cost to the public purse of picking up the pieces and dealing with the mental health problems of these people as they become more and more isolated will be enormous.

Isolation is a big problem in the Highlands and Islands, where people live in remote rural communities. It is even more of a problem for women, who, because they tend to live longer, are much more likely to be bereaved. Many are also of the generation who are less likely to drive.

Because of cuts to local authority budgets, initiatives such as lunch clubs and community car schemes are being closed and service provision is being focused on meeting need rather than on prevention. However, that is a false economy, because without more social interaction people will need much greater intervention much sooner.

The only social contact for many of our elderly is their home carer, but their time with clients is being slashed to a point where they are no longer able to help them get to the toilet, far less sit and chat with them and see how they are. We need to rethink how we deal with and prevent loneliness, and I am very grateful to Margaret McDougall for securing a debate that has allowed us to highlight and explore these issues.

17:28

**The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson):** Like others, I congratulate Margaret McDougall on securing time for this debate. I have listened with real interest to members' speeches.

Loneliness is a complex emotional response to isolation and a lack of the kind of companionship or wider social network that many of us take for granted. It usually gives rise to feelings of anxiety; indeed, individuals who are feeling lonely can also feel anxious when they are surrounded by others.

We are all likely to experience a period of loneliness at some point in our lives. Although loneliness is not a mental health condition, it is a factor that can contribute to ill health. It can also be caused by a person's ill health. Therefore, loneliness can lead to someone who might not be ill developing a condition as a result of the problems that are associated with it and it can be caused by a person's physical or mental ill health.

We are aware of the research that shows that loneliness and social isolation can have a significant impact on physical and mental health, which Mary Scanlon and other members mentioned. Studies have shown that people who are socially isolated can experience more stress, have lower self-esteem and be more likely to have sleep problems than people who have strong social networks. All those things have a negative effect on a person's general wellbeing and can contribute to physical ill health as well as to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

Given that we recognise the impact that loneliness can have, it is important that we ensure that we have a range of services to support people should they require to speak to someone to get help and advice. That is why we support services such as breathing space, which provides advice and support to people who might be lonely or experiencing low mood or depression. We want to provide them with a first stop in getting advice and

support. We also support organisations such as Samaritans, which provides assistance to people on a 24-hour basis.

I turn to a point on which Malcolm Chisholm hit the nail on the head. Last year, I chaired the ministerial task force on health inequalities. In our report, which was published earlier this year, we described an important concept, but one that is often overlooked and undervalued—that of social capital. It was one of the four key priorities that we identified. Social capital is important when it comes to creating resilience in communities and in individuals. Volunteering, through which people can play a purposeful role in their communities, is a key part of that.

One of the challenges that we face in building better social capital in our communities is to move away from the tendency to think that bodies such as local authorities and third sector organisations should go in and do things for the people who live in those communities. Instead, we need to approach the issue from the perspective of building the assets that already exist in communities in order to develop their social capital.

I saw such an approach first hand in Fife in a project that has regenerated the value in a community. That has not happened because the council or a third sector organisation has come in and run a programme. The project has listened to what members of the community think are important to them and has engaged with them to facilitate that and take it forward in a way that best suits their needs. A key part of that lies in delivering greater volunteering opportunities for the people who live in the area and reducing the social isolation that some individuals can experience. That approach is important in tackling not only loneliness, but some of the health inequalities in society, which can themselves contribute to loneliness.

Older people can be at greater risk of becoming lonely. I want to focus on the impact that loneliness can have on their mental health. That is why, in our new mental health strategy, we set out a range of work that we wanted to do to support and promote better mental health and wellbeing for older people. To that end, we have established a working group that has the specific objective of implementing the commitments on older people in the mental health strategy.

Part of that work will involve the group focusing on producing a range of indicators that allow us to identify what progress can be made. Tackling issues such as loneliness will be an important part of that overall agenda.

Several members mentioned befriending projects. There is no national strategy on

befriending, because it sits in a range of existing national strategies—it is in our national strategy on mental health and in our reshaping care for older people programme. In my constituency, a befriending project helps older people with their shopping and so on. It creates partnerships and friendships when individuals have lost them and become socially isolated. That should be seen as part of how services are delivered day in, day out.

I accept that loneliness can affect physical and mental health, but the reverse is also true. If we tackle some of the causes of ill health, we can generally also help to reduce the number who experience social isolation. That is why we support projects such as Community Food and Health (Scotland), which works in low-income communities to improve access to and take-up of a healthy diet. That is important.

With that organisation's expertise, we have supported a number of projects, such as the Food Train, which has expanded from Dumfries and Galloway to six regions across Scotland—last year, its Glasgow branch was opened by my colleague Alex Neil. The Food Train provides a grocery shopping system and befriending, and it helps households to support older people in their communities.

Loneliness must be looked at in the generality of the range of measures that we are taking, whether they involve mental health, reshaping care for older people or how we build social capital to tackle health inequalities in our community. All that has a role to play in ensuring that loneliness is sufficiently addressed.

I hope that members are assured that we recognise the issue's importance. We are determined that the measures that we take forward in our policy areas will help to address some of the problems that loneliness in our society causes.

*Meeting closed at 17:37.*

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