



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 17 December 2014

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

Portfolio Question Time

Finance, Constitution and Economy

Small Business Saturday

1. Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its ministers helped promote small business Saturday and what its position is on supporting such events in the future. (S4O-03821)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government recognises the vital role that small businesses play in our economy and we are committed to helping them to thrive. Initiatives such as small business Saturday help to raise the profile of small businesses. My ministerial colleagues and I supported the campaign, working with the Federation of Small Businesses. We visited a wide variety of small local businesses on the day and made good use of social media to encourage communities to do the same. We want to ensure that people continue to support their local small businesses throughout the year.

Richard Lyle: I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am the convener of the cross-party group on the Scottish Showmen's Guild.

What further help can the minister give to small businesses that might not have fixed premises and which might not receive help through the small business bonus scheme? In particular, what further help can he offer to showmen—as the Scottish Showmen's Guild celebrates its 125th year—who face reduced income because of the present regulations under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982?

John Swinney: There are a number of ways in which people who do not occupy continuous business premises are provided with opportunities to contribute to the local economy. I am thinking of the temporary markets that exist in different communities at this time of year. There is one in the city that I represent, Perth. Such opportunities are facilitated by local authorities to allow businesses of the type to which the member refers to participate.

It is important to recognise that the small business community makes a valuable contribution to the strength and confidence of the local economy throughout the year. As a consequence, it was a pleasure to support small business Saturday. Of more importance is the continuing support that the Government offers through the small business bonus scheme, which now supports 92,000 businesses around the country. It is a particularly good example of how the Government provides assistance, day in and day out, to Scotland's small business community.

Oil and Gas Industry (Jobs in Decommissioning)

2. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what planning it is doing to keep the jobs and opportunities of decommissioning the oil and gas industry in Scotland. (S4O-03822)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government has conducted extensive and detailed planning to help create a decommissioning industry in Scotland to take advantage of a sector that Oil & Gas UK estimates will be worth a total of £37 billion between now and 2040. That planning work has included the establishment of Decom North Sea; publication of the Scottish Government's oil and gas strategy in 2012; promotion of energy skills with a budget of £6.5 million; career promotion through My World of Work and other initiatives; consideration by the independent expert commission in its report in July of the essential elements of decommissioning; and the publication in October of a detailed report by Scottish Enterprise on decommissioning capacity.

Jenny Marra: I thank the minister for his response, but I am concerned that much decommissioning work seems to be going to Norway, Holland, the midlands of England and places such as Hartlepool. At the moment, a substantial amount of decommissioning work does not seem to be being kept in Scotland. As the minister said, the decommissioning industry will be worth billions of pounds over the next couple of generations. The oil and gas industry feels that more needs to be done to keep those jobs in Scotland. Can Mr Ewing step up the programme and identify areas in Scotland in which he feels that decommissioning should be taking place?

Fergus Ewing: I can do more than that. I can say that we are investing in decommissioning as well as in planning, which is what the original question was about. We have invested substantially in decommissioning, especially in Shetland. That work is being taken forward by the industry. I have had involvement in it with Canadian Natural Resources—I met its project

manager for the Murchison field, which is being decommissioned—and in a large number of other areas.

It is up to the industry to take forward the decommissioning work. We are working extremely closely with Oil & Gas UK and with several operators, with whom I meet regularly, most recently on Monday of this week.

Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Will the minister tell us a bit more about what assistance the Scottish Government has provided to improve the decommissioning facilities in Shetland and allow the area to capture that valuable economic opportunity?

Fergus Ewing: Yes. I have been working over the past three years to ensure that the opportunities for decommissioning in Shetland are pursued. As the member knows from his regular campaigning on the matter in the area, Shetland is geographically best placed to be a hub for decommissioning work. That is why I have, on several occasions, met Sandra Laurenson of Lerwick Port Authority, as well as Murdo MacIver and his colleagues at Peterson SBS. That is why that work has come to fruition over the past three years and has led to substantial investment of around £1.2 million, which has levered £20 million of private sector investment in Lerwick. We are still waiting for commensurate contributions from the United Kingdom Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Question 3 has been withdrawn by David Torrance for understandable reasons.

Small Business Bonus Scheme (Aberdeen)

4. Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government to what extent small businesses in Aberdeen have benefited from the small business bonus scheme. (S4O-03824)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): In Aberdeen, an estimated 2,045 businesses pay zero or reduced rates under the small business bonus scheme and have saved around £25.4 million in business rates taxation through the scheme since its introduction in 2008.

Mark McDonald: On small business Saturday, I visited the Byron Bakery in my constituency. The owners, Ally and Fiona Rait, took over the business in 2008 and have benefited every year from the small business bonus scheme. They were keen to emphasise the strong support that it has provided for their business. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that the Byron Bakery and other small businesses in Aberdeen will continue to benefit from the small business bonus not only in

this parliamentary session but, if the Scottish National Party is re-elected, in the next?

John Swinney: The choices that members make about the visits that they make on small business Saturday are instructive. Mr McDonald visited a bakery, which might be a surprise to some of us, given his new svelte figure. I visited the award-winning florist in Blairgowrie, Something Special Flowers, which perhaps says something about my softer side in answering parliamentary questions.

I confirm to Mr McDonald that the small business bonus scheme represents significant assistance to small companies throughout the country. When the First Minister addressed Parliament on 26 November to set out the programme for government, she confirmed that the Government will continue the scheme until the end of the parliamentary session and, if re-elected in 2016, will continue it for the next parliamentary session as well.

Offshore Energy Sector (North Sea)

5. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government where it foresees future jobs growth in the offshore energy sector in the North Sea. (S4O-03825)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The report “Fuelling the next generation: A study of the United Kingdom upstream oil and gas workforce” highlights that factors such as capital expenditure, decommissioning and international trade will drive the size and shape of the future workforce. Future jobs growth depends on investment in the United Kingdom continental shelf. The autumn statement has done little to encourage investment in the UKCS.

Lewis Macdonald: The minister will be aware that 1,000 jobs have already gone in the past few months and that thousands more are on the line. Given the recent “Fuelling the next generation” report, does he agree that employers in the sector cannot afford to shed staff today and expect to recruit staff tomorrow? Will he encourage the sector to protect jobs in order to maintain continuity, keep confidence high and provide security for the onshore and offshore workforce?

Fergus Ewing: Lewis Macdonald highlights a fair, sensible approach. It is certainly one that I have espoused and sought to deploy in leadership. I spoke to the OPITO business breakfast in November during the national oil and gas skills week. We have provided an extra £6.5 million to establish energy skills Scotland. We encourage all companies—small, medium and enormous—to take on young people, which many of them do. However, more can be done and it is

essential that, during these challenging times, companies do not cut costs by cutting the number of young people that they employ. I certainly subscribe to that principle.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 6 from Ken Macintosh has not been lodged.

Air Passenger Duty (Abolition for Young People)

7. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact on the economy of abolishing air passenger duty for young people. (S4O-03827)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The United Kingdom Government assessment, which has been certified by the Office for Budget Responsibility, estimates that the Exchequer impact of the policy will cost £40 million in 2014-15, rising to £95 million in 2019-20. However, analysis from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs concluded that

"the measure is not expected to have any significant economic impacts".

We have urged the UK Government to act on the Smith commission recommendation and devolve APD so that we can reduce the tax to help unlock Scotland's full economic potential and boost international connectivity and tourism.

As there is now cross-party agreement on the need to devolve APD to Scotland, it is vital that the UK Government takes early action to implement that. That view is shared by Scotland's main airports, which have written to each of the Westminster party leaders urging quick progress.

David Stewart: Does the minister share my view that the exemption of children from APD in 2015 and 2016 will reduce costs to air passengers with children who are travelling to Scotland? That is obviously good news for Scottish airports such as Inverness, which is in my region, and, of course, it is good news for tourism. As the minister hinted, it is also a taster for the full devolution of APD when the Smith commission proposals are enacted in full.

Fergus Ewing: I am delighted to agree with David Stewart, who I know takes an interest in aviation matters. I am also delighted that this appears to be a measure on which there is cross-party agreement. As the minister for tourism, I would be absolutely thrilled and delighted at the prospect of being able to remove one of the substantial barriers and hurdles to attracting more people to come to enjoy the magnificent hospitality that Scotland has to offer. Reducing APD, and eliminating it eventually, would certainly enable that objective to be better achieved.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): Other than just saying, "Reduce it," what is the Scottish Government's specific policy for day 1 of devolved APD?

Fergus Ewing: If Gavin was listening—he does not normally make the mistake of not listening to the answer, which members just heard—I said that APD would eventually be eliminated. I did not just say, "Reduce it." Listen up, Gavin—listen up.

Gavin Brown: I said "day 1". The minister did not listen to the question.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Fergus Ewing: Of course we envisage that the 50 per cent reduction, which we said was our policy before the referendum, will continue to be our policy. We do not shilly-shally or U-turn on our policies like some other parties. I am sorry that Gavin has just spoilt the consensus because I fully hope that we can get cross-party support from almost all members to reduce APD by 50 per cent as soon as we possibly can.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. Could members use full names in the chamber, please?

Oil Prices (Economic Impact)

8. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what the economic impact on Scotland is of the recent fall in crude oil prices. (S4O-03828)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The extent of that impact will depend on how long the low prices last. There are a range of forecasts suggesting that prices will rebound from current levels in 2015.

To minimise the predicted economic impact, it is imperative that the United Kingdom Government delivers in full its promised new investment allowance, and that it does so by no later than the March 2015 budget.

Alex Johnstone: I thank the minister for his answer. Five weeks ago I asked the First Minister the same question and he told me that recovery was on the horizon. Since then, oil prices have dropped by a further \$25 a barrel.

The minister will be aware that the service industry is vital to the economy of Scotland, particularly in the north-east. Is there any action that the minister can take at this stage to encourage confidence in that industry in order to prevent any attempt at downsizing or relocating to other markets from the north-east and to ensure that we are in a position to take up where we left off when prices eventually recover?

Fergus Ewing: I agree with Alex Johnstone that it is important to do everything that we can, irrespective of which party we are in, to encourage confidence in the excellent oil and gas industry, which is, in many ways, the best in the world. The industry faces considerable pressures at the moment because of high costs and low oil prices. However, many predict that the oil price will recover, and the horizon may not, therefore, be too far away.

I had meetings in Aberdeen on Monday. I also met trade union representatives here yesterday—they represented many decades of experience of working in the North Sea. Until the tax changes that George Osborne and Danny Alexander promised a couple of weeks ago are delivered, there will be no new or further investment in the industry because it does not have the detail. It is essential, therefore, that the promised new measures—especially the new investment allowance—are brought forward in the budget in March. Any later than that, and there will be extremely serious repercussions.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The Deputy First Minister announced in March 2013 the launch of the “Oil and Gas Analytical Bulletin”. At that stage, the bulletin forecast that the price of oil would be \$113 per barrel. Now the price has almost halved—it stands at \$59 a barrel. Every member in the chamber recognises the impact of that fall on employment and the economy, but we need reliable figures and analysis, as I am sure the minister agrees.

Does the minister also agree with what professor of economics Ronald MacDonald said today about the importance of oil price estimates? Does the minister agree that it is time to have an inquiry into the validity of those estimates, because we need confidence in the predictions?

The minister’s prediction is currently higher than that of the Office for Budget Responsibility, and he has always suggested that the OBR is overoptimistic. Will he return to the chamber with a statement?

Fergus Ewing: In that long and somewhat tortuous question, I was asked to get involved in an academic inquiry of some sort. Frankly, I do not have time for that, as we are too busy working with the oil industry to help it here and now. We have delivered more than 100 additional account-managed services to 100 small and medium-sized enterprises, and have provided more than £6 million for energy skills. We have, unlike the United Kingdom Government, set up a £10 million innovation fund, and we have increased the number of Scottish Development International staff all over the world.

Most seriously of all, what the industry needs right now are the details on the budget measures that were promised. From my meetings with operators and my discussions with trade unions and academics in the past few weeks, it is absolutely clear—and beyond political debate—that what is required for more investment and confidence in the industry is the implementation of the vague promises that were delivered in the autumn statement. Most especially, the investment allowance is required and must be put in place by March in the budget. That, rather than rerunning the referendum as Jackie Baillie seems to want to do, is the absolute priority for everyone.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): The minister predicted a price of \$113 per barrel. Given the oil price just now, does he agree with me that, although he may be a Ewing, he is certainly no JR?

Fergus Ewing: I always had a soft spot for JR.

Project Bank Accounts (Impact on Small Businesses)

9. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the piloting of project bank accounts will impact on small businesses in the construction sector. (S4O-03829)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): Small and medium-sized businesses based in Scotland form the backbone of our national construction capacity. Project bank accounts should reduce the amount of time that it takes for vital cash to reach them, and should provide confidence for firms that rely on work from public sector projects by reducing their exposure to credit and improving their overall cash-flow position.

Project bank account trial projects are on-going and will be evaluated in due course.

Gordon MacDonald: Can the minister confirm whether the Scottish Government will continue with project bank accounts? What benefits does the Government believe their use brings?

Fergus Ewing: We continue to trial project bank accounts, and I am delighted that Gordon MacDonald takes a close interest in the topic.

Project bank accounts deliver two main benefits. First, small businesses in the contract chain for major works get paid for the work directly and on time, and they do not have to wait several months while money sits in the account of someone higher up the chain.

Secondly, as those of us who, like me, are slightly longer in the tooth than we would wish and who remember the Lilley debacle will know, the risk is that small companies that are lower down

the chain may face insolvency as a result of problems higher up the chain.

Project bank accounts are designed to tackle both those well-known and identified problems. I am delighted that the Scottish Government is piloting project bank accounts and trying them out. We will most certainly come back to Parliament to debate the issue, in which the member takes such a close interest, very soon.

Enterprise Support (South Scotland)

10. Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support enterprise and business across the South Scotland parliamentary region. (S4O-03830)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is committed to supporting sustainable economic growth across Scotland. We recognise the particular challenges that are faced in South Scotland and we work closely with a wide range of delivery partners to promote economic activity in the area. By way of example, in 2014, regional selective assistance awards worth more than £6.2 million were awarded to 13 businesses across all the local authorities in the South Scotland parliamentary region, creating 665 jobs and safeguarding 173 jobs.

Jim Hume: I thank the Deputy First Minister for his answer, but it will be of little comfort to the only surviving auction mart in the Scottish Borders, which, four years ago, had a massive hike in its business rates overnight and without consultation. The mart is a significant employer that is vital to the local rural economy. It has a sister mart with a similar footprint just a few miles away, across the border near Wooler. That mart has rates of around £11,000, whereas the rates for the mart in the Borders are around a staggering £90,000. It is about nine times more expensive to do business north of the border because of the Scottish Government's harsh decisions. Will the Deputy First Minister act now to right that wrong, so that marts in Scotland do not work under a regime that is so unfair and non-competitive when compared with the regime in England?

John Swinney: The process for the valuation of properties for non-domestic rates is carried out entirely independently of Government by the valuation boards around the country. I know that there have been issues about auction marts, and ministers engaged directly with marts on the question in the aftermath of the revaluation. I stress that the judgments are arrived at through the independent valuation process. Of course, companies are entitled to appeal against the valuations that are made. I do not have the information to hand but, from my general

knowledge of the handling of appeals, I know that the overwhelming majority of them have now been settled. In fact, a very significant proportion of appeals have now been settled. I will inquire as to whether the appeal in relation to the auction mart to which Mr Hume refers has been settled. That is the due process that exists for companies to determine whether the appropriate rateable value issues have been considered in determining the valuation.

On the wider question of the role of auction marts, I recognise their significance in the rural economy. They provide a significant focal point for the trade and activity of the agricultural sector. Ministers will be happy to continue our discussions with the auction mart sector. Those are being taken forward by my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment.

Employment and the Economy (North-east Scotland)

11. Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support employment and the economy in the north-east in response to Oil & Gas UK's report, "Fuelling the next generation". (S4O-03831)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): We in the Scottish Government are supporting the industry through a wide variety of measures within the devolved functions. However, the industry requires more support from Westminster on reserved functions.

Richard Baker: In relation to the minister's responsibilities, can he tell us how Scottish Enterprise will respond to new challenges in the north-east economy, given the fall in the oil price? The report identifies that on-going skills gaps remain, for the sector, an additional challenge that it does not need at the moment. Does that not highlight the need to invest in skills and not to reduce investment in further education, which unfortunately has been the track record of the Government?

Fergus Ewing: I agreed with much of that, until the last sub-clause. On what Scottish Enterprise is doing, I have here the report on decommissioning that Jenny Marra asked about, which was published in October.

On Monday, in the course of numerous meetings in Aberdeen I met Scottish Enterprise staff, as I always do. I can tell members that Scottish Enterprise has an excellent team that is delivering a wide range of support to the industry, and that that support is hugely valued and has enormously helped small and medium-sized enterprises in particular to achieve their potential, to grow enormously and to take on large numbers

of staff, often providing goods and services that are exported throughout the world.

Of course, on the skills front we have also provided more resources to enable our colleges and universities—of which Aberdeen offers some of the finest in the world—to give young people the skills, training and qualifications that they need to play a part in what is an excellent industry. I think that we share the same aspirations, if not always the same conclusions, in this matter.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): When will the next Scottish Government “Oil and Gas Analytical Bulletin” be published?

Fergus Ewing: We will publish appropriate statistical information in due course. However, although publication of statistical information is important, it is not as important as getting the right measures for the industry. I can tell members that the industry faces enormous challenges at the moment. Until such time as the ground rules for the basis of new investment are established, it will not be reasonable to expect that billions of dollars will be invested in new fields, new developments and extensions. That is why the most important message—which I think I am getting across loud and clear—is that the measures that the United Kingdom Government promised a couple of weeks ago must be delivered no later than March. That is imperative. I hope that that approach will be shared across all parties.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 12, in the name of Iain Gray, has been withdrawn, and an explanation has been provided.

Cruise Liner Sector and Tourism (Impact of Passport Control Procedures)

13. Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what response it has received to requests to the United Kingdom Government to meet to discuss the impact of passport control procedures on the cruise liner sector and tourism in Scotland. (S4O-03833)

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The UK Government introduced, without consultation, face-to-document passport checks of cruise liner passengers. The Scottish Government remains concerned about the damaging effect that that is having on the cruise industry across the UK.

The matter of passport checks of cruise liner passengers was first raised with the Scottish Government at the convention of the Highlands and Islands in October 2012. Since then, despite the fact that the Scottish Government has made five separate requests to meet UK ministers to discuss the issue, we have not been successful.

Stuart McMillan: The minister and I have discussed the matter inside and outside the chamber. I share the minister's frustration at the fact that the UK Government appears not to want to talk about the issue. However, although the Smith commission proposals do not include transfer of passport control measures to Scotland, paragraph 17 of the report says that

“it may be appropriate to devolve further powers beyond those set out in the heads of agreement”.

Does the minister therefore agree that transferring those passport control powers could enable a Scottish solution to the problem, which is faced by a growing industry that has a positive effect on the economy of Scotland and, in particular, of Inverclyde?

Fergus Ewing: Yes, I do. It is essential that the UK Government listen to Scotland's needs and that it act accordingly. Stuart McMillan, who has championed this issue in the Scottish Parliament, quite rightly highlights the fact that the cruise market in Scotland has grown exponentially, as I have seen in places such as Greenock, where it is now an important part of the local economy and sustains a great many jobs. There is huge potential.

Although security issues are, of course, important, we believe that the approach that has been adopted is gold plated and over the top. We greatly regret that despite our reasoned approach in this matter, the UK Government is not willing properly to engage with the Scottish Government to find a better, more practical and successful solution.

Local Taxation (Independent Commission)

14. Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when the independent commission to examine council tax alternatives will begin its work, and what timetable it will work to. (S4O-03834)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The commission will commence in early 2015 and report in the autumn.

Graeme Pearson: Mr Swinney will remember that, as far back as 1997, the Scottish National Party manifesto promised the introduction of a local income tax and that, in 2007, its manifesto promised “Scrapping the unfair council tax”. Today, we have had a reply from the minister indicating a timescale.

Does the cabinet secretary appreciate the pressure that local authorities have faced in those 17 years, and will he ensure that the appropriate priority is placed on delivering a working solution within that timescale?

John Swinney: The last time I looked I had not been in power for 17 years. It may feel like that to Graeme Pearson, but it has only been seven and a bit years. If the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities was feeling pressure in the 10 years before I came to office, that pressure was delivered by Graeme Pearson's good colleagues in the Labour Party, both in the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government.

Local authorities have been well supported financially by the Scottish Government. We have, since this Government came to office, had years of negotiated and agreed settlements between local government and the Scottish Government, and local government's share of the total budget that is available to the Scottish Government is higher today than it was when this Government came to office in 2007, so local authorities have since then been better and more securely supported by the Scottish Government.

The Government wants to proceed with the establishment of the commission to examine issues around local taxation, in line with recommendations that were given to us by the Local Government and Regeneration Committee and in the spirit of broadest possible agreement. Last week we talked to the COSLA leadership about the steps that we can take in partnership with local government to take forward such an agreement. On 26 November, in her statement to Parliament on the programme for government, the First Minister invited all political parties to be included in the process. The Government wants to proceed with as much agreement as possible, so I hope that the Labour Party will be part of that agreement.

Health Spending (Barnett Consequentials)

15. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what detail the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy can provide regarding the allocation of the Barnett consequentials arising from the recent increase in United Kingdom Government health spending. (S4O-03835)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): As I announced on 3 December, the Barnett consequentials arising from the increase in UK Government health spending will be passed on in full to the national health service in Scotland.

Dr Simpson: I thank the cabinet secretary for his answer, although it does not really give us any more detail. Would he like to comment on the publication of the recent report from Scotpho—the Scottish public health observatory—which showed that, out of 11 actions that can reduce inequalities, paying the living wage is by far the most effective?

Having failed to make payment of the living wage happen through the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014, will the Government follow London's lead and ensure that all public sector contracts require that workers engaged under them are paid the living wage, in order to reduce health inequalities?

John Swinney: I agree unreservedly with Dr Simpson that the living wage is the most effective way to tackle poverty and inequality. The Government has led from the front by paying the living wage to our staff, ensuring that it is paid to public sector workers who are covered by our pay policy and taking forward mechanisms that are supportable in law. Dr Simpson and I have heard all the debates about the advice of the European Commission and the advice that we have. We have taken steps in law to negotiate contracts that provide for the payment of the living wage. We have managed to secure that most recently in relation to the Government's catering and cleaning contracts.

Last week in the national economic forum, we led a debate on the importance of extending the living wage across the private sector. I am delighted to say that that received a strong and positive endorsement from many private sector organisations that were in attendance and that it resulted in some companies changing their practice.

The Government will continue to take forward such work in concert with the Poverty Alliance, with which we work closely on such questions.

Draft Budget 2015-16 (Housing Adaptations for Tenants of Registered Social Landlords)

16. Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy has had with colleagues regarding the allocation in the 2015-16 draft budget for housing adaptations for older and disabled tenants of registered social landlords. (S4O-03836)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): I confirm that the £10 million of funding available in 2014-15 for registered social landlords to deliver adaptations to help older and disabled people to live at home independently and safely will be maintained in 2015-16.

Mary Fee: The Scottish Housing Regulator reports that, on average, social housing tenants wait 66 days for medical adaptations to be completed, while some registered social landlords take a staggering 358 days. Does the cabinet secretary agree that those timescales are completely unacceptable? What action will he take

to support the Minister for Housing and Welfare in ensuring that local authorities have the support to help older and disabled residents to have medical adaptations implemented as soon as possible?

John Swinney: I agree with Mary Fee that, if an assessment is made that an individual requires some adaptation in their home to support safer independent living, they should be able to secure it in a credible timescale, and the timescales that she just read out are not credible. I will look at the matter carefully and discuss it with the Minister for Housing and Welfare. If I can offer particular additional support to the work that I am sure Ms Fee is doing, I will certainly do that.

Budget Consideration (Comparison of Methods in Scotland and the United Kingdom)

17. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on how the Scottish budget method of consultation and committee deliberation compares with that of the United Kingdom. (S4O-03837)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): Over the summer, I engaged extensively on our budget priorities with a wide range of stakeholders, including our partners in local government, the trade unions, business organisations, the third sector and those with low-carbon interests. Since it was published on 9 October, the 2015-16 draft budget has been on the agenda of more than 40 Scottish Parliament committee meetings and has been the subject of at least a dozen ministerial evidence sessions.

I have written to the finance spokespeople of the main parties in the Scottish Parliament to seek their views on the draft budget, and I hope to meet each of them in the new year to discuss it. I am always open to discussion on how the process can be improved, but I believe that most stakeholders and parliamentarians south of the border would consider the comprehensive consultation and scrutiny process that I have just outlined a strong proposition.

John Mason: Does the cabinet secretary agree that Westminster's methods are outdated theatre, that they are not fit for a modern democracy and that they make it extremely difficult for the Scottish Parliament to plan ahead?

John Swinney: In scrutiny terms, the Scottish Parliament has always followed the practices to which Mr Mason referred in his initial question, dating back to one of the bills that we passed in 1999-2000—the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Bill—in which we recognised the importance of effective financial scrutiny. From where I am sitting, it certainly feels as if there is

effective scrutiny of the financial commitments that the Government makes, but we are always willing to pursue any suggestions that are made on that. From my experience as a member of the House of Commons, I would say that there is significantly greater scrutiny of financial provisions in this Parliament than there ever was in the House of Commons.

Scottish Exchequer

18. Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it considers that it should establish a Scottish exchequer to accommodate further tax and spending powers going forward. (S4O-03838)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy (John Swinney): The Scottish Government will continue to build on its reputation for fiscal competence in implementing the limited tax and spending powers that were recommended for devolution by the Smith commission. Those powers will be exercised within a fiscal framework that provides an equitable settlement for both the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments.

Chic Brodie: With the increased powers that the Smith commission proposed, and with the inevitable further powers on revenue and expenditure functions, such as all welfare benefits powers and total powers on tax administration and collection, on borrowing and on financial policy, does the cabinet secretary agree that a fully fledged Scottish exchequer will be necessary to apply macrofinancial policies in preparation for the independence that will come?

John Swinney: For Scotland to be an independent country, it would require to have all the necessary skills and capabilities at its disposal to exercise all functions properly and effectively. I assure Mr Brodie that, as we take forward the additional responsibilities that we have—we are doing that in relation to land and buildings transaction tax and landfill tax—we are acquiring the skills and expertise to exercise those functions properly. That will continue to be the Scottish Government's approach as we acquire further responsibilities.

Historical Child Abuse

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a statement by Angela Constance on historical child abuse. As the cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, there should be no interruptions or interventions.

I call Angela Constance. Cabinet secretary, you have 10 minutes.

14:40

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): On 11 November, my predecessor, Michael Russell, stood in this chamber and spoke of “the moral imperative” that compels all of us to face up to and act on the reality of historical abuse of children and the current risks of child abuse.

In his statement, Michael Russell laid out this Government’s commitment to move comprehensively and quickly on these issues. He reflected on the achievements of Survivor Scotland, the interaction process and the establishment of the national confidential forum, and he promised to return to this chamber to set out the Government’s view on whether a national inquiry into historical abuse in Scotland was the right way forward to meeting the needs of survivors. Today, I am making good on that promise.

National investigations such as the Shaw review and the Kerelaw inquiry have already been carried out into this issue, and it is important for any further inquiry to complement and build on previous work, while moving the issue forward. We must also be conscious of the work that is already under way with survivors. The Scottish Government has given its commitment to working to develop a survivor support fund and to fund an appropriate commemoration, guided by the views of survivors.

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs has invited key stakeholders from the legal sector to consider how the civil justice system can be more accessible and responsive to survivors of abuse as children in care. That will include consideration of the way in which the time bar operates, and we will continue to work with survivors to ensure the fullest understanding of the civil justice barriers that survivors face today.

Our dedication to considering all of the issues must match the seriousness of those issues. We have witnessed the pitfalls when an Administration rushes to make decisions about an inquiry without involving the people who will be most affected by it. We are not a Government that believes in haste

at the expense of sense. We are committed to delivering on what we promise; the victims of abuse are owed nothing less than a thorough consideration of all factors before a decision is reached.

Of course, the case for an inquiry is strong. I am sure that I do not need to tell members of this chamber that we owe it to survivors to find the truth, to speak that truth wherever it needs to be heard, and to listen and learn from what we hear. However, we must also be mindful of the fact that inquiries are major undertakings. The decision to launch them cannot be taken lightly, and the planning around them must be careful and inclusive. They must have a clear focus and not be open-ended in either remit or timescale.

As part of our response to the Scottish Human Rights Commission’s interaction process, I, the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs and the Minister for Children and Young People met a number of survivors on Monday to discuss what an inquiry would mean to them. Having listened to their personal experiences and concerns, I have deliberated carefully, and I have also reflected on the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who once said:

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”

This Parliament must always be on the side of victims of abuse. We must have the truth of what happened to them and how the organisations and individuals into whose care the children were entrusted failed them so catastrophically. We will get to that truth, and we will establish a national public inquiry into historical abuse of children in institutional care.

To ensure that justice is done, I can tell the chamber that, where crimes are exposed, the full force of the law will be available to bring the perpetrators to account. I can also advise the chamber that the Lord Advocate has been consulted on holding the inquiry, and measures will be put in place to ensure that it does not compromise or interfere with on-going criminal investigations and prosecutions.

I am grateful to the survivors of institutional child abuse who have taken the time to meet me and other ministers and who have spoken bravely and eloquently about why they consider that a public inquiry is needed and necessary. As vital as their voices have been in getting us to this point—they have indeed been vital—I am, of course, acutely conscious that many more survivors remain silent. As abused children, they had no voice and no one to cry out on their behalf at the appalling injustices that they suffered while they were growing up. Today, they await the right circumstances for their

experiences to be heard. I sincerely hope that the public inquiry will provide such an opportunity.

As a society, we have an opportunity to confront the mistakes of our past and learn from them. That will not be easy, but only by shining a light on the darkest recesses of our recent history will we fully understand the failures of our past to enable us to prevent them from happening again and to ensure a brighter future for every child and young person in Scotland.

A few weeks ago, the First Minister set out the priorities for our Government and spoke about the need to build a fairer and more equitable Scotland. That is a vision of a Scotland that will look truth squarely in the eye and will not be quick to judge, but will not flinch from what is discovered. For that reason, the inquiry will be a statutory inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005. It will have the power to compel witnesses to attend and give evidence if required.

As intimated earlier, we will consult survivors and relevant organisations on the exact terms of reference. I propose that that process be complete by the end of April. Those terms of reference need to capture the principles of the inquiry and how we can create the right environment to support victims to confide and the right timescales over which it should be held.

The process must also find the right people to oversee the inquiry, not least any chair or panel. We will not make the same mistakes as others have made by rushing out with names before we have consulted survivors and relevant organisations about the attributes of a chair or panel. To support the work, I have asked the centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland—CELCIS—to provide on-going logistical support, academic input and expert advice throughout the process.

Engagement with survivors has already started in earnest. Scottish Government officials have written to survivor organisations about plans for engagement around these matters for the first few months of next year. We have had a positive response from organisations, which have welcomed the opportunity to speak to us in a setting in which survivors will feel comfortable in having their voices heard.

As part of the process, we will also hold a series of regional events that will give a wide range of stakeholders the opportunity to contribute. As well as shaping the survivor support fund, those events will be used to consult on the inquiry with a view to having the terms of reference and announcing a chair or panel by the end of April next year, as I mentioned earlier.

I will conclude my statement with one further reflection. When the Parliament was reconvened

in 1999 and Scotland's inaugural First Minister, Donald Dewar, addressed the nation during the opening ceremony, he spoke of the four words on the mace that sits in the chamber: "Wisdom. Justice. Compassion. Integrity." Those are the words that resound whenever the chamber has turned to the issue, and they are the words on which the inquiry will be founded.

I am happy to take questions from members.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, but I will let them run on for as long as necessary. After that, we will move to the next item of business.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement and for having early sight of it. It is a welcome statement and a welcome decision. In truth, it should have happened sooner. I understand the cabinet secretary's points about the care and lack of haste required to come to a view, but it is 10 years since the former First Minister, Jack McConnell, apologised on behalf of the Scottish people to the survivors of institutional child abuse. For a moral imperative, this has proceeded and progressed too slowly.

This next step has taken too long, but we are taking it today. The most important thing—the cabinet secretary was right to acknowledge this—is that those survivors who have campaigned long and hard and those who have always felt unable to speak out all have faith in the process that we begin today.

To that end, can the cabinet secretary give us some indication of how widely and which institutions she expects the inquiry to investigate? Can she elaborate on how she will consult survivors on the appointment of a chair inclusively and transparently to avoid the missteps that we have seen elsewhere? Can she tell us how survivors will be supported through expenses and otherwise in giving their evidence? How will she ensure that this inquiry does not just examine the historical abuses but ensures that such shameful events are not occurring and cannot occur in Scotland today?

Angela Constance: I am grateful to Mr Gray for the tone and tenor of his questions.

Mr Gray makes the point about why we are having an inquiry now. I am acutely conscious that it is 10 years since Jack McConnell made that very public apology on behalf of the nation, but it is important to recognise that much has happened in the past 10 years. There has been the national strategy, which was introduced in 2005 by the previous Administration and which this Administration took forward. Since 2007, we have

seen the Shaw review and the Kerelaw inquiry. We currently fund 25 organisations that support survivors, and as ministers we are actively participating in the Scottish human rights interaction process, which in August this year produced a new paper that I think made a very compelling case about why we now need an inquiry.

It is important that we move forward over the first few months of 2015 hand in glove with survivors and the organisations that represent them. They need to be consulted about the person spec and the skills that we require for the chairperson or panel. There is a range of views in the survivor community about the type of individuals or, indeed, whether there should be a co-chair or a panel. We will continue that work in earnest.

Mr Gray asked which institutions will be covered. We will have to look at the detail of that, as I am acutely conscious that, when we look at the history of institutional child abuse in Scotland, it does not involve just state institutions. Children in the 1950s and 1960s, and perhaps even as late as the 1970s, were put into institutional types of care by quite informal arrangements.

It is therefore important that the terms of reference are crafted in a way that will enable us to get to the true nature, scope and extent of institutional child abuse in this country from children who were put into institutional care. I am very conscious that there are many forms of institutional care.

Finally, we are committed to ensuring that survivors have the necessary emotional and financial support both to participate in the inquiry process and as they go forward on their road to recovery.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement.

We, too, welcome the Scottish Government's announcement that there will be a national inquiry into the historical abuse of children in institutional care. I hope that it will provide an opportunity to expose the perpetrators of such hideous crimes against children and to learn lessons to prevent the abuse of children in care from ever happening again.

The cabinet secretary explained that key stakeholders will be consulted to ensure that the legal proceedings are as accessible as possible to survivors. I emphasise the importance of ensuring the inquiry's accessibility.

The cabinet secretary noted that many survivors remain silent about abuse and have no voice. I am concerned that that might remain the case unless

practical help and support are available for the brave people who come forward. Only an inquiry that supports survivors can truly deliver the justice that victims deserve.

How will the inquiry work alongside other inquiries into abuse that will take place across the United Kingdom? Will it share information with them? Can the victims have confidence that guilty individuals who might have worked in institutions across the United Kingdom will be held to account?

Angela Constance: It is important to recognise that the inquiry will not operate in isolation. It is the police's job to investigate the criminality of individuals and organisations, it is prosecutors' job to prosecute and it is the courts' job to convict on the basis of evidence. All of that must continue, and it does continue daily. I am sure that my colleague Michael Matheson, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, would testify to that.

Nanette Milne makes a pragmatic point about working with other inquiries when appropriate. We have to recognise that child abuse has no borders and that we might have to work with other jurisdictions, but it is appropriate that we in Scotland have our national public statutory inquiry to look at our failings as a country in our past. My officials have already been in touch with officials in Northern Ireland, for example, because an inquiry is continuing there on that basis, and we will of course have discussions and share information and experiences as appropriate with our colleagues in the UK Government.

Nanette Milne's point about the inquiry's accessibility and the importance of ensuring the right support for survivors to participate is well made. That is why we are—crucially—taking our time to work with survivors to get the right terms of reference, the right scope and the right people to lead the inquiry. It is appropriate that we take time to do that and that we do not rush into decisions, albeit that there is a deadline of April. We have rightly given ourselves further time to work through the detail with survivors, which is entirely appropriate.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I appreciate that the terms of the inquiry are at an early stage and that survivors must be consulted, but can the cabinet secretary outline any specific actions that she hopes the inquiry will achieve?

Angela Constance: Having placed so much emphasis on the need to consult survivors meaningfully and appropriately, I do not want to overspeculate about the purpose or the terms of reference of the inquiry. However, it is important to emphasise that the inquiry's purpose is about getting to truth and justice; giving public

acknowledgement and validation; establishing a comprehensive national record; crucially, understanding the nature and extent of the abuse of children in care and the extent to which the state and non-state institutions failed in their duty to protect vulnerable children; and, again crucially, considering how those failings have been addressed in policy, practice and legislation.

I am clear that the inquiry has to be independent and robust. Survivors tell me that they are looking for an inquisitorial inquiry as opposed to an adversarial one, but it needs to focus on the systemic and institutional failings that let so many of our children down.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I, too, welcome the announcement of a public inquiry with statutory powers. Victims and survivors have long cried out for that. However, the trauma of victims and survivors must always be at the forefront. How will the inquiry ensure that, in getting to the truth, it does not compound the damage? I press the cabinet secretary on the support that will be available to victims and survivors of abuse when they interact with the inquiry. Will third-party advocates be able to present evidence on behalf of those who cannot engage with the inquiry by themselves?

Angela Constance: Can I get back to Ms McInnes about the ins and outs of whether third parties can represent individuals? I will take the suggestion on board, but I think that it needs careful consideration.

The member makes an important point in saying that we have to avoid survivors being retraumatised by having to give evidence or participate in an inquiry. It is important to stress that the purpose of a statutory inquiry is not to compel victims or survivors to appear but to compel other witnesses who are crucial to get to the truth of the systemic and institutional failings. We have to ensure the right environment, with the right skills and expertise leading the inquiry and with the right skills and expertise made available to support survivors.

It has come across clearly from survivors that we must not have a public inquiry in which the processes and ways of doing business compound trauma or retraumatise individuals. I am clear that we must avoid that.

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for giving us early sight of her statement. The presentation of the statement indicates that the Government gets it as far as the issue is concerned.

The cabinet secretary should know that survivors fear that the years of delay have enabled the destruction of paperwork and other evidence that might have identified witnesses who might

have been of value to a public inquiry. Will she assure survivors that she will take all steps from here on in to ensure that paperwork is protected and that evidence is maintained to await the inquiry's establishment? Will she ensure that instances of documentation that is missing or has been destroyed will be reported, for the information of the public and in the interests of transparency?

Angela Constance: I begin by assuring Mr Pearson that I do indeed get it, as does the Government.

Mr Pearson makes a crucial point about records. As a former social worker and as a constituency MSP, I have met individuals who live with the frustration and pain of not being able to understand or put together a chronology of their life story, because records are missing. We take so much for granted: we all have many pictures of our children, and documents and memorabilia of our childhoods and those of our children. Many survivors have huge gaps in their lives because records were destroyed. It is difficult for them to move forward as part of their recovery when there are big gaps in their life stories. The point about protecting records and the integrity of information from here on in is crucial. Survivors must have absolute confidence in the process.

One of the inquiry's core purposes is to create a comprehensive national record. I hope that that might help some individuals to piece together their life stories and journeys. That comprehensive national record is important to creating the chronology of events. Important Government work is also on-going to produce an online database of all children's homes in Scotland.

We are looking at and learning from other jurisdictions. For example, Australia's find and connect service can help people to piece together their lives and to locate relatives, such as siblings and parents, from whom they were separated.

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): I want to focus the cabinet secretary on the issue of time bar in particular. In her statement, she said that the review

"will include consideration of the way in which the time bar operates".

Having been in Parliament for some time, I was able to look back and see that there was a review on the law of limitation back in 2004-05 and that at the beginning of 2007 the Scottish Law Commission was asked to consider aspects of the law in relation to time bar.

It seems to me that there is a reluctance among the legal profession to look at the issue of time bar. However, there is now a recognition—way ahead of anything that we have ever had before,

because of recent very sad events across the UK—that survivors are often very reluctant to come forward for years and years. I impress on the cabinet secretary that, although she cannot interfere with the operation of the justice system, she and her colleagues can take steps to ensure that our justice system recognises the particular characteristics of these kinds of cases.

Angela Constance: I appreciate Ms Fabiani's long-standing interest in the matter of time bar. It is important to stress that there is no time bar for criminal cases—I am sure that Ms Fabiani and others recognise and understand that. Nevertheless, it is important that the Government acknowledges that the time bar for civil cases is an issue of high priority to survivors.

I am pleased to say that Paul Wheelhouse, the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, was, along with me and Aileen Campbell, the Minister for Children and Young People, at the interaction event that was organised by the Scottish Human Rights Commission on Monday. He was there to listen to the views and concerns of survivors.

Linda Fabiani is right to say that the Scottish Law Commission looked into the issue of time bar, which is complex. There is some flexibility for judges, but it remains of great concern to survivors. As I said in my statement, Paul Wheelhouse has written to key stakeholders in the legal sector, asking them to discuss these matters with him. The Government will continue to work with survivors as Mr Wheelhouse's discussion with the legal establishment continues, so that we have the fullest understanding of the civil justice barriers that are faced by survivors.

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I warmly welcome the cabinet secretary's announcement of an inquiry. I am sure that it will be warmly welcomed by the survivors of historical sexual abuse, who, in order to live, flourish and move on from being survivors, need to have a clear narrative published and placed on the public record that makes it clear who was and remains accountable.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that telling their story, so that we all understand the unimaginable horrors that they have gone through and can all resolve never to have those circumstances lived again by any child, is a crucial part of the task and that, therefore, in putting it together we need not just lawyers and social workers but archivists, historians and those from many disciplines? Will the cabinet secretary ensure that the terms of reference contain those actions, which can allow us not only to understand what has taken place but to ensure that it never happens again?

Angela Constance: I am pleased that Michael Russell is in the chamber today. He has been a strong champion of the support that survivors greatly need and a strong advocate for an inquiry. His point about survivors' personal testimony is a powerful one, as the personal testimony of survivors is salient to what we need to learn as individuals and as a nation.

In response to Mr Pearson, I spoke about the importance of the national collective account of what has happened and who is responsible, and how that is helpful to individuals who are piecing together their own lives and personal histories. However, as Michael Russell says, that national picture and account of what has happened is imperative if we are all to move forward collectively as a nation and ensure that we learn the lessons of the past. An important purpose of an inquiry is to fully understand what has happened and why, and to compare it to what happens today.

There is never any room for complacency when it comes to the protection of children, which must be our number 1 priority in all matters. It is, therefore, important that, as we progress in our consultation with survivors, we craft the terms of reference in the right way and give appropriate consideration to the skills of all those who are involved either directly in the inquiry or as the work of the inquiry moves forward.

Michael Russell makes the point that that is not just about involving legal and human rights experts or people with care, support, health, education and social work roles. I agree that we need to look at including individuals with a broader range of skills to ensure that we have an accurate and live national account of what has happened and what went wrong in the lives of so many of the nation's children.

The Presiding Officer: As I said earlier, I will allow all members who wish to ask a question to do so. I have a list of seven members who wish to ask a question. That will impact on the subsequent debate, so those who are speaking in it should be prepared to cut their speeches.

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): I heard the cabinet secretary say in response to Graeme Pearson's question that, from here on in, records will be protected. In some cases, survivors have been told that there is no evidence to support their claims because records have been destroyed; in some cases, those who were responsible for the abuse have died or their whereabouts are not known. What hope can the cabinet secretary give to survivors that such cases will be included as part of the inquiry?

Angela Constance: I appreciate the great historical difficulties related to missing records. I

give Graeme Pearson and Margaret McDougall an undertaking to ensure that everything possible will be done. We will go out and engage with appropriate stakeholders, in health or social work services, to ensure that we do all that we can to retrieve records where they exist and that we have best practice as we move forward. Obviously, there are legal requirements to meet on the maintenance and the protection of information contained in records.

The purpose of an inquiry is to work with survivors to enable them to move forward, to get to the truth and to justice, to give them that much-needed public acknowledgement and validation of what they have experienced and, as I mentioned, to create a comprehensive national record.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary introduce legislative changes to extend the extraterritorial effects of sexual offences against children and to include offences committed elsewhere in the UK so that they can be prosecuted in Scotland if need be?

Angela Constance: My colleagues in justice are progressing that important matter.

It is important to remember that the position on extraterritoriality does not mean that sexual offences against children cannot be prosecuted. That said, it is correct that such cases can be prosecuted only in the part of the UK where the offence was committed. For example, an offence that is committed in England can be prosecuted only in England and such offences cannot by law be prosecuted in Scotland.

The Scottish Government ministerial working group on child sexual exploitation, which reported earlier this year, considered that there is a case for extending the extraterritorial effect of sexual offences against children to include offences committed elsewhere in the United Kingdom so that they can be prosecuted in Scotland if that is the best place to conduct the prosecution. The Scottish Government agrees with that recommendation and we intend to introduce legislative change when there is a suitable legislative opportunity.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the statutory public inquiry into historical abuse and the cabinet secretary's commitment to the issue.

I have constituents who have been affected by abuse and who consistently raise the time bar issue. I know that the cabinet secretary will agree with the Scottish Human Rights Commission's view that the time bar is a barrier to survivors getting access to civil justice. A lack of flexibility would mean that survivors were denied justice. Will the public inquiry be able to comment on the time bar issue?

Angela Constance: As I intimated in my statement, we need to do some further work with survivors on a range of issues in relation to the terms of reference for the public inquiry. I do not want to speculate too much in advance of that consultation, but it is certainly not lost on me that the time bar in civil cases is a huge issue for survivors. As I intimated in my answer to Ms Fabiani, it is an issue that is being pursued by Mr Wheelhouse and Mr Matheson.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary outline how she anticipates the new Police Scotland national child abuse investigation unit improving co-ordination and intelligence gathering when it comes to tackling child sexual exploitation?

Angela Constance: That is an issue on which Mr Matheson and Mr Wheelhouse will be well versed and on which they will keep a close eye.

From my perspective, it is very valuable that the new Police Scotland national child abuse investigation unit will provide a national resource with a range of specialist skills and expertise. When necessary, it will lead and co-ordinate complex inquiries and develop good and better practice. Crucially, it will also improve links between the police, the third sector and other statutory agencies. In doing so, it will improve the intelligence networks that are required to proactively identify cases of child abuse.

It is important to note that the unit will be a national resource and that its job will be to directly support the good work that is undertaken under the existing structure of local police child protection units across Scotland.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I know that the inquiry's terms of reference are of the utmost importance and that they will require to be given proper consideration. Will the cabinet secretary outline some of the work that will be involved in the process of drafting the terms of reference, and can she tell survivors why it will be the end of April before they will know what the terms of reference are? I take on board her point about the importance of sense over haste.

Angela Constance: As we move forward over the next few months, it is important that we consult in a way that enables survivors to participate. We have written to various organisations that are funded through financial support from Survivor Scotland. A number of small events will be held across the country to engage with survivors. In addition, there will be some larger regional events that will involve the health service, the third sector and children's charities.

The scope and remit of the terms of reference are crucial, so how they are crafted is extremely important to ensure not only that survivors have

confidence in the inquiry, but that the inquiry has a focus of purpose that means that it will achieve outcomes that are meaningful to survivors and to us as a country.

Although I do not want to speculate too much about the terms of reference, we need to have a discussion about them—survivors themselves seek further discussion on them—particularly around what is considered to be institutional care. It is imperative that we do not make the mistakes that have been made in other jurisdictions. I am clear that if we are taking the step that we all agree that we should be taking of having a national public inquiry, we must get it right. Therefore, we must work with others. We cannot act in isolation. We must get all the detail absolutely correct.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I thank the Presiding Officer for allocating extra time to this important item of business.

I agree with the many members who have said that it has taken us too long to get here. I think that it could be argued with justification that it has taken us 14 years too long to get here, but I am delighted that we are where we are.

While they were in opposition, senior members of the cabinet secretary's party argued vehemently that they would end the time bar in the civil justice system if and when they came to power. I listened carefully to the responses that were given to Linda Fabiani and Jackie Baillie. What is to stop the cabinet secretary ensuring that the inquiry not only discusses but suspends—or considers the suspension of—the time bar in civil cases of historical abuse?

Angela Constance: I can only say simply and succinctly to Mr Fergusson that I cannot change the past, but I hope that I can work with all members to change the future.

The time bar is undoubtedly important to survivors, who are being ably represented by MSPs across the parties, which is to be welcomed. We will seriously take on board the views of all members and survivors. I am pleased that Mr Wheelhouse is sitting next to me, because he will be the lead on taking that work forward.

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): I was the convener of the Public Petitions Committee, which, 10 years ago, dealt with the petition that led the then First Minister Jack McConnell to issue his apology on behalf of the people of Scotland, so I have retained a keen interest in the matter. However, I also recall some of the issues that were raised when that petition was discussed, and especially the concerns that the Catholic Church raised about the obstacles that it foresaw to any potential inquiry.

The cabinet secretary was absolutely right to say that child abuse has no borders. However, 10 years ago, the Catholic Church argued that responsibility for institutions within the church had different borders because its hierarchy means that the bishops in Scotland have no responsibility for religious orders, and that responsibility lies with the Holy See in Rome.

Will the cabinet secretary tell us what discussions have taken place with the Catholic Church, how it has overcome that potential obstacle and why it is now more comfortable with an inquiry taking place? It was vital that that obstacle was removed.

Angela Constance: My officials have been in touch with a range of religious organisations and children's charities. We have many religious organisations and children's charities in Scotland that, like the nation, have a past that let our children down. Collectively, we—whether the state, the Government, religious organisations or charities—have to look that past squarely in the eye, acknowledge our failings, acknowledge the damage that has been done and move forward together.

One of the strengths of a public inquiry is that it gives religious organisations and charities a good opportunity to demonstrate that they are open to participating freely and voluntarily in the process and that, like the rest of us, they acknowledge the failings of the past and are utterly committed to making things right for children today and for the children of tomorrow.

The Presiding Officer: That ends the cabinet secretary's statement on historical child abuse.

Developing Scotland's Young Workforce

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-11901, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on developing Scotland's young workforce. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now, but I advise that speeches are now likely to be of five minutes' duration.

I call Roseanna Cunningham to speak to and move the motion. Cabinet secretary—you have a maximum of 13 minutes.

15:23

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham): This debate is an opportunity to set out the Government's new youth employment strategy and its full response to the report from the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce.

Members will remember that, in June, Sir Ian Wood and his commission presented a coherent, practical and powerful set of ideas about what more needs to be done to align our education system firmly, and more fully, with the needs of the economy.

Angela Constance, the then Cabinet Secretary for Training, Youth and Women's Employment, presented our initial response to Parliament in June. We said that we shared without exception the commission's ambitions for young people, employment and prosperity in Scotland.

On the publication of their report, Sir Ian and his commission were clear about their recommendations. However, they were equally certain that we already had many of the building blocks in place: the strong regional college system, the undeniable success of Scotland's modern apprenticeship programme and, with curriculum for excellence, a long-term national plan for success in our schools.

As Sir Ian recognised, we are already going in the right direction. Against the background of recession and continued Westminster austerity, our strategy for developing Scotland's young workforce is delivering. Recent employment statistics for Scotland have been encouraging—we have record numbers of people in work. Youth unemployment in Scotland is at a five-year low and Scotland is outperforming the United Kingdom as a whole in the youth employment and youth inactivity rates; indeed, yesterday's figures from Skills Development Scotland confirm that there are now record numbers of Scottish school leavers

achieving positive destinations, so we start from an already strong foundation. However, we know that we have to do more.

We want to tackle long-term issues in the labour market, and barriers to young women and men getting into jobs. Earlier this year, we said that we would be able to increase the annual number of new modern apprenticeship starts, taking the number to 30,000 a year by 2020.

The First Minister has already said that within our schools it is also our priority to increase attainment for all, and in the weeks and months ahead, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning will take forward a programme to do just that. The equation is simple. If we drive up attainment for all in our schools, we will improve the prospects of all our young people as they enter the workplace.

We have set ambitious targets for our young workforce. Our long-term youth employment strategy is designed ultimately to reduce youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021. In each of the next seven years, we will provide a report on progress towards that target. By any measure, that represents a radical reduction on the current position. It will put us where we belong—among the best-performing countries in Europe. We know that that is within our grasp.

We need to focus as never before on aligning our education system more firmly, and for the longer term, with the needs of the economy, and we need a renewed focus on employability within education. Sir Ian's report demands no less than a culture change from all parts of the education system, from employers and from young people themselves, as well as from those who influence them.

Above all, our seven-year programme will be a collaborative effort. Government cannot do this on its own, which is why our programme has been developed in conjunction with our partners in local government and with Scotland's employers and trade unions, as well as with our schools and colleges.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for giving way. I very much agree with the sentiments of her remarks. When she gets on to how the allocation of moneys will be provided across the different agencies that she has just mentioned, will she take into account issues for rural and island areas, where the unit numbers—in other words, pupil numbers—are smaller and therefore the costs can be greater in delivering the very recommendations that I am sure she is going to come on to describe?

Roseanna Cunningham: I thank Tavish Scott for his intervention. Of course, I am conscious that we are now well into the financial year 2014-15.

However, it is worth highlighting again that local government has been a full partner in developing the plans, which are now very well developed, so it should be making clear which local priorities and actions require the additional investment. That is something that Tavish Scott may wish to consider. My officials are currently working with their counterparts in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to establish the allocation of the local government funding, and they are taking into account factors including deprivation, rurality and appropriate adjustments for the islands, which is a very key issue. If Tavish Scott is happy with that answer at this stage, I will be happy to speak to him again in more detail as the situation develops and perhaps as he becomes aware of more detailed information.

That is a good point at which to move on to resources in general. In June, we said that we would be providing the resources to kick-start the whole programme. We made an initial £12 million available for implementation of the programme in the financial year 2014-15, and we have committed a further £16.6 million in the 2015-16 draft budget. Clearly, we also need to think about funding across the education and training system over that period. In the Wood commission report, there was a call for greater collaboration in use of resources. That is why we will continue to look to all our partners to test new approaches and work together to build capacity across the system and to improve outcomes for Scotland's young people. That, again, is what Sir Ian's report recommended.

Today, I am pleased to set out not only our strategy, but how local government intends to use the funds that we are allocating to it. We have agreed with local government a package of £6.5 million in 2014-15 to support its contribution to implementation. Since local authorities are at different stages of developing their specific proposals, the deployment of funding from that package will necessarily vary from area to area—a point that Tavish Scott has, in a sense, already made.

Broadly speaking, the funding will support the development of vocational and career pathways for young people, the enhancement of STEM—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—opportunities and training, and the engagement of schools with parents and carers regarding the new opportunities on offer. It will support a review of work experience to make it relevant to the needs of young people and local labour markets and it will support further development of modern apprenticeships. It will also support action to tackle inequality by ensuring that opportunities are open to all, and that vulnerable groups are supported into positive destinations. I know that many members will wish to comment on that last aspect.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am greatly encouraged by what the cabinet secretary has said. With regard to STEM subjects, has the Government given any thought to discussions with local authorities on heeding the call for dedicated science teachers in primary schools?

Roseanna Cunningham: I rather expect that my colleague who is in charge of the education portfolio will want to take that forward.

As it happens, my colleague Annabelle Ewing and I have been speaking to a number of people about what happens in schools in particular, and those issues need to be looked at carefully. We need to ensure that schools are making available all opportunities to the maximum number of pupils right from the start, and that opportunities are not closed off to young people because of lack of awareness, as much as anything else.

On schools specifically, Sir Ian Wood and his commission noted the progress that we are making with curriculum for excellence, which is now firmly embedded as the way we do education in Scotland. It has moved away from a narrow focus, and is about preparing young people to be adaptable, flexible and resilient lifelong learners. As Sir Ian noted, it provides us with the best possible foundation from which to close the attainment gap, and from which to better prepare our young people for the world of work. I know that Liz Smith and her colleagues are concerned about that.

Along with our schools, Scotland's college sector is already responding positively to Sir Ian's recommendations. The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council is already, together with local authorities, schools and others, supporting seven college regions to develop senior phase vocational pathways so that young people in the senior phase of school are better supported into the world of work.

Colleges and schools have been working collaboratively for several years, and pilots are building on the success of what has gone before. Pilots are now in place in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Edinburgh, Fife, Central, Glasgow and West Lothian, and they are reaching out to more young people and helping them to make positive choices about their careers. The pilots are strengthening vital links between school, college, university and employment for 15 to 18-year-old secondary school students.

Crucially, all college regional outcome agreements will from the academic year 2015-16 contain clear statements that outline colleges' contributions to senior phase vocational pathways in their regions.

Employers are vital too, and I warmly welcome the support that we have had from the business community for Sir Ian's recommendations on how we can improve employer engagement. Scotland's businesses have already come forward, and we have been able to establish the national invest in young people group. It is chaired by Rob Woodward, who is the chief executive of STV, and initial funding has been made available to establish regional groups. Those groups will be important in the future in delivering fair access and in engaging people at local level.

Work is also under way on development of a new standard for work experience, which Sir Ian's report identified as an area for early improvement, and which young people have identified as a priority. Developing young people's understanding of the world of work is also central to foundation apprenticeships. In Fife, 50 pupils from five secondary schools are already working towards engineering foundation apprenticeships, and a similar pathfinder scheme is in place in West Lothian. Drawing lessons from those initiatives, we aim to roll out such apprenticeships and drive a change in provision throughout Scotland.

The commission's report sets out a challenge to us about the scale of inequality. We want more jobs, and better jobs, for our young people. However, because of the UK Government's discriminatory regulations, some of our young workers could receive less than £3 an hour. No one, no matter what age they are, should be working for less than £3 an hour, so I call on Westminster to align the rates for apprentices with the other higher bands of the national minimum wage. We would like to go further with the living wage, but as a bare minimum we must end the shockingly low minimum wage that apprentices can currently face.

We will tackle all the barriers that our young people face in getting a fair deal in the workplace; tackling occupational segregation must be a priority. We cannot view it as acceptable that so many young women choose not to follow up study of maths, science, technology and engineering simply because they consider that to be training for a boy's job.

The proportion of women who have benefited from the MA programme may have increased from 27 per cent to 41 per cent, but we are still falling short. There are cultural factors that we will need to address if we are to harness the talents of all our young people, regardless of their background. That is why our implementation plans contain specific measures to address those factors and to reduce workforce inequalities among all our young people.

I take the point that Jayne Baxter made in the chamber last week about the particular difficulties

that young disabled people can face. Whatever difficulties or barriers stand in front of our young people, we have a duty to ensure that there is a way ahead and that they can all benefit from the opportunities, which is why we are funding a number of local pilot projects on that across Scotland. Where there is evidence of good work locally, we will expect that to inspire and inform practice across Scotland.

Last month, when the First Minister set out the Government's programme, she said that we will focus on working

"in the interests of all those whom we serve."—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2014; c 19.]

Above all, it will be our mission to create a fairer and more prosperous nation. Under this Government, wealth and inclusion must always go hand in hand. With our implementation plans and refreshed strategy, we will support our young people better for employment. Each of us in Parliament, in common with our constituents and citizens all over Scotland, has a stake in supporting our young people into the workforce. Our approach is to engage as many partners and stakeholders as want to participate in that endeavour. I take great pride in leading the agenda on behalf of the Scottish Government.

I move,

That the Parliament endorses the ambitions set out in the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce report, *Education Working for All!*; notes the progress made in reducing youth unemployment in Scotland since the publication of Scotland's youth employment strategy; recognises that there is more to do in tackling youth unemployment and improving the number and quality of youth employment opportunities; further recognises that the refreshed strategy must take into account the changing economic conditions, focus attention on supporting young people who need more help to participate in the labour market and address legacy issues from the recession; believes that critical to improving youth employment is a world class vocational education system, providing more opportunities for young people; further believes that this will best be achieved by supporting close working between employers and an education system that is responsive to economic and labour market need, and welcomes the Scottish Government's implementation plan developed with a broad range of partners, including local government, for reducing youth unemployment and unlocking social mobility as set out in the newly published youth employment strategy.

15:36

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Today, 67,000 young people are unemployed. They are young people full of potential, ambition and expectation, but they lack an opportunity. They could be the engineers, welders, nurses, carers and doctors of tomorrow. That is a tragic waste of our young talent. Their plight has to be one of the top priorities of the current Government—or any Government—because, if we want to create the

successful and fairer Scotland that the cabinet secretary has spoken about, we have to change direction. We will never create a fair society and economy based on a low-skills, low-pay and zero-hours culture.

I therefore welcome Sir Ian Wood's report, which is an extensive and thorough piece of work, with 39 recommendations. In the short time that I have, I will pick up on a few of the issues that are raised in it and in the Government's response. As a former teacher and college lecturer, I fully agree that we need to prepare young people for work at an earlier stage, but I believe that introducing children to different jobs and learning about careers should begin much earlier—I think that it should begin in primary school. Visits to local factories, shops, care homes, hospitals, restaurants and engineering plants help young people to understand what goes on in those workplaces and what people actually do when they go out to work.

School visits by nurses, vets, police officers or chefs give a practical insight into the real lives and careers of people in work. In my time in schools, some of the most influential people who made an impression on the pupils were those who came into school to share their life experiences. However, all of this has to be real. Young people can spot tokenism a mile away, they hate being patronised and they can see through flannel in two seconds, so I hope that we can avoid such an approach.

I share Sir Ian's desire for vocational education and academic training to be put on the same footing. We desperately need more engineers, construction workers, technicians and information technology specialists. Our schools and colleges have to be aligned seamlessly to provide the qualifications and experience that pupils and students need to build such careers. Of course we need better links between our colleges and schools, but those links have to be meaningful and have to lead to qualifications that are of relevance to the local economy as well as the interests of our young people. There are many good examples of that happening across Scotland but, as the report says, we need to develop those links much further.

There is a lot to be commended in the report, which sets out good intention on quality assurance, regional outcome agreements and partnership working, and some excellent sentiment on equalities. However, there are a number of issues that I have concerns about. The report says that there is a need for "meaningful and effective" careers guidance and that a more "comprehensive standard" is required. Around two years ago, I raised concerns in this chamber about the direction of the careers service. Those

concerns have not gone away. I think that the report reflects that.

Similarly, on modern apprenticeships, we previously raised issues about short timescales and the fact that some of them can be completed in three or six months, and we raised concerns about some of the sectors in which modern apprenticeships were being offered and about the level of qualification that was achieved. As I recall, the Government had increased the number of modern apprenticeships at level 2 and decreased the number at level 3, thus inflating the numbers. I think that Sir Ian's report alludes to that. It says:

"Now is the time to more actively target Modern Apprenticeships towards supporting economic growth and areas of the labour market where the long term prospects of young apprentices are greatest."

Sir Ian calls for more apprenticeships at level 3 or above, for a rethink of the status and value of apprenticeships and for more routes for progression, and he echoes the criticism that I have consistently made when he says:

"The term Modern Apprenticeships is still applied across the wide variety of different in-work training programmes and there is a case to introduce branding to help ... differentiate ... levels."

I agree with that. Just because something is called an apprenticeship, that does not necessarily reflect the public's perception or the perception of a young person of what it actually entails.

We need to ascertain whether modern apprenticeships are creating secure employment and whether our young people are staying in work on completion. It is my belief that we need a far more thorough evaluation to make sure that modern apprenticeships are fair and non-exploitative and offer value for money and that, most important, they lead to good, secure employment.

The truth is that, at the moment, we simply do not know how good modern apprenticeships are. Audit Scotland said in its recent report:

"The Scottish Government has set various priorities for modern apprenticeships but existing performance measures do not focus on long-term outcomes, such as sustainable employment. This means it is difficult to measure their long-term contribution to national outcomes. More specific long-term aims and objectives, along with information on their benefits and appropriate outcome measures, would make it easier to assess the extent to which modern apprenticeships provide value for money. It would also help direct funding in ways that offer the best value to individuals, employers and the economy."

I therefore ask the cabinet secretary to confirm whether the Scottish Government intends to act on the advice of Audit Scotland. Is it going to include sustainable employment as a performance measure of the success of the modern apprenticeship programme? I did not see that in

the Government's response. I am happy to give way to the minister if she wants to answer that question just now, or she can respond at the end of the debate. Such a long-term evaluation, going beyond what has been done up until now, will help to inform our thinking about whether modern apprenticeships tackle youth unemployment in a sustainable, long-term way.

On colleges, Sir Ian's report sets out a range of sensible proposals that we can support. However, of course, all of that is set against the backdrop of the Scottish Government's policy agenda that has had such a devastating impact on further education in Scotland. Budgets in the sector have been cut by £67 million in real terms between 2011 and 2016; 140,000 student places have been lost, with adult learners, students with learning disabilities and women being most affected; and part-time courses, often the very courses that build confidence and get people back into education, have been cut to the bone. Even in the very group that the Scottish Government has targeted, the under-25s, numbers are falling. There are now nearly 60,000 fewer under-25s at college than there were in 2007-08. That is not a good record. Thousands of lecturing and support jobs have gone and, only last week, we saw that colleges need £14.7 million to meet the level of bursaries that students need, yet only £3.5 million has been awarded—more than £11 million short. So much for supporting students through their education.

That is Mike Russell's further education legacy. I hope that the new cabinet secretary will immediately change course. If she does, she has our support. If not, the strategy will start with one hand tied behind its back.

The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing): Will the member give way?

Neil Findlay: I am in my last minute, but I will give way if the Presiding Officer will allow it.

Annabelle Ewing: Is it not the case that student support is currently at £104 million, which is much in excess of what it was in 2006-07, when the Scottish National Party took office from Labour?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): You are in your last 50 seconds, Mr Findlay.

Neil Findlay: Annabelle Ewing should look at the shortfall of £11 million between what the colleges requested and what was awarded on the SNP's watch.

The Government's overall objective is to reduce youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021. That would mean that, after 14 years of an SNP Government—God forbid—60 per cent of today's young unemployed Scots would still be on the

dole; 60 per cent would be abandoned without hope. The First Minister often says that our greatest asset is our people, so why does that not appear to apply to all our people? What poverty of ambition that is. What a lack of determination and vision.

Let me say very clearly that we will never give up on our young people. I hope that the Government will reflect on that.

I move amendment S4M-11901.3, to leave out from first "believes" to "market need" and insert:

"believes that any young workforce strategy should make every attempt to ensure that young people in the most deprived and rural areas have equal access to opportunities; calls on the Scottish Government to address the 140,000 places cut from Scotland's colleges, cuts that have disproportionately affected women, young people and disabled adults from deprived backgrounds; believes that vocational education should be given the same prominence and stature as academic education; recognises that vocational education and training are critical to improving opportunities but that a world class system can only be achieved by appropriately funding Scotland's colleges; calls on the Scottish Government to tackle the issue of underemployment and promote sustainable, secure and safe employment for young people; further believes that this will best be achieved by joint working between employers, schools, colleges, universities and trade unions in an education and training system that is responsive to economic and labour market need,".

15:45

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I welcome Neil Findlay to his new post of spokesman for fair work, skills and training. If I may say so, he is very well suited to the post.

In the final week in Parliament in this year like no other, I am very pleased to bring some consensus. All of us in the Conservative Party agree with and support the Wood commission's proposals on vocational education. We support the Government's motion and, although we tried our hardest, we could not disagree with the content of the Labour amendment.

We hope that both Labour and the SNP will support our amendment, which focuses on employability skills, as discussed in the Wood commission report, and on addressing the deterioration of literacy and numeracy. The Audit Scotland report of June this year stated that 35 per cent of secondary 2 pupils were not working at the expected numeracy level, compared with 2 per cent of primary 7 pupils.

Our amendment also focuses on STEM subjects and on utilising the training, experience and expertise in our FE colleges, where there are excellent examples of partnership with industry.

I want to address something that I feel very passionate about, which is technically known as parity of esteem. I have just as much respect for

the skills and qualifications of an electrician, a plumber and a joiner as I do for those of an accountant, a lawyer or a nurse, who are professionals. We need to stop the snobbery that sees an apprenticeship or a trade as somehow less worthy than a degree. Many people who work in the oil industry and other industries in Scotland and abroad earn far more than many people who have been to university, whom we class as professionals. Now that we have a new cabinet secretary, a new team on the Conservative benches and a new team on the Labour benches, can we all agree that we equally value the skills of every person, whether they are builders, gardeners or bricklayers, and not assume that a degree is the only way forward? That got that off my chest.

Neil Findlay: Mary Scanlon speaks highly of bricklayers. I assure her that she will always have my support for that.

Mary Scanlon: Why does Neil Findlay think that I mentioned bricklayers? I thought that he might like that one.

We need to ask why so many pupils stay on until sixth year at school. Last week, when I visited a school in Inverness I asked how many pupils out of 200 left at the end of fourth year. The answer was seven. I asked what the pupils who remained did for the final two years. Did they all leave with qualifications? The answer that I got was, "Not really."

The Scottish Parliament information centre confirmed that, in 2007, 76 per cent of pupils stayed on to S5 and 44 per cent stayed on to S6. In 2013, the figures had risen to 86 and 60 per cent respectively. That is fine, provided that the extra years are used to gain qualifications, training and work experience. The essence of the Wood commission report is to ensure that time in school or colleges is productive and enhances work prospects.

Neil Findlay mentioned careers advice, which I am concerned about. Skills Development Scotland is very prominent in our schools, and we need to ask whether pupils—and their parents—are given all the options and opportunities at the end of third year, which is when it should happen, to prepare for the world of work.

This week, all MSPs received the SDS updates for the winter for each council area. I noticed that, for the first six months of this year, SDS provided skills advice to 56 companies in the three constituencies in Highland, which is an average of 18 per constituency. It provided skills advice to seven companies in Orkney and five in the Western Isles. In booming Shetland, with all the opportunities there, SDS managed to provide advice to three companies. There are certainly

questions to be asked about the partnership approach there.

Last month's unemployment figure for 16 to 24-year-olds sits at 79,000. That is down from last year, but it is still hugely concerning.

Talking of employment and unemployment, can we please not forget those 16 to 19-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training? There are 29,000 of them this year. That is bad enough, but there were 29,000 in 2007. Please do not forget about them.

The volume of school-college activity was 45,500 in 2010-11. In two years, it fell by 20,000.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must draw to a close, please.

Mary Scanlon: I will move to my final points.

There has been a reduction in the rate of female apprenticeships at the higher levels. I would like to know, given that it has been outlined how much money goes to local authorities, how much our FE colleges will be getting in order to utilise the tremendous expertise that they have, which would enable so many pupils and young people throughout Scotland to fulfil their potential.

I move amendment S4M-11901.1, to insert at end:

"... understands that employers are calling for more emphasis on employability to help prepare education leavers for the complex demands of the labour market; is particularly concerned with weaknesses in basic literacy standards and with the comparative evidence, noted in the recent Audit Scotland report, *School education*, which highlights some decline in overall numeracy standards between P7 and S2; recognises the urgent need for more, fully trained science teachers in primary schools to help address the weak uptake of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, and urges the Scottish Government to use the excellent training facilities, expertise and experience of Scottish colleges to help deliver this strategy for young people".

15:52

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I welcome the Government's refreshed youth employment strategy, which has the ambitious target of

"reducing 2014 levels of youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021".

Today's labour market statistics highlight the fact that youth unemployment has fallen by 26 per cent over the past 12 months. A further 40 per cent cut in youth unemployment over the lifetime of the strategy will produce lower levels of youth unemployment than the pre-recession average of 13 per cent between 2004 and 2007.

The Government's "Developing the Young Workforce" report, which was published on

Monday, highlights the need for greater partnership working if we are to achieve that reduction. A partnership between the Government and local authorities, with their responsibilities for schools and local economic development, is a key part of achieving a reduction in youth unemployment.

The Edinburgh guarantee, introduced by the City of Edinburgh Council and employers in the city, encourages all sectors to work together to ensure that every school leaver in Edinburgh will leave school with the choice of a job, training or further education opportunity being made available to them. That has resulted in an increase in the number of Edinburgh school leavers moving on to positive destinations. Over the past three years, the rate has climbed from 82 per cent to 91 per cent.

Since the guarantee was introduced, 1,370 jobs, apprenticeships and training opportunities have been generated by 250 employers across Edinburgh. Large employers in the city have signed up to the guarantee. The Standard Life intern programme has helped school leavers to experience an invaluable first taste of the workplace. They are provided with a real job for six months, as well as a development programme, and they are paid the living wage.

BT Scotland offers apprenticeships to young people, helps school students to develop employability skills through its work inspiration programme, and works with Intowork, so that people with disabilities get information and communication technology skills training and support to prepare them for employment.

Sainsbury's works with schools, offering work experience, a mentoring scheme and interview skills to prepare students for leaving school. Those who gain employment with the company are helped to progress by developing skills and job-related qualifications, with apprenticeships and first-rate practical training at one of the company's food colleges.

However, if we are to achieve our aim of substantially reducing youth unemployment, we cannot focus only on large employers. In its briefing for the debate, the Federation of Small Businesses highlights the point that although almost half of all jobs in the private sector are in small businesses, only 8 per cent of small firms employ an apprentice. When it surveyed employers, the FSB found that more than half of small employers had no engagement with the education system but that those who had engaged provided a range of support to school leavers from work experience and class talks to workplace visits.

For 42 per cent of employers, their top reason for not engaging was that they had not considered it, but there are good reasons why small employers should engage in the process by helping to mentor young people and—hopefully—employing a young person: they learn quickly; they are keen to gain valued skills to build a career; they are enthusiastic and loyal, because of the opportunity that they are being given; and there is support to reduce training and recruitment costs.

As Garry Clark, head of policy for Scottish Chambers of Commerce, stated at the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee on 8 October,

“Wood has set out a challenge for businesses to get involved in schools at an early stage and at a consistent level across the country, and we would certainly encourage our members to take advantage of that ... We want Wood to be central to what the Scottish Government is going to do on skills both this year and into the future, and it is important for business to take its full share of responsibility in that regard.”—[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 8 October 2014; c 52.]

Other sectors, mainly hospitality and retail, have long recognised the benefits of employing young people, with a third of retail employees being under the age of 24. According to the British Retail Consortium, retailers on average invest £1,440 in training per employee, and the need to retain young staff in retail has resulted in more than 50 per cent of 16 and 17-year-olds and more than 85 per cent of 18 to 20-year-olds being paid at least the adult national minimum wage, even though the rates are lower for the under-21s.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must draw to a close, please.

Gordon MacDonald: If we are to have a world-leading vocational education system and to tackle youth unemployment, we must meet the needs of industry and, as a result, require employers to help shape that system.

15:57

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome this opportunity to talk about developing Scotland's young workforce. The commission has looked at ways of improving the transition from education to employment—and rightly so. The last time I talked about this issue, I said that the Scottish Government was guilty of undervaluing vocational education, and I still have serious concerns about how the commission's recommendations can be implemented, given the savage cuts to college funding. Let us face facts: because of the Government, more than 140,000 places have been lost. Even though I have consistently reminded the Government about waiting lists for college places, it seems to be in no rush to resolve the issue. Instead, we are making even greater

demands of colleges, which is quite frankly unreasonable.

However, credit must be given where it is due. The value of the modern apprenticeship programme and other such schemes that colleges are introducing is now being recognised, and I thank the colleges and their staff for the efforts that they are making, despite the Government's cuts.

Targets for greater access to modern apprenticeships for disabled people, ethnic minorities and women need to be monitored clearly and closely by the Scottish Government and its agencies. Less than 2 per cent of Scotland's apprentices have been drawn from ethnic minority groups, and only 0.3 per cent of all apprenticeships in Scotland have gone to disabled people. I find those figures horrific, and I am sure that the cabinet secretary will want to address the issue in her closing remarks.

On the commission's recommendations on economic development, I welcome the new youth employment strategy, but the Scottish Government must take more ambitious and radical steps. Reducing youth unemployment by 40 per cent is a good start, but our future economy will be in a healthier position only when youth employment rates are in line with general employment rates.

As I have said before, college places are limited, and since 2007-08, there has been a 40 per cent decrease in the number of women in colleges and a 33 per cent decrease in the number of men in them. Most important, inequality still exists among our Scottish minorities.

I commend the small improvements in most of the commission's recommendations, but more needs to be done. With the Government continuing to cut college funds, underfunding local government and generally putting a squeeze on education budgets, I struggle to see how the future changes can be made appropriately.

I will highlight a good example of improving youth employability in my constituency. Move On is a charity that got a lottery fund to run the FareShare volunteering employability project, which helps vulnerable young people in Glasgow to make the transition from the care system, homelessness or unstable backgrounds to stable adult life. It aims to run the project over five years and to help some 200 young people to learn skills, build confidence, train and gain work experience for CVs. It is a very good opportunity. I hope that the Government will continue to support such organisations over and above addressing the shortfall in college funding.

One of the most important things that I want to say is that I have consistently and repeatedly

reminded the Government of its funding—particularly its college funding—responsibilities. Historically, the then First Minister, Alex Salmond, and the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Michael Russell, both said to me that there were no cuts to colleges, but they both had to apologise because there were cuts. Despite those apologies, they never fulfilled the shortfall. I am still looking for that shortfall to be fulfilled.

We cannot expect our colleges and our staff to train young people to have real jobs and meaningful employment if we do not continue to support them.

16:02

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the Government's recognition and will that we can go further in our efforts to tackle youth unemployment.

I represent South Scotland, which is a vast region that is made up of rural communities. Although young people in the region face many of the same problems associated with unemployment that their urban peers face, my constituents face an additional set of barriers because of their geographical isolation and poor infrastructure.

The region has many economic strengths—for example, in tourism, hospitality, agriculture-related business and energy. The latter has been seized upon by Dumfries and Galloway College, which now offers excellent courses in that field—in particular, wind turbine technician courses and training in the maintenance and replacement of the cables that are used for the distribution and transmission of electricity. Considerable potential remains in both areas as the electricity distribution system is upgraded. I therefore welcome the new emphasis on STEM opportunities and training that the cabinet secretary announced this week as part of the £6.5 million extra funding.

Those energy engineering sectors provide young people with invaluable opportunities to grow, develop and build a worthwhile career, and the chance to do so without forcing them to leave the communities in which they have grown up. Dumfries and Galloway College has been particularly effective at focusing its courses on employment-related outcomes.

On that note, I welcome the Wood report's endorsement of the Government's direction of travel on college reform. As Sir Ian Wood said in his introduction to the report,

"Colleges have come on immensely since the Commission's work started in February 2013. They are re-energised ... They have some good new leadership and are clearly recognising their opportunity to migrate up the

technology skills ladder and to enhance the focus on employability of the students."

Neil Findlay: How is college for the 140,000 students who cannot get a place?

Joan McAlpine: As the member knows, the number of full-time equivalent students at our colleges is over 116,000.

Neil Findlay: That is not what I asked.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Findlay, that is enough.

Joan McAlpine: The figures that Mr Findlay quotes are just not true. In addition, for the past two years, we have spent £522 million on colleges, which is more than Mr Findlay's Labour Governments ever spent on them, so I will not take anything from him on that.

Dumfries and Galloway College also has the advantage of sharing the Crichton campus with the University of West Scotland and the University of Glasgow, and those three institutions are breaking down barriers between further and higher education and pioneering some excellent examples of articulation between the institutions and, of course, parity of esteem.

Working in hospitality, one of the key employment sectors in the region, can involve irregular hours, which means that young people, who often depend on public transport, face difficulties in travelling to and from work and college. I therefore welcome the cabinet secretary's response to Tavish Scott's earlier question about additional support for rural businesses in employing young people.

In preparation for this debate, I contacted local employers for their feedback on the barriers to employing young people. I am particularly grateful to Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce and its chief executive, Gordon Mann, and to Tricia Hunter of the training agency Minerva People, who gave me some very useful pointers.

In Dumfries and Galloway, around 6,500 registered businesses operate with fewer than 10 employees, a higher proportion of small and medium-sized enterprises and microbusinesses than do so in the rest of Scotland. Some of those businesses tell me that the time required to mentor, train and develop a young person is substantial and that employers in smaller organisations do not have much spare staffing capacity. Dedicating an experienced member of staff to mentor a new recruit can have a significant knock-on effect financially, and of course small businesses do not have human resources teams to direct that kind of work. I am told that that is one of the main reasons why employers in SMEs and microbusinesses do not offer opportunities to young people.

My contacts also identified prejudices with regard to young people that are similar to those identified in the Wood report and to which the minister alluded. However, that gives us even more reason to challenge such attitudes. I particularly welcome the Scottish Government's investors in young people award, which sends a very strong message about the positive benefits of employing young people. I also welcome the commission's recommendation 20, which states:

"A small business Modern Apprenticeship recruitment incentive package should be developed to equip and support smaller and micro businesses to recruit and train more young people."

That is extremely good news for rural areas such as Dumfries and Galloway.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Joan McAlpine: If even a small proportion of the 7,000 businesses there take on a young person, we would see a huge increase in youth employment, which I would whole-heartedly welcome.

16:07

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, welcome this debate on developing Scotland's young workforce. I congratulate, albeit in absentia, Roseanna Cunningham on her promotion, as I do Annabelle Ewing, and I offer her an apology for earlier intemperate remarks.

As others have observed, the Wood commission's report contained a comprehensive series of recommendations, but in publishing the report back in June, Sir Ian Wood also set out in very stark terms the challenges that we face, in that thousands of our young people are not in work or education and are wondering whether their community has any need for them. Fewer than 30 per cent of Scottish businesses have any contact with education to offer work experience opportunities or to recruit young people directly, and only 13 per cent of employers have modern apprentices.

Very deliberately, Sir Ian Wood set out a challenge to not just the public and voluntary sectors but the private sector to up their game. Of course, there are examples of companies that are doing precisely that. I am not sure whether Standard Life is back on the Government's Christmas card list yet, but the cabinet secretary might wish to find out more about that company's investment 2020 programme, which offers 12-month traineeships for successful applicants and can boast 100 per cent positive destinations for them, most of which are within Standard Life, whose business unit directors are now queuing up to take on trainees. The programme also helps to

address an age profile in the company that was a source of real concern over the medium to longer term.

Standard Life's programme is a good illustration of how transition from education into training and work can be made smoother. Gaining better vocational skills while in education and the opportunity to upskill even after leaving education are all part of the picture, which means that schools, colleges, employers, public sector agencies and Government all need to be involved.

I do not think that there is any lack of shared ambition for Scotland's young people to have the opportunity of sustainable employment and the skills that they need to succeed in it now and in the future, but that ambition must be translated more effectively and less patchily into practical reality.

On the plus side, I welcome not only the fact that we have been achieving 25,000 modern apprenticeships but the ambition to move to 30,000. However, as I think ministers accept, it is not just a numbers game. The range of companies and sectors that are covered by modern apprenticeships needs to be expanded and the quality of those apprenticeships needs to be safeguarded and, in many cases, improved. Sir Ian Wood and the NUS have picked up on that point. Perhaps the involvement of former modern apprentices will help to make that happen.

I agree with the comments that Roseanna Cunningham made in her opening speech about equality of opportunity. We are seeing a problem addressed there, which is to be welcomed, but Mary Scanlon's point about STEM also needs to be picked up.

On black and minority ethnic young people, I was struck by the following comment from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights:

"The Strategy's key message with regard to BME young people is that they embark on a narrower range of pathways than young people from the population as a whole, are more likely to experience unemployment and represent less than 2% of all Modern Apprenticeship entrants despite making up 6% of Scotland's young population."

There is more to be done there.

Colleges Scotland suggests that, even though colleges deliver more than 20 per cent of current modern apprenticeships, there is a lack of recognition of the role that colleges play—and the role that they might play in future—in delivery. As Neil Findlay and others observed, the Government is conspicuously failing to walk the walk on colleges.

We have heard about the cuts that the sector faces. NUS Scotland's stop student poverty campaign is calling on the Scottish Government to

put in place better measures to fund students throughout their education and to prevent them from falling into poverty. Its action comes a week after figures published by the Scottish funding council showed an £11.2 million shortfall in college student support funds.

Joan McAlpine: Will the member take an intervention?

Liam McArthur: I think that the member made her point earlier, and I am running out of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Liam McArthur: The SNP's raid on college budgets is having a direct impact on young people's pockets. Students need the bursary funding to help them to manage the cost of living while studying. Without it, they either take on more debt or drop out, and the situation is starting to cut into efforts to broaden access. We are also seeing colleges struggling to meet additional support needs. In discussing college mergers, Colleges Scotland states:

"the consequent reductions in staffing levels have made the provision of good quality support much harder to achieve".

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you draw to a close, please?

Liam McArthur: There is a real need to focus on using the powers that we have, as well as those that come from the Smith commission, to build a stronger economy, a fairer society and, crucially, opportunity for all our young people.

16:12

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the debate. I am sure that not one among us would demur from the intent and motivation behind the motion. Members might wish to amend it, but no one would disagree with its intent.

As has been mentioned, the young are critical in the context of supporting our national economic strategy and vision. Before I focus on modern apprenticeships and the associated training provision, I will comment on three particular areas. The first is mentioned but briefly in the Wood commission's final report. An initial paragraph in the report mentions making

"recommendations towards Scotland producing better qualified, work ready and motivated young people ... both as employees and"—

here is the focal point—

"entrepreneurs of the future."

Entrepreneurial education, which is not widely mentioned in the report, is as important for young

people as any other education is if we are to unleash their manifest creativity.

Secondly, I agree with Mary Scanlon that, if we are to be successful, we have to eschew the notion—I believe that the report does this partially—that there is some hierarchy of contribution and that we have been somehow seduced into the Blairite belief that everyone should aim for a university degree. Imagine a world full of academics, lawyers and business experts but too few others to build, maintain and support our infrastructure.

Thirdly, we need to ensure that young trainees in whatever form embrace the fact that we face huge international competition. The success of our economic strategy depends on the alignment of the training and skills development of our young people, their creativity and their work ethic. Those things are important if we are to meet the aims in the national strategy and meet the international challenges.

The key component that underpins that is the foundation of modern apprenticeships, which are the keystone of our economic success. In the energy sector alone, modern apprenticeships are a keystone in the expansion of opportunity and reach for the sector. Because of demographics and growth opportunities—I will return to growth—30,000 engineers will be needed over the next seven to eight years, yet we exclude half our young from that, because we exclude young women from being attracted to the sector, primarily because of the culture and the perceptions of parents and teachers. Recommendation 30 of the report rightly calls for SDS to develop an action plan to address gender inequalities and disparities in modern apprenticeships, whatever the sector, and so we should.

On the success of modern apprenticeship programmes, although there is an emphasis on increased college participation, it is important to acknowledge the increasing role of quality training from training providers and to simplify and accelerate the processes between SDS and those providers to progress the intake and development of modern apprentices.

Recommendation 10 of the report addresses the need for greater employment engagement and the need to offer significantly more high-quality apprenticeships and so expand the number of modern apprenticeship starts. The cabinet secretary referred to the target of 30,000 modern apprenticeships a year by 2020. That could be met not necessarily with much greater funding but with a more ready and faster cycle of funding by employers and the Government skills agency.

We have to beget a critical progression to higher levels of training, which are as important in the construction and food and drink sectors as they are in engineering and other sectors. The bar for higher-level skills in the workplace has to be raised so that progress through the ranks from a trade apprenticeship to being a professional engineer, chef and so on is suitably determined. I support the report's view that there should be an increased focus on modern apprenticeships at level 3 and above as we seek to create a market pool for a higher-skilled, higher-waged and revenue-generating economy.

There has always been a continuum at the heart of the apprenticeship system as skills are handed from one generation to another. If that is put together with clear development and a simplified training and funding structure that involves greater employer engagement, we can meet the skills challenge and make Scotland a truly global player.

16:17

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I will focus on two educational matters that relate to the recommendations in the Wood report. One is a novel approach that is taking place in Galloway to provide a specialist vocational and academic education, and the second refers to the Wood commission's recommendation that STEM subjects should be placed at the heart of the development of Scotland's young workforce.

Because of time constraints, I will not go into the history of the development of the Dumfries learning town project, but it sits well with the Wood report's recommendations. It will involve a rolling programme of refurbishment and rebuilding of four schools in Dumfries, the alignment of primary and secondary education to create integrated schooling across the town, and the creation of Dumfries learning hub, which will complement and extend the opportunities offered by local schools and Dumfries and Galloway College. The learning hub will offer specialist learning opportunities including vocational opportunities and skills development for work, for academic learning and for life. It will offer professional development for teachers and careers guidance for students. Importantly, it will also offer learning opportunities for adults who might have missed out when they were at school.

Teaching will be done by teachers who have specialist expertise, and it is envisaged that college and university lecturers and members of the business, sports and arts and culture communities and beyond will be able to contribute to a wider definition of education than is normally understood. The input of those people will give young people a better insight into the world of work and how they can prepare for that.

That chimes with many of the recommendations of the Wood report—on the delivery of recognised vocational qualifications alongside academic qualifications, appropriate resources for preparing young people for employment, the need to involve employers and employers' role in economic development, and the need to provide good work experience and careers guidance.

Dumfries and Galloway Council has identified a preferred site that is accessible from all four schools but which is also—importantly—close to the parts of Dumfries where there is a higher incidence of educational disadvantage. That could address education inequalities for school pupils and other members of the surrounding community.

The second part of my speech relates to recommendation 12—that

“A focus on STEM should sit at the heart of the development of Scotland's Young Workforce.”

That is generally about an earlier part of the education system—if we do not get the foundations correct for the embedding of STEM subjects, the recommendation will not happen. The right things have to happen in schools.

The Royal Society of Chemistry published eight recommendations to coincide with this year's science and the Parliament event in November. In its briefing for the event, the RSC noted that Scotland's overall rating for science education shows that we lag behind many of our international competitors—indeed, we are slightly behind England—and suggests that there is a need to provide inspiring science teaching from a very early age. With that in mind, the RSC recommends that every primary school should have—or have access to, in the case of small schools—a science subject leader who is a science specialist and who can provide leadership on science teaching and support for colleagues.

A science specialist could be someone who has at least one higher or an equivalent in a science subject—they would not need to have a degree in science. The current minimum entry qualifications for primary school teaching are English at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 6, which is a higher, and maths at SCQF level 5, which is a standard grade—there is no requirement for any qualification in science at all. That is worrying, because somebody who has had a poor experience of learning science and gave it up at an early age will not feel all that confident about teaching it to primary pupils.

The RSC is concerned about the quality of practical work in schools, following a survey of Scottish schools that was carried out in November by the learned societies group on Scottish science education. The survey highlighted dissatisfaction at primary and secondary levels with the funding

for scientific equipment and consumables, a lack of teacher confidence in primary schools and a lack of technician support.

Sciences are often considered to be academic disciplines, but they are also vocational, because the practical and experimental nature of science—the knowing by doing—engages younger pupils and inspires a desire for greater and deeper understanding. In my view, there are insufficient opportunities for school students to enjoy practical work. If we agree that STEM subjects should be at the heart of developing the young workforce, we need to stimulate interest in those subjects from an early age, with teachers and opportunities to capture and stimulate children's innate curiosity about the world around them.

This is a cross-portfolio issue. We need to focus on how we can improve both engagement with and achievement in STEM subjects from the earliest part of school education right up to colleges and universities.

16:22

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

I am delighted to join other members in congratulating the Scottish Government on its ambition for our young people. The Government's strategy is built on a strong base to develop a new approach to vocational education and training and to youth employment that will make us one of the best-performing countries in Europe.

I congratulate the cabinet secretary on endorsing and sharing the ambitions that are set out in the report by the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce, and I welcome the Government's implementation plan, which was developed in partnership with local government and many other partners. It is a plan for reducing youth unemployment, a plan for a fairer Scotland for our young people and a plan for all.

Sir Ian Wood welcomed the plan in June and said:

“The reforms which have already taken place in schools and colleges as well as the growth in the number of Modern Apprenticeships provide a strong platform for change.”

As Liam McArthur said, the Wood report has sent a strong message to all businesses in every sector that it is time for them to participate in the formation and education of our young people. The response has been very good so far, and I can testify that many businesses in the north-east have decided to get involved.

Why is it important for our entrepreneurs to have a voice in Scotland's youth employment strategy? It is because they know the skills that are needed for today's and tomorrow's economies. However, it is not enough to recognise and facilitate

businesses' input; the employment strategy has to be regionalised and relevant to every sector.

To support the north-east and Scotland's energy sector, energy skills Scotland has brought together employers and education in collaboration to meet the skills demands of the industry and to enhance the skills and prospects of energy workers. Energy skills Scotland is a Scottish Government and industry initiative, and those bodies are working together in partnership with the world of education and local authorities. I saw the initiative working in the classroom and I can report that an energy course is available to all children. I invite the cabinet secretary to come to the north-east and experience what that course has to offer.

I recommend to the Parliament the your future in energy programme, which is embedded in the curriculum for excellence. The programme is supported by the Scottish Government, ESS, the Society of Petroleum Engineers and many headteachers in the north-east. The study programme includes courses to help our young people to develop the skills that they require to consider a career in the energy sector.

Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce has recently undertaken valued and significant work on youth employment. I thank Rachel Elliott for the comprehensive briefing that we received prior to the debate. It is good that we have different organisations working in the north-east to address the problem. The fact that Sir Ian Wood comes from the north-east helps to generate that energy.

The Government's plan builds on Sir Ian Wood's recommendations and encourages and supports more employers to recruit more young people. For young people who live in the most deprived and rural areas, having equal access to employment opportunities is important. However, acquiring particular skills makes sense only if there is employment locally for young people to use those skills.

I am particularly encouraged by the Government's strategy on advancing equalities in education and youth employment, which recognises that diversity in the workplace is key to addressing the wider inequalities in Scotland. That makes sense.

It is important to evaluate our success on the number of people gaining employment; indeed, that is a lot more important than evaluating the number of young people acquiring skills that they will never use. Page 14 of "Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy", under the section on "Measures", says that key performance indicator 10 is to

"Increase the employment rate for young disabled people to the population average by 2021."

That is a fantastic ambition.

The Government has a plan and a vision on how best to respond to economic and labour market needs. I share its ambition for our young people. Today, record numbers of young people are going into education, work or training. Under this Government, vocational education is given the same prominence and stature as academic education. Let us work together to support and empower our young people to make positive choices.

16:27

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): It is important to say that education should never be entirely about getting people ready for work. Education should expand horizons and help children to become well-rounded, resilient individuals who can make the most of life. Those attributes will also help young people in their working lives.

A desire for meaningful work is central to most people's lives, which is why tackling unemployment and underemployment is vital. Unemployed young people can feel alienated and purposeless. As we know, the impact can be lifelong. Education should equip people to enter meaningful jobs that they can enjoy and take pride in. However, that requires an economy that is built not on low-wage, low-skilled jobs but on well-paid, meaningful employment.

During last month's programme for government debate, I spoke about the challenge of fuel poverty and the need to retrofit thousands of our houses with insulation, double glazing and other low-carbon improvements. I said that the cabinet secretary

"has an important role to play in creating a workforce with skills in sustainable construction and retrofitting."—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2014, c 44.]

I will expand on that point.

John Swinney was clear to me in the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's budget scrutiny that he thought that retrofitting of energy efficiency measures should be a national infrastructure priority not only because it will tackle fuel poverty and cut emissions but because, importantly, it will create new jobs in the construction industry and new opportunities for young people through the modern apprenticeship scheme. WWF estimates that there will be 3,500 jobs in the short term and 9,000 jobs by 2017.

I looked at some of the construction industry skill surveys to get a feeling for how confident employers are that they have the people with the right skills to deliver an increase in energy efficiency. In 2011, ConstructionSkills surveyed

1,200 companies and sole traders; 30 per cent of them thought that environmental regulations and eco design would prompt the need for new skills or knowledge. In its construction sector skills assessment in 2012, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills said that, when it came to skills,

“It is the retrofitting of existing building stock which poses the greatest challenge to the industry”,

but that there is an opportunity there, too.

In its 2013 skills survey of 1,300 construction professionals, the Chartered Institute of Building found that 44 per cent of respondents did not believe that the construction workforce would have the skills required for the green deal. A quarter of people marked the need for energy efficiency training as very urgent. The CIOB has also talked of the need to

“develop a new ‘green focused’ workforce that moves away from ‘generic’ construction skills”.

It is clear that there is already a demand for new energy efficiency and retrofitting skills. We need a programme of high-quality, well-paid apprenticeships. On top of the existing market, the plans for regulation of energy efficiency in private sector homes will boost demand.

There are also jobs in repairing our existing homes. That topic was discussed at the most recent meeting of the cross-party group on construction. An incredible 57 per cent of Scottish homes have disrepair to critical elements. Having a building that is wind and watertight is a basic prerequisite for having a comfortable home that is affordable to heat. There is a repairs backlog that could keep many people in important work for a long time, and a reduction in VAT on repairs could result in a huge jobs boost. It is important that the Parliament continues to call on Westminster to make such a change.

I know that Skills Development Scotland has been administering a low-carbon skills fund for SMEs of £100,000 in 2014-15. That is very welcome, but it is important that low-carbon skills are included in as many apprenticeships and as much training as possible. I recently asked written questions on how energy efficiency skills are included in the training for modern apprentices in the construction industry. There are no specific retrofitting courses or apprenticeships. I hope that we can change that, and I would welcome any update from SDS or the cabinet secretary.

It is highly important that diversity is built into the modern apprenticeship scheme. It is fair to say that the STEM apprentices whom I have met have been largely—although not exclusively—young men. I know that colleagues have raised the issue of gender segregation and that the cabinet secretary and the Government are aware of the

challenges in attracting young women into those valuable careers.

In addition, young people with disabilities, those who are leaving care and those from ethnic minority backgrounds were identified by the Wood report as needing extra support when they enter and participate in vocational training. That is welcome, because there is likely to be extra financial pressure on disabled young people, and there might be opportunities to look at more flexible age requirements and more flexible working for people with some types of disability and for those who are leaving care.

Investing in young people and in tackling fuel poverty makes sense. Vocational education can help to ensure that all our young people get the training that is best suited to them, but it is also vital that the jobs and industries that we help to create are skilled, well paid and make a positive contribution to society.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Stewart Maxwell, after which we will move to the closing speeches.

16:33

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

“Failing to invest in our youth is a false economy. Investments in young people will pay great dividends in a better future for all.”

Those are the words of United Nations secretary general Ban Ki-moon when he spoke in New York at the launch of the 2011 international year of youth. The international year of youth was established by the UN in 1985 with the aim of increasing the quality and quantity of opportunities that are available to young people for full, effective and constructive participation in society.

We know that it is often young people who are disadvantaged the most during periods of economic recession. Therefore, the investment by the Scottish Government over the past few years in initiatives such as opportunities for all and the youth employment Scotland fund has been important in improving the employability of our young people during difficult economic times, and has resulted in record numbers of young Scots going into education, work and training. The latest figures from Skills Development Scotland show that, across Scotland, more than 92 per cent of school leavers entered a positive destination in 2013-14. Nonetheless, it is a tragedy every time a young Scot goes through school only to become an unemployment statistic, and it is clear that there is still a lot of work to be done to address the challenges of youth unemployment in Scotland.

More than 77,000 modern apprenticeship places have been created over the past three years, and I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increase the number of places that are available each year, from 25,000 to 30,000 by 2020. A survey of modern apprentices that Skills Development Scotland carried out in 2014 showed that modern apprenticeships are highly regarded, with four out of five participants completing a modern apprenticeship in order to gain a qualification and improve their future job prospects. In fact, 92 per cent of those who complete their modern apprenticeship go on to be in employment six months later. It is clear to me that the continued growth of modern apprenticeship places will be crucial to improving vocational education and employment opportunities for many young Scots.

I highlight the work that Young Enterprise Scotland is carrying out in East Renfrewshire at its academy training centre, which is based near Rouken Glen park in Giffnock. The YES academy, as it is known, which Young Enterprise Scotland runs with support from East Renfrewshire Council and other partners, recently celebrated its first anniversary. Its main aim is to create opportunities for young people to obtain the skills and confidence that they need to gain access to secure employment.

The academy works with a range of local schools, colleges and employers to give youngsters the chance to gain qualifications and new skills in areas such as construction, horticulture and hair and beauty. That not only helps local young people to become more employable but benefits local businesses, which gain from having access to a more skilled and confident workforce. The community in East Renfrewshire also benefits from the work that the academy does on local projects.

Back in March, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to host an event in Parliament that highlighted the excellent work that the Prince's Trust Scotland undertakes. The trust helps around 9,000 young people in Scotland each year, many of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Three in four of the young people whom it supports go into education and training, get jobs or start their own businesses.

During the event, we heard from a number of inspiring young adults who spoke about how they were able to overcome adversity and make better lives for themselves with support from the Prince's Trust. It was encouraging to hear from so many young people who had struggled with educational attainment but who still managed to better themselves and become successful, although it was troubling to reflect on what might have happened to those young Scots had they not had

the support of the trust's dedicated staff and volunteers.

Much of the work of the Parliament's Education and Culture Committee has focused on improving the life outcomes of looked-after children. However, we intend to consider how to address the attainment gap in education for other disadvantaged groups of children and young people. Therefore, I ask the minister to say in her closing speech what the Scottish Government's plans are to address that gap and, in particular, what action it is taking to raise attainment levels among Scotland's most disadvantaged young people.

The launch of the Scottish Government's new youth employment strategy is to be welcomed and I support the Government's plans to deliver an improved work-relevant educational experience for Scotland's young people.

I would also be grateful if the minister would comment on what the Scottish Government can do to ensure that our young people are better equipped not only to enter the world of work, but to become entrepreneurs and job creators themselves. Scotland's past is filled with examples of successful entrepreneurs and innovators, from Andrew Carnegie to John Logie Baird. Encouraging a similar spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship among young people today will be just as beneficial to Scotland's future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excellent. Many thanks. We are bang on time. I remind all members who have taken part in the debate that they should be in the chamber for the closing speeches, to which we now come.

16:38

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate the cabinet secretary and the minister on their new positions.

It has been, largely, a thoughtful debate. I reiterate the Conservatives' support for the Government motion and the Labour amendment. We cannot really disagree with the tone of either for the reasons that Chic Brodie mentioned in his speech.

All sides of the political divide accept that the domestic and international economic problems of recent years have had a profound effect on the whole economy. However, perhaps the greatest impact has been on many of our young people and, although the unemployment rate for young people in Scotland has not reached the exceptionally high levels that we see in other parts of Europe, there are still significant problems, notwithstanding the very encouraging statistics that the cabinet secretary and Gordon MacDonald

mentioned. There is definitely an improvement, but we have to accept that the level of unemployment among young people aged 16 to 25 is still twice as high as that for the rest of the working population. That is exactly the focus that Ian Wood had when he set out on his report.

If we are to ensure that the Scottish economy is stronger in the future, the onus is on all of us to help to boost the jobs market. The cabinet secretary was right to talk about the quality of the jobs rather than just their number—that is a crucial point.

I reiterate another crucial point, which my colleague Mary Scanlon made when she spoke about the 29,000 youngsters who are not in any form of training, employment or education. Ignoring that could cost the economy up to £2 billion, according to the Government's own statistics—if my memory serves me correctly. That should send a strong message to all of us.

If there is one key issue in the Scottish Government's motion, it is that of the changing nature of economic circumstances. That is a very important point to make. However, the motion is a little too narrow when it comes to tackling some of the complexities of the labour market. I will spend a little time on that point, because we can be in absolutely no doubt whatsoever about the very real issues that confront youngsters with poor literacy and numeracy. That is not just the case among those who are perhaps the furthest removed from the labour market; it is also the case—although this is not widely recognised—among those who have qualifications.

Alison Johnstone made a good point about the wider perspective of what education has to try to do, but it cannot do that unless there are significant improvements in literacy and numeracy across the board and in the ability of youngsters to use those skills when they get to work. The Confederation of British Industry Scotland and the chambers of commerce point to the worrying fact that they still have to carry out quite a lot of remedial work with new employees.

We need to be clear that young people have to be extremely versatile these days—perhaps much more so than the generations before them. To do that, they have to be much more adaptable in their working practices. They have to learn not just a bank of knowledge but how and why things happen, using an interdisciplinary approach. I am a great supporter of the basic philosophy of curriculum for excellence, but I do not think that it is working in the way that we have to ensure that it does for that interdisciplinary approach to really work.

That brings me to colleges. I agree wholeheartedly with the comments that have been made

about the need to redress some of the college cuts. I do not think that Joan McAlpine was right to say that it is just about full-time equivalents, although the position in that regard has undoubtedly remained the same, which I think is progress. However, that is not where the problem lies. The problem is with help for those who, previously, would never have aspired to a college education. The point was made by Neil Findlay and Hanzala Malik—

Joan McAlpine: Will the member give way?

Liz Smith: I will just finish this point.

This is about helping part-time students, students with disabilities and ethnic minority students, who perhaps find it very difficult to engage in college education as they have specialist needs. I think that we should be focusing on that aspect of the college cuts.

Joan McAlpine: Will the member acknowledge the praise in the introduction to Sir Ian Wood's report for the reorganisation of colleges, and particularly for the focus on employment outcomes as a result of that reorganisation?

Liz Smith: I acknowledge that Ian Wood concentrates very much on colleges' ability to deliver according to local circumstances. However, that approach needs to take account of the fact that a lot of the college cuts have severely affected those who find engaging in college education difficult and who want to work in their local community. That is the problem that the Government has to address.

There is a very strong message from the universities about their approach to colleges and schools.

I will pick up on a point that Elaine Murray made in her very interesting and thoughtful speech about the approach to STEM subjects. I think that we have to add modern languages to that, because the evidence that has been presented to the European and External Relations Committee shows that we still need to do a great deal to ensure that the one-plus-two language strategy is working properly. The Scottish baccalaureate was supposed to address that issue, but it does not seem to have caught the imagination of schools or pupils—or of colleges or universities.

This has been a very healthy debate that has, I think, been relatively free of the party-political rancour that we sometimes have. There have been a lot of thoughtful suggestions and I look forward to the minister's response.

16:44

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Like others, I welcome the new

youth employment strategy and the partnership approach that it embodies, although I think that our amendment emphasises that that approach should include trade unions and universities, as well as the other partners that members have talked about extensively.

We are also pleased about the £6.5 million for local authorities that was announced this week, but there are funding issues in other parts of the education system—and in the training system, which I hope to come on to in a moment.

We welcome the overriding target—40 per cent by 2021 is a good start—but it could be more ambitious. The Scottish Government's early years strategy refers to "stretch targets"; perhaps a stretch target is needed in this area.

I very much agree with what Mary Scanlon said about valuing the skills of every person equally. However, I emphasise the danger of going back to the old approach of having two streams for pupils in schools. The Wood commission's final report notes on page 36 that

"Our Interim Report emphasises that the Commission does not favour separate academic and vocational streams. Young people should be able to participate in both in line with their career aspirations."

It is important that we hold on to that view.

Central to the agenda is the need for more opportunities for young people to undertake learning that connects more directly with employment. There are many proposals in the report and in the Government's response that address that need.

We welcome the new standards for work experience. We also welcome earlier careers guidance, although Neil Findlay noted that he expressed concerns in that area some time ago. It is a fact that Skills Development Scotland has been cutting back on face-to-face guidance in recent years, so some of the report's recommendations swim against the tide of what has been happening.

One could also say that about the emphasis on more school-college partnerships. Those partnerships are central to the objective of increasing the uptake of work-related learning and qualifications in the senior phase of school, yet in a briefing that members received this week, Colleges Scotland said that, because of funding policy changes four years ago, there has been a reduction in school-college partnership activity. The figure dropped from 45,500 in 2010-11 to 26,330 two years later. Colleges Scotland recommends a national funding framework for school-college partnership provision. That framework will be important, given that such partnerships are so central to the strategy.

I will not repeat the comments from members on further education and college funding, but we cannot just dismiss, as Joan McAlpine did, some of the figures that have been quoted. Liz Smith was right to say that colleges have helped many people who would not have aspired to a college education previously, and we must be concerned about 140,000 places being cut and a real-terms budget reduction of £67 million over the current five-year period.

Apprenticeships are central, too. The Wood report recommends new quality assurance processes and new incentives to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises to take on more apprentices. We welcome in principle the Government's target of 30,000 apprenticeships by 2020, but there is an issue with the quality of those apprenticeships. The report's recommendation for more apprenticeships at level 3 and above echoes what Labour members—particularly Neil Findlay and Kezia Dugdale—have been saying for some time.

One surprising feature of the Wood report and the Government's response is that there is very little on contribution rates. Members received an interesting briefing today from the Scottish Training Federation, which pointed out that training organisations delivered more than 75 per cent of the completions for the modern apprenticeship programme. Those organisations seem to have been rather forgotten in the debate.

The STF also pointed out that its funding has stayed static for more than 10 years. It said that it will be difficult for the Scottish Government to deliver 5,000 additional modern apprenticeships on the back of significant reductions in the contribution rates. It would be interesting to hear from the minister on that subject in her winding-up speech.

Many members have rightly mentioned recommendation 12, which states:

"A focus on STEM should sit at the heart of the development of Scotland's Young Workforce."

I think that all members agree with that.

There was not a great deal on STEM in the Government's response, but I was glad to hear the cabinet secretary say that some of the money that has been announced this week will go towards enhancing STEM opportunities, as that is a big issue.

Science in primary schools was rightly emphasised in the Conservative amendment and by Elaine Murray, who referred to the Royal Society of Edinburgh's work in that area. I certainly agree with the need for a science subject leader in primary schools.

Gender segregation in the STEM subjects has also been mentioned. The issue of occupational segregation was rightly highlighted by the cabinet secretary, and some of the report's most interesting recommendations apply to that area. For example, we are told by the Government that the Scottish funding council is

"publishing a plan to reduce gender imbalance on courses in joint action with Skills Development Scotland and other partners".

We will all watch developments on that front with great interest, because it is—as Alison Johnstone emphasised—a matter of great concern.

Last but not least is the active partnership with employers that is recommended. I am glad that the national invest in young people group has been established.

There are interesting recommendations in the Wood report that it would be good to hear more about. For example, recommendation 22 states:

"Procurement and supply chain policies in both the public and private sectors should be applied to encourage more employers to support the development of Scotland's young workforce."

We have not heard much about that area, but it could be fruitful.

Recommendation 25 talks about "Financial recruitment incentives". It is never easy to talk about money. We have talked about money for colleges and training providers, so I will understand if the Government reminds us that money is not exactly in plentiful supply.

I point out the great success of the Edinburgh guarantee. Part of that has been an Edinburgh jobs fund, which offers a wage incentive to businesses with fewer than 400 employees to hire a 16 to 24-year-old in a new or additional position. The fund offers a wage subsidy of 50 per cent of the national minimum wage for a maximum of six months. Some local authorities are already taking effective action. I hope that some of the money that has been announced this week will result in similar action throughout Scotland.

16:51

The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing): I am pleased that we have been able to set out our implementation plans and refreshed strategy that will support our young people better for employment. As members have heard, we have a positive vision for Scotland's young people and for our schools, colleges and employers, as well as for teachers and all the others who work with Scotland's young people every day. It is a seven-year national programme on which we will report our progress annually so that we can all keep

track of how the Scottish Government is doing against its ambitions. Our commitment to young people is clear.

We have heard about the important issue of narrowing the attainment gap in schools. Although that is, in the first place, a matter for the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, I note that the First Minister has taken a keen interest in the subject and regards it as a priority for the Scottish Government. Initiatives are already under way and others are planned, including the appointment of an attainment adviser for each local authority and the read, write, count campaign on literacy and numeracy, which is aimed at primary 1 to 3.

We have heard about the ambitious target to reduce youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021. Mr Findlay accused the Government of not being ambitious enough in its targets, but in fact—as he will know from having read the Wood commission recommendations closely—we have taken our lead from Sir Ian and his commission on that. Our target will put us in the top five nations in Europe. I suggest that, by any measure, we do not lack ambition for our young people—far to the contrary.

I turn to our ambitious target to increase the number of modern apprenticeships to 30,000 a year by 2020. The review shows that currently the majority of modern apprenticeships—some 65 per cent—are at level 3 or above. A Skills Development Scotland survey showed that 92 per cent of modern apprenticeship completers have been in work for six months or more, which Stewart Maxwell referred to, and that 79 per cent are in full-time work. We are working with Skills Development Scotland to develop long-term measures, as was identified in the Audit Scotland report "Modern apprenticeships". I hope that Mr Findlay will acknowledge that work.

On Mr Chisholm's point about contribution rates, that is of course an operational matter for Skills Development Scotland, although I understand from the Scottish Training Federation's briefing to members for the debate that it is engaging "robustly", as it describes it, with SDS on the matter. We look forward to hearing more on those discussions.

As the cabinet secretary said in her opening remarks, we have the ability to build on the important initiatives that have been taken in the sector, the strong regional college system, the undeniable success of Scotland's modern apprenticeships programme and, of course, curriculum for excellence. Those provide us with a long-term plan.

Liz Smith: The minister is absolutely right, but does she accept that when it comes to providing

for local needs there is real pressure to ensure that college places that allow for part-time and more flexible work are in the economy and not on the cutback list?

Annabelle Ewing: I suggest to Liz Smith that that is not, in fact, the case. Curriculum for excellence gives us the flexibility that schools need and have been asking for, as far as I am aware. It is surely all about equipping young people with the skills that they need for learning for life and for work.

The Wood commission's report gives us a blueprint from which to progress. The commission was made up of talented and passionate people, and their continued involvement, through a range of groups and networks, will be a real asset to everybody who is involved in implementation. That is why the cabinet secretary and I are pleased to announce that Sir Ian has agreed to join the national advisory group in order to ensure that we continue on the right track in the coming years.

We will not allow the programme to lose any momentum, and we will use the breadth of expertise on our programme board and our national advisory group, as well as that on the national invest in young people group, to drive progress and shape implementation in the coming years. However, as has been said, the Government cannot do that on its own. That is why we will look to the talents of people across Scotland—and across Parliament—to support this endeavour. In that regard, I am appreciative of the broadly supportive comments that we have heard today from the Conservative front bench, from Liam McArthur, from Malcolm Chisholm and from others. It is important that we all work together to secure the objectives.

The important issue of the advancement of equalities was raised by a number of members. It is right to say that we are absolutely determined to ensure that our plans encompass all young people, and we will work with all partners and stakeholders to ensure that the focus now moves to what a person can do, rather than what they cannot do. In that respect, it might interest Stewart Maxwell to know that there is a pilot project that is looking to get more care leavers—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): One moment, minister. There is far too much noise from members who are just arriving in the chamber. You have not been part of the debate; you should allow members who have been to hear the minister's summing up.

Annabelle Ewing: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

That pilot project is designed to get more care leavers into modern apprenticeships, and is run in

conjunction with Who Cares? Scotland, Action for Children Scotland, Barnardo's and Quarriers.

There is, of course, a particular role for public bodies to play. Sir Ian's report recognised the potential for public bodies to be exemplars in supporting the education and training system in general, and in recruiting young people. In that regard, the cabinet secretary has written to the chief executives of all public bodies to encourage them to develop an invest in youth plan that will set out what they will do to support the development of our young workforce. We will monitor the performance of those public bodies through their corporate plans and by assessing the number that achieve the important accreditation of the investors in young people accolade.

Local government is, of course, a key stakeholder, and we have worked closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities at every stage of the programme. I look forward to continuing that partnership approach. COSLA is represented on our programme board and jointly chairs our national advisory group. I thank COSLA for all the hard work that it has done to secure the formulation for implementation of the Wood commission report.

Schools are also important. We have had an interesting discussion about the role of schools and, in particular, about the fact that the implementation strategy must involve children at a younger age, including at primary school. I support the comments that members made in that regard.

It is axiomatic that schools should work closely with colleges, but it is essential to the success of the youth employment strategy.

Mary Scanlon: Will the minister give way?

Annabelle Ewing: I am afraid that I am running out of time, and I have already taken an intervention.

It is important that schools and colleges work closely together to deliver vocational education for our young people.

On the important issue of parity of esteem, I simply say that of course there is parity of esteem and that the vocational opportunities are designed to give our young people an additional opportunity at school, and are not to be at the expense of any other academic opportunities.

We work closely with colleges. We have heard the usual claims, from the Labour front bench in particular, about college numbers. Of course, we have in fact maintained student places at 116,000 full-time equivalent places. I say gently to Mr Findlay that it would, on the odd occasion, be useful for him to compare apples with apples. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Annabelle Ewing: It does our young people no service whatever to make misleading comparisons.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

The Presiding Officer: The minister is in her last 15 seconds.

Annabelle Ewing: This has actually been a very consensual debate. [*Interruption.*] I could not possibly repeat what the cabinet secretary just said.

I look forward to working closely with all members from across the chamber who I know, in their hearts, support the opportunity for our young people to have a chance in life. That is what they want and that is what we parliamentarians have a duty to deliver.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-11908, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 6 January 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Winter Festivals

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Mental Health

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 7 January 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Justice and the Law Officers;
Rural Affairs, Food and Environment

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Active Travel

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 8 January 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Boosting the Economy

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 13 January 2015

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 14 January 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Health, Wellbeing and Sport
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 15 January 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by 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 three business motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S4M-11909, S4M-11912, and S4M-11914, which set out stage 1 and stage 2 timetables for various bills.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 8 May 2015.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Community Charge Debt (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 30 January 2015.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Legal Writings (Counterparts and Delivery) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 30 January 2015.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motions agreed to.

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-11901.3, in the name of Neil Findlay, which seeks to amend motion S4M-11901, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on developing Scotland's young workforce, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 54, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-11901.1, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-11901, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on developing Scotland's young workforce, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 54, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-11901, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on developing Scotland's young workforce, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament endorses the ambitions set out in the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce report, *Education Working for All!*; notes the progress made in reducing youth unemployment in Scotland since the publication of Scotland's youth employment strategy; recognises that there is more to do in tackling youth unemployment and improving the number and quality of youth employment opportunities; further recognises that the refreshed strategy must take into account the changing economic conditions, focus attention on supporting young people who need more help to participate in the labour market and address legacy issues from the recession; believes that critical to improving youth employment is a world class vocational education system, providing more opportunities for young people; further believes that this will best be achieved by supporting close working between employers and an education system that is responsive to economic and labour market need, and welcomes the Scottish Government's implementation plan developed with a broad range of partners, including local government, for reducing youth unemployment and unlocking social mobility as set out in the newly published youth employment strategy.

Creating Jobs in Glasgow's East End

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-11082, in the name of Paul Martin, on creating jobs in Glasgow's east end. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the news that the £45 million expansion of the Fort Shopping Centre in the east end of Glasgow is expected to establish around 500 new jobs; recognises what it sees as the need to ensure that large-scale developments such as this are not missed opportunities for local jobseekers, and notes the view that there is a need to bring together businesses, employers, social enterprises and charities to create more jobs and apprenticeships in the east end.

17:06

Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): I take this opportunity to thank colleagues from across the parties for supporting the motion in my name. Many members who are here this evening will be familiar with the Glasgow Fort. I advise members that there are just seven days left until Christmas. I know that there are many bargains to be had at the Glasgow Fort, at junction 10 of the M8, so you should take advantage of that on your way home this evening.

The Fort shopping centre provides more than 2,500 jobs and is located in the Easterhouse area of my constituency, Glasgow Provan. Members may be aware of some of the background and the challenges that face the east end of Glasgow, particularly Easterhouse, with its high concentration of unemployment.

It was recently announced that Marks and Spencer will build an extension to its existing facility at the Glasgow Fort, which will add another 500 jobs to the existing 2,500. I am sure that, like the whole community, every member in the chamber will agree with me that the extension is welcome in an area of high unemployment. At the same time, we must ensure that the investment benefits those who live in the locality of the Fort.

I was compelled to lodge the motion after having a conversation with a young man who lives directly across from the Glasgow Fort. He welcomed the expansion of the facility, but he advised me that he had been facing a number of difficulties in securing permanent employment since leaving college. He said that, most importantly, he wanted to work. When I discussed with him the new jobs that are coming to the Fort, he advised me that, due to the gaps in his employment history and the challenges that he faced in creating a CV, he did

not feel that he would be given the opportunity to pursue the jobs that are coming with the expansion of the Fort.

I find that unacceptable. That young man, other young people in Easterhouse, and indeed other people elsewhere who wish to take up such employment opportunities in their local area should be given the opportunity to take them up.

Simply put in my terms, there is no lack of aspiration to work; there is a lack of opportunity. We in the Parliament have the responsibility and the powers available to us to take action in that respect.

Unfortunately, there are many other people in my constituency and in other parts of Glasgow and beyond who find themselves in a similar position. We have a responsibility to reverse that trend. As I have said, it is important that, as a local member, I recognise and welcome the investment, but we need to take action and consider how we can reverse the trend that I have described.

I have already written to the chief executive of Marks and Spencer, and I have called on him to employ local jobseekers and to work with the council's Jobs & Business Glasgow organisation to consider how we can support those who wish to gain employment in the Glasgow Fort. I welcome the positive reply that I have received from the chief executive of Marks and Spencer, and I look forward to meeting the company in the new year to discuss various initiatives to give local people the opportunities that they deserve.

I would also like Marks and Spencer to follow the lead of one of its rivals, Tesco. When I represented Springburn, I worked with Tesco on the St Rollox initiative, which ensured that 450 local people from Springburn were employed at its store in St Rollox. Many of them still work there. As part of that initiative, one gentleman, who had not worked for 25 years, got the support that he deserved and was able to secure employment at the store.

My main ask of the Scottish Government is that it encourages employers to employ locally and puts in place the resources necessary to take that forward. As I have said, there are a number of very complex reasons why individuals are not able to gain employment, but it is the responsibility of members in this chamber to take the matter forward.

Unemployment, with its costs to and challenges for our economy, is unacceptable, and I think that all of us in the chamber are united in taking action on the issue. In citing the St Rollox initiative, which prepared people to apply for the posts that became available, I have highlighted a specific example of best practice. I also welcome the £45 million investment that has been made in the local

area with the expansion of the Glasgow Fort as well as other investments in the area, and I very much look forward to working with, I hope, the Scottish Government and local employers to ensure that we make a difference and give people a genuine opportunity to be employed in the locality.

17:12

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I thank Paul Martin for bringing this motion to the chamber. As he will realise, the Fort is not currently in my constituency, but once upon a time it was, when I represented Glasgow East at Westminster. In fact, it holds a very special place in my memory. In summer 2008, both of the main parties did a lot of campaigning there for the by-election, and I especially remember the morning of Friday 25 July 2008, when we met the media there to celebrate the Scottish National Party winning the by-election.

Over the years, I have seen the Fort develop from its early days when, as I remember, some local people did not even like the name because they felt that it was overly warlike and not good for the Easterhouse area. However, we seem to have got over that problem. Being on the motorway into and out of Glasgow has also been an advantage for Easterhouse, certainly with regard to this particular development. In fact, Easterhouse has benefited from its location in comparison with some of Glasgow's other post-war peripheral housing schemes such as Drumchapel and Castlemilk, and it is now very much at the centre of things.

At the beginning, there were delays in attracting to the Fort some kind of leisure facility, even though that had been a commitment from the beginning by the developers and Glasgow City Council. I am glad that, as well as the shopping experience, we now have a Vue cinema and a whole range of eating places.

From the early days, there was a realisation that many shoppers would come from a distance by using their cars and the motorway, but there was also a commitment to providing as many jobs as possible for local people. Presumably the situation varies slightly from employer to employer but, to be fair to the Fort as a whole, I think that a serious effort has been made to fulfil that commitment. Indeed, as Paul Martin has eloquently pointed out, the same will be the case with the present expansion.

One of the reasons why I enjoyed using the Fort at first was that it had a really good bookshop in the shape of Borders. Of course, Borders is no longer there, and I think that its story paints a picture of the retail sector and, frankly, the jobs

that can go with it. When I was younger, the place to buy books in Glasgow was John Smith & Son in St Vincent Street—I suspect that other members remember it, as well. However, Borders and the other big chains went into Glasgow city centre and to the out-of-town shopping centres such as the Fort, and John Smith & Son and many smaller shops got squeezed out. Over time, of course, Borders has been squeezed out by the likes of Amazon.

My memory of Borders is that, as well as being a good bookshop, it had a name for being a somewhat poor employer and very much anti-trade union. That raises the question of some jobs being better than others and some employers being better than others. I very much welcome the expansion of the Fort and the new jobs that come alongside that, but are they really new jobs, or are they in effect a transfer of jobs from smaller shops that have been squeezed out by the big chains that inhabit retail parks?

I guess that it is a mixture of both. These days, people do not have a lot of extra money to spend, and they can spend each pound only once in one shop. On the other hand, I hope that people are being attracted to Glasgow from other parts of Scotland and beyond and that the number of retail sales is increasing.

The motion mentions the wider east end. There has been a lot to welcome in the east end this year, not least with the Commonwealth games, which brought both temporary and permanent jobs. Clyde Gateway has done great work with regeneration, and the new police building at Dalmarnock will increase footfall, even though many of the jobs are transferring. That will have a knock-on effect.

I hope to be at the Fort tomorrow evening rather than this evening, as I hope to take part in carol singing at Morrisons. I am sure that Mr Martin, the Presiding Officer and any other members would be very welcome to take part in that, as well, if they would like to do so.

17:16

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I congratulate my colleague Paul Martin on securing this very worthwhile and important debate.

The motion is about creating jobs in Glasgow's east end, of course, but I am sure that the Presiding Officer will appreciate that my constituency stretches from the north-west of the city to the east and that, in fact, at several points Mr Martin's constituency and mine run along opposite sides of the same road. In any case, a job that is located in the east end of the city may, on occasion at least—with all due respect to Mr

Martin—be an opportunity for someone in a neighbouring constituency, too.

Paul Martin rightly identified the good practice that Tesco demonstrated when it opened its superstore at St Rollox, which is now in my constituency following the boundary changes in 2011. Working with local partners, including the much-missed Glasgow North Regeneration Agency under the guidance of its excellent chief executive, Cathy Lang, Tesco went out of its way to prepare and recruit local people for its new store. Even those who were not fortunate enough to be employed by it had the opportunity to learn the basic skills that are needed in the world of work. Over the years, I have spoken to a number of people who used that experience and successfully found employment elsewhere.

Having learned from Paul Martin's knowledge of what happened at St Rollox, I was particularly keen to ensure that Tesco operated a similar programme when it enlarged its store in Maryhill. I am pleased that it decided to operate a similar scheme there and provided pre-interview training and assistance, for example with CV preparation.

We are really talking about local jobs for local people. I would argue that the constituencies that Paul Martin and I have the privilege to represent contain the best people and the most vibrant communities, but they also have some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country. That disturbs me greatly, and it motivated me to become involved in politics in the first place. Paul Martin is absolutely right when he says that large developments in the east end of the city must also be opportunities for local people and that all agencies and organisations must come together to create more jobs and apprenticeships.

In my constituency, we hope soon to see a major retail facility built on the site of the former North British Locomotive Company works at Carlisle Street in Springburn. The site was cleared in the 1960s and has stood deserted ever since. The proposals that Forge Properties has put forward could spur further regeneration in the area and, crucially, provide a food shopping hub in an area that is sadly lacking in that kind of possibility. New roads and other infrastructure would follow, of course, and some 611 jobs are likely to be created.

I and the local councillors for the area, Chris Kelly and Helen Stephen, want to work with the developer to ensure that jobs go to people in our community and neighbouring areas both during the construction phase and when the centre opens. We will do everything in our power to make that happen. However, we need to ensure that all other agencies are also partners in that work, particularly Jobs & Business Glasgow.

Again, I congratulate Paul Martin, and I sincerely hope that his hard work on Glasgow Fort pays off for his constituents, as his previous efforts at St Rollox did for Springburn.

17:20

The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing): I congratulate Paul Martin on securing this members' business debate tonight. His entreaty for some last-minute Christmas shopping will be noted in the *Official Report* of the debate, which I hope will be pored over avidly tomorrow by our colleagues, who might be tempted to proceed directly to the Fort to get their last-minute Christmas presents.

I welcome the expansion of the Fort shopping centre in the east end of Glasgow and in particular the opportunities for jobseekers that the expansion will create. I thank the member for Glasgow Provan for highlighting the hugely important issue of job creation and, therefore, apprenticeship opportunities—points that John Mason and Patricia Ferguson took up. I will focus on a number of issues of relevance to those issues.

As far as skills training and access to the jobs market is concerned, it is worth noting that the most recent United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills survey outlines a number of key strengths in skills and training in Scotland, including positive feedback on the work readiness of our young people. The survey found that young people in Scotland are the best prepared for work in the UK and that the situation in relation to skills gaps is improving. However, we want more firms to play a part in supporting our people towards fair and sustainable employment, and our efforts to achieve that will be stepped up further in the coming year in the context of our refreshed youth employment strategy.

Patricia Ferguson: I appreciate all efforts to encourage and support young people into employment, but the kind of people who have particularly benefited from Tesco's initiatives are those who have been out of the job market for a long time and struggle with issues of confidence and skills. Those people are probably the hardest to reach—to use a clichéd phrase—but are most genuinely in need of that kind of support.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank Patricia Ferguson for her comment, which is a fair one. Indeed, there is a recognition that there are a number of people who are further away from the jobs market who do need support. Our refreshed youth employment strategy is intended to provide the support needed to ensure that all young people have an opportunity to get into the workplace.

Skills Development Scotland has been working with the Scottish funding council, local authorities

and others to develop regional skills assessments. That work will help to improve understanding of the skills and labour market demands across Scotland. Last month, SDS published a series of 11 regional skills assessments covering the length and breadth of Scotland, including the Glasgow region and Glasgow and Clyde Valley. The collaborative approach employed in developing the assessments reiterates the Scottish Government's commitment to work with our employers to ensure that our skills and education systems are closely aligned with economic opportunities.

Mention was made of the Commonwealth games legacy, which is also of relevance in this context. Members will be aware that the Scottish Government and its key partners began planning a legacy fit for the Commonwealth games back in 2008. Central to those plans were our and our partners' ambitions to increase movement for Scottish people into employment, training and volunteering, increase the growth of Scottish businesses and help Scotland to attract new business investments. As part of that, the Scottish Government has provided £125 million to Clyde Gateway since 2007, helping to remediate land, create office and industrial space, attract inward investment and generate job opportunities in the east end of Glasgow.

In addition, the £500 million spent on the construction and refurbishment of games venues and the athletes' village in the east end of Glasgow over the six years leading to 2014 has, on average, supported 1,000 jobs and contributed £52 million to Scotland's gross value added in each year. Furthermore, 500 jobs, including 168 apprenticeships, were provided for the long-term unemployed and education leavers on Commonwealth games infrastructure-related contracts, as well as opportunities for investment from local businesses and social enterprises.

Clyde Gateway also seeks to support local people to access the opportunities that regeneration of the area is bringing. Community benefit clauses form a mandatory part of contracts that are delivered by Clyde Gateway, providing jobs and training for local people. Where jobs cannot be provided due to the specialist nature of the work, alternative community benefits are agreed with the contractor.

It is also worth noting that Clyde Gateway is delivering a range of employment and training projects to support people into work, many for the first time, and it has agreed a joint action plan with Skills Development Scotland to support the specific employability and training needs in the area. That perhaps covers the concern that Ms Ferguson expressed.

I mentioned the youth employment strategy that we published on Monday, which responds to the report by Sir Ian Wood and his commission for developing Scotland's young workforce. In the debate that we had this afternoon, we set out a radical plan to offer young people the skills and knowledge that they need to move from education into the world of work. I agree with Paul Martin that all of us, as parliamentarians, have a responsibility to do what we can with the powers that we have in the Parliament to ensure that every young person has a chance to make their way in life. That is certainly a duty that I take very seriously indeed.

The milestones over the next six years are clear and ambitious. We have committed to taking the action that is needed to meet our ambitious target of reducing youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021. The Government has already committed £12 million this year—and £16.6 million is planned for 2015-16—to support and develop the plans that are outlined in the implementation plan. That funding demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that the resources are in place to make real our vision of a world-class vocational education system. We will improve the options for young people to help them to get into sustainable jobs that will drive economic growth and so reduce youth unemployment to the levels of the best-performing countries in Europe. The programme aims to achieve systemic change across schools, colleges, training provision and employers, underpinned by consistent and sustained support from this Government.

Those actions will sit alongside our existing successful actions to tackle youth unemployment. They include the opportunities for all programme, which is a commitment to offer a place in education or training to 16 to 19-year-olds who need it, and our modern apprenticeships programme. We are continuing to deliver 25,000 modern apprenticeship starts a year and we plan to go further by increasing the target to 30,000 by 2020.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity tonight to respond to Mr Martin's debate. I stress that, although much has been achieved and developments such as the highlighted one at Glasgow Fort are important to drive recovery, there is still a great deal to do. The member can be assured that we will use every possible opportunity for Government, local government, businesses, employers, social enterprises, the third sector and the people of Scotland to work together to ensure that we maximise job creation and apprenticeship opportunities in Glasgow's east end and, indeed, across Scotland.

Meeting closed at 17:28.

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