



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 17 February 2015

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**Tuesday 17 February 2015**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Col.</b>
<b>TIME FOR REFLECTION</b> .....	1
<b>BUSINESS MOTION</b> .....	3
<i>Motion moved—[Joe FitzPatrick]—and agreed to.</i>	
<b>TOPICAL QUESTION TIME</b> .....	4
Teacher Numbers .....	4
Alcohol (Football Matches) .....	7
<b>EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT</b> .....	11
<i>Motion moved—[Angela Constance].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Iain Gray].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Mary Scanlon].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance) .....	11
Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab) .....	16
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con) .....	19
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP) .....	22
Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab) .....	25
Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP) .....	27
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD) .....	30
Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP) .....	33
Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab) .....	35
Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP) .....	37
Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab) .....	40
Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP) .....	42
Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP) .....	45
Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab) .....	47
Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP) .....	49
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP) .....	51
Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab) .....	54
Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP) .....	56
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	58
Iain Gray .....	60
Angela Constance .....	63
<b>SERIOUS CRIME BILL</b> .....	68
<i>Motion moved—[Michael Matheson].</i>	
<b>PUBLIC BODIES (ABOLITION OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEES ON PESTICIDES) ORDER 2015</b> .....	69
<i>Motion moved—[Aileen McLeod].</i>	
<b>EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE</b> .....	70
<i>Motion moved—[Fiona Hyslop].</i>	
<b>DECISION TIME</b> .....	71
<b>STROKE SURVIVORS (SUPPORT)</b> .....	78
<i>Motion debated—[Margaret Mitchell].</i>	
Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con) .....	78
Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP) .....	81
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab) .....	82
Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP) .....	84
The Minister for Public Health (Maureen Watt) .....	85

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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 17 February 2015*

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, and our leader today is Reverend Calum Macdonald, minister of the Park Church in Giffnock.

**The Rev Calum Macdonald (Park Church, Giffnock):** Good afternoon to you. It is a pleasure for me to be here and I thank you for the opportunity.

This time last year I was in Gulu, in northern Uganda. I visited an old friend who has been working as a missionary with those who live in the most extreme poverty, in a nation that is recovering from a horrendous period of civil war. While there, I had the honour of preaching to some 300 inmates at Gulu men's prison. Here I am a year later in these hallowed halls, speaking to those who sit at the heart of the Scottish political scene. I stand before you unclear as to which has been the greater privilege of the two.

What could this wee boy from Maryhill in Glasgow share today? The same wee boy who, as he grew up, recognised for himself the importance and relevance of Christian faith for daily life, and who later on followed what he felt was the call of God to enter the ordained ministry of the Church of Scotland, serving as one of its parish ministers—what could he possibly offer for reflection this day?

One thing I could suggest is the axiom that was passed to me by a minister whom I worked with. He used to say, "Learn to agree to disagree without being disagreeable." I have used that as a maxim to live by in the life and worship of the church. I believe that it is a principle that ironically has held the Church of Scotland in unity, particularly in recent times. I believe that it is also a principle that applies to the political world of democratic debate and practice, all the more so as we move forward from a referendum to a national election. Some will of course say that that is naive, for the world of politics is a dirty business. That may be so in some instances, but although agreeing to disagree without being disagreeable is a goal that perhaps just exceeds our grasp, it remains a precious ideal to aspire to. Anything outside that ideal is really a haven for discrimination.

The late Rev Peter Marshall, a Scot who emigrated and eventually became chaplain to the US Senate, said, in one of his great prayers to the leaders of the nation:

"So may we together seek happiness for all our citizens in the name of Him who created us all equal in His sight".

I read the words of the apostle Paul in that statement, who when writing to the Romans wrote:

"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up."

Agreeing to disagree without being disagreeable—a maxim that we could all take on board.

May God bless the decisions and deliberations that are made and the debates that take place this week.

## Business Motion

14:05

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-12330, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out revisions to the business programme for today.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 17 February 2015—

after

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Raising Attainment

insert

*followed by* Supplementary Legislative Consent Motion: Serious Crime Bill – UK Legislation

*followed by* Public Bodies Consent Motion: Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides) Order 2015 – UK Legislation

*followed by* Scottish Ministers' Nominations to the European Economic and Social Committee of the European Union—[Joe FitzPatrick.]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Topical Question Time

### Teacher Numbers

**1. George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to provide councils with resources to maintain teacher numbers. (S4T-00943)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** The Government provides councils, through the local government finance settlement, with £37.6 million to fund the teacher induction scheme and £41 million to support the commitment to maintain teacher numbers.

The Deputy First Minister wrote to all local authorities on 5 February asking them individually to commit to maintain their pupil teacher ratio and the numbers of teachers that they employ. In return for meeting that commitment, the Government will provide councils with their share of the £41 million, plus a share of an additional £10 million.

**George Adam:** Given the resources available to councils that commit to maintaining teacher numbers and the fact that the Scottish Government has offered to suspend the penalty that it was entitled to apply as a result of last year's fall in teacher numbers, does the cabinet secretary agree with Larry Flanagan, the general secretary of the Educational Institute of Scotland? He said:

"The fact that COSLA"—

the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—

"is continuing to resist a national agreement, including the offer of significant new money, is extremely disappointing."

**Angela Constance:** Yes, it is indeed disappointing that COSLA found itself unable to accept the original offer. That fair and generous offer has now been made to all local authorities; I encourage them to accept it.

It is important to recognise that the maintenance of teacher numbers is also a condition of the tripartite pay agreement. Teachers unions have accepted changes to their members' terms and conditions on the basis that teacher numbers will be maintained.

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** A number of members want to ask questions and I intend to call you all. However, I want a question—I do not want any statements—so just come right to it.

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary confirm that, when she talks about maintaining the number of teachers, that

number is 4,275 fewer than when this Government came to office in 2007?

**Angela Constance:** The offer that has been made to local authorities is to maintain teacher numbers at the 2014-15 level. It is important to recognise that there was a vast decrease in teachers between 2007 and 2011. Since 2011, teacher numbers have broadly stabilised, although last year there was a small, but disappointing decrease. Therefore, since 2011, extra resource and a commitment to maintaining teacher numbers have been part of the local government agreement.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** Given the unacceptable teacher vacancy numbers in Moray, will the cabinet secretary advise what contact is being made with the council to establish why that situation has arisen and to ensure that it is taking proper steps to address the deficiency?

**Angela Constance:** A number of actions can be taken and are being pursued at local and national level. I have had meetings with Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council, and I have been in touch with members who represent the Moray area.

It is true that in some areas of the country there are teacher shortages, particularly in certain subjects. The Scottish Government has an overall responsibility for national workforce planning; local authorities have duties to employ and recruit teachers.

A number of actions are being taken. At a national level, for example, for the fourth year in a row we have increased the number of students going into initial teacher training. The increase has been disproportionately geared towards the University of Aberdeen, the University of Dundee and the University of the Highlands and Islands to help those geographical areas where there are shortages. At local level, as I know from my discussions, councils are using the flexibility of financial incentives and programmes such as the distance learning initial teacher education initiative, which the Government funds, to train up classroom assistants.

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** The cabinet secretary will be aware that local authorities such as South Ayrshire Council, which has complied with the Government's expectation and already has a lower pupil teacher ratio than required, and which also has falling school rolls, will nonetheless be required to employ teachers for whom there will be no job if it wants to attract its share of the £51 million fund provided by Government. Local authorities that comply—

**The Presiding Officer:** Can we get a question, Mr Scott?

**John Scott:** Indeed. Is it fair that those local authorities will be expected to subsidise the councils that have not complied with the guidelines?

**Angela Constance:** It is certainly fair to say that the Government would have preferred to reach a national agreement with COSLA. I am certainly aware of the diversity across Scotland. In some areas, such as Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Edinburgh, we have increasing pupil numbers that are quite remarkable. In other areas of the country, such as parts of Ayrshire, the school roll is falling, and I appreciate that there are challenges. We will work closely with individual councils. Nonetheless, the offer that is available to individual councils is to maintain teacher numbers at a minimum of the 2014-15 levels. We will, of course, have and are having dialogue with any council regarding any particular issues that it has.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Does the cabinet secretary accept that authorities such as Moray Council, which may already be struggling to recruit teachers, will not find the task any easier if they are then subject to financial penalties? Does she agree that the Government's divide-and-rule approach makes national workforce planning and responding to the changes in school rolls that John Scott referred to between local authority areas difficult if not impossible?

**Angela Constance:** It is important to state that COSLA and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland are involved in the working group that looks at national workforce planning and have never disagreed with the recommendations of that group. Indeed, ministers have always accepted the recommendations of the workforce planning group and have, for the fourth consecutive year, increased the numbers of students going into initial teacher education. As I said, I would have preferred to get a national agreement with COSLA, but COSLA was unable to come to an agreement with the Government. I am sure that Liam McArthur understands that my number 1 priority as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning is to safeguard the education of our children, to maintain and raise attainment, and to close the attainment gap. I do not see how we can make significant progress in closing the attainment gap while sitting back and allowing teacher numbers to fall.

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** This morning, Dumfries and Galloway Council announced a U-turn on its decision to cut 52 additional support for learning posts, including teachers. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that vindicates strong action from the Scottish Government, because it encourages Labour councils such as Dumfries and Galloway Council,

which would not have done so, to commit to maintaining teacher numbers?

**Angela Constance:** I certainly welcome the news that Dumfries and Galloway Council has reconsidered its earlier proposals. That is good news and I am sure that it will be warmly welcomed across the Dumfries and Galloway area. As Miss McAlpine is aware, under the terms of the offer that we have made to each and every local authority, we are asking them to assure a minimum of the total number of teachers at 2014-15 levels to maintain the maximum pupil teacher ratio for schools at the 2014-15 levels, and that is important if we are to safeguard the education of our children as we move forward.

**Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con):** Does the Scottish Government consider that education policy should focus on outcomes for students rather than centrally imposed targets?

**Angela Constance:** I very much believe that we should be focused on outcomes for our children, but it is important to recognise that teachers have been at the heart of all the progress that we have made on attainment, on school leaver destinations and on the important initiatives that are focused on children from the most deprived areas. Good-quality teaching is absolutely central to the delivery of education and to improving outcomes for our children. We cannot achieve those things without teachers, and I agree with the Educational Institute for Scotland that teachers are our greatest asset in the education system.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the Scottish Government accept the recommendations of the General Teaching Council for Scotland to remove the red tape that prevents some teachers who come from south of the border and from other parts from applying in Scotland?

**Angela Constance:** Ms Smith will be well aware that the GTCS is an independent body that is independent of Government for very good reasons. From my dialogue with local authorities the length and breadth of Scotland, I know that there is a feeling that some of the processes that they need to go through—for very good reason—to maintain teacher quality could be speeded up.

### **Alcohol (Football Matches)**

**2. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will consider introducing a pilot scheme for the sale and consumption of alcohol at football matches. (S4T-00941)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson):** Drinking at football matches is a serious and complex issue. Although the vast majority of football fans in Scotland are well

behaved and a credit to their clubs, the current policy on alcohol at football grounds was introduced for good reason.

There has been a positive cultural shift in attitudes to alcohol in Scotland over recent years, which we welcome, but there is still much work to be done in the area. We therefore need to consider the issue carefully. A variety of organisations, including Police Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid, strongly support the policy remaining as it is, given the marked increase in the number of violent incidents that have been recorded in relation to some football matches.

Watching Scottish football in a stadium should be a family-friendly experience. Indeed, it has become a much more family-friendly pursuit since the introduction of the current alcohol policy. It is important that we maintain a fun and safe environment for spectators. However, I am aware that other members of the Parliament and the Scottish Football Association have their own views, and I encourage them to continue their dialogue with Police Scotland.

**Neil Bibby:** The ban on alcohol at football matches was introduced in 1980, before I and hundreds of thousands of other football fans were even born. It is time to rethink the policy. The minister will be aware that people can have a drink of alcohol at the rugby, at the theatre, at a music venue and—if they pay enough—at football hospitality. Surely, the minister would not say that ordinary football fans cannot be trusted to have a drink. Surely, it is time to look again at the blanket ban.

**Michael Matheson:** For the member to equate attending a football game with attending a theatre or a pop concert is stretching things a little far. He should reflect on the fact that the ban was introduced for rugby games because Scottish Rugby Union volunteered to opt into it despite the fact that there was no history of any difficulty at its games. The history to the issue must be recognised and taken account of. As I have said, if the SFA and Police Scotland wish to have discussions about the matter, they should feel free to do so.

As a football fan and someone who regularly attends football matches with my young children, I find it easy enough to go 90 minutes without any alcohol. I suspect that most fans would find that they are able to go 90 minutes without any alcohol. We must treat the matter carefully and seriously, and not turn it into a political football as the member's party has done.

**Neil Bibby:** I was at the St Mirren v Inverness Caledonian Thistle game on Saturday, and a clear majority of supporters—many of them families—from both clubs wanted the ban on alcohol lifted.



Scottish Labour, the Scottish Conservatives and—I remind the minister—many SNP back benchers including Kenny MacAskill, the former Cabinet Secretary for Justice, want the blanket ban to be looked at, although, of course, the police should have discretion.

**The Presiding Officer:** Can we have a question?

**Neil Bibby:** There is a groundswell of opinion in favour of lifting the ban. Why does it appear that the SNP Government ministers are against that proposal when a consultation and a pilot project have not taken place?

**Michael Matheson:** The member clearly did not listen to what I just said. If the SFA and Police Scotland want to have dialogue on the matter—I know that they have already been having dialogue about it—I am more than happy for that dialogue to take place and for them to explore the issue and produce proposals.

If the member thinks that standing outside Love Street speaking to some fans is a form of proper consultation, he is pretty misguided when it comes to how a consultation should be undertaken and how people should be engaged with. As I have said in the past, given the serious nature of the issue, if we and the SFA are to consult on it, a thorough and proper consultation must be carried out that goes well beyond just those who attend football matches.

The member should reflect on the fact that Scotland has a long-standing problem in its relationship with alcohol, which costs the taxpayer some £3 billion per year. That is almost £900 for each taxpayer in Scotland. If we are to make sure that we continue to turn the tide in our relationship with alcohol and to get it on to a more positive footing, we must be prepared to progress policies that will deliver that. Mr Bibby's party has shown that, historically, it has not been prepared to do that on issues such as minimum pricing.

**The Presiding Officer:** Talking of St Mirren, I call George Adam.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I regularly attend St Mirren football games. The cabinet secretary might be aware that St Mirren had a highly successful fan zone within its grounds on match day towards the end of last year. It proved to be very family friendly. Children played football and there was an Xbox for them to play on while adults consumed alcohol. That was an event at which football—allegedly—formed part of the entertainment.

Does the cabinet secretary support the idea of going down the route of having a pilot similar to St Mirren's fan zone? Does he agree that, as alcohol

at football matches is quite an emotive subject, it might have been better for the Labour Party to back my call for a members' business debate in Scotland's Parliament to discuss it instead of chasing camera crews around football grounds?

**Michael Matheson:** I will pass on the opportunity to comment on the entertainment that is provided on the pitch at St Mirren Park—I will leave it to George Adam, as a St Mirren fan, to do that.

I recognise that George Adam has a long-standing interest in the matter and has raised it on a number of occasions with the football authorities, the police and Scottish Government ministers. St Mirren's approach of having a fan zone—which was outside the restricted area for alcohol—appears to have been successful. If St Mirren is inclined to continue to pursue that route, it is open to the club to do so.

It is extremely important that our football clubs recognise that they must provide a family-friendly environment. We are talking about the fans of tomorrow as well as the fans of today. The clubs must ensure that the match-day experience that they provide for their fans is safe and fun. I am not entirely sure that alcohol should play a large part in that.

## Educational Attainment

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-12316, in the name of Angela Constance, on raising attainment.

14:23

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** Our education system is improving. In our schools, curriculum for excellence has become embedded as the way in which we do education. Exam pass rates are at an all-time high and school leaver destination figures are the best on record—more than nine out of 10 of the students who left school in 2013 are in employment, training or education.

Despite those improvements—they are improvements—we need to do more. School leavers from the most disadvantaged 20 per cent of areas do only half as well as their equivalents from the most affluent areas do. In the most deprived 10 per cent of areas, fewer than one young person in every three leaves school with at least one higher. In the most affluent areas, the figure is four out of every five. In the Scotland that we seek, that gap is simply unacceptable.

That is why we have made it our top priority to raise attainment for all and ensure that all Scotland's children and young people get an equal chance in our schools. Education will not fulfil its potential as a societal good until we have closed the attainment gap.

Too many children in Scotland have their life chances determined by their postcode rather than their talent. No one in the chamber should accept that waste of potential. It undermines our economy and eats at the very fabric of our society. Education is the best gift that we can give people. It is a right and it should be a passport to a better place.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** The cabinet secretary points to the postcode lottery and identifies rightly that in certain postcode areas there are particular problems with poverty and lower attainment levels. However, I think that we would all accept that in almost every postcode there are those for whom the attainment gap is a significant problem, so an approach on an area basis will miss out some of those who live in more affluent areas but who are nevertheless subject to poverty.

**Angela Constance:** Mr McArthur raises an important point, because it is true that there are children in every school who are being held back from reaching their full potential and children who live in or attend a school in more affluent areas

who need support. Nonetheless, as we move forward—I will speak later about the Scottish attainment challenge—we need to invest in a more targeted resource for the children who are most in need. As well as having a targeted approach, we need to have a firm foundation and a universal approach.

Scotland is by no means unique in having an equity gap, and teachers around the world struggle with how to make up in their classrooms for social disadvantage, but deprivation is not destiny. We know from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that there are education systems where disadvantaged students succeed and where equity and excellence are not mutually exclusive—we can have one with the other.

Central to raising attainment are talented teachers and school leaders. That is why we have made a commitment in our budget to make available £51 million to maintain teacher numbers across Scotland. We are blessed across Scotland with great schools and the most talented, inspiring teachers available anywhere. Day on day, they are having a transformational effect on the lives of the children and young people in their care. We want to make sure that that excellence is shared and spread, so as part of our programme for government we will make sure that every local authority has access to an attainment adviser.

With the powers that we have, we are doing all that we can to limit the impacts of poverty, particularly on our children and young people. I will always argue for more powers, but I accept the need to find ways to do more with what we have. That is why we are focusing on the early years, where the impacts of poverty can be worst. We are taking the lead in pioneering work on early years and preventative spend. Our early years collaborative, the family nurse partnership and quality early learning and childcare are making a difference to life chances.

The Government is already delivering 16 hours a week of free childcare for all three and four-year-olds, and from last October that entitlement was extended to 15 per cent of two-year-olds. It will be further extended to 27 per cent of two-year-olds from August this year. That is more hours of early learning and childcare than in any other part of the United Kingdom, and we have set out an ambitious plan to increase childcare provision even further.

Building on the solid foundation of early years, we will focus relentlessly on driving up attainment in our schools. Last year, we launched the raising attainment for all programme, which already involves more than 150 schools and has a forensic focus on closing the attainment gap. However, we need to pick up the pace, and in the past two

months we have launched three initiatives that will help us to do that.

The new literacy and numeracy campaign for primaries 1 to 3—read, write, count—will benefit all children in P1 to P3 but will have a specific focus on schools and parents in our most disadvantaged communities. It will provide support to make sure that gaps in learning do not develop or increase over time.

We have also launched free school meals for children in primaries 1 to 3. That is benefiting about 135,000 children the length and breadth of the country, it is saving families £330 a year and it is providing the healthy and nutritious lunches that support our children's learning.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for the measures that she just outlined, which will undoubtedly be helpful. Given that the statistics to which she referred in the opening part of her speech have been part of the educational scene for a long time, will the Scottish Government tell us what the catalyst has been that makes it want to change things now?

**Angela Constance:** That is a tad disingenuous from Ms Smith. She will be well aware of the actions that we have taken over the piece and the long term. I mentioned the raising attainment for all programme, and there is also the school improvement programme for Scotland. Like the raising attainment for all programme, that is about schools working together and sharing knowledge, practice and research. We know from research that collaboration across the school network is important. There are other measures such as the access to education fund, and I would contend that the teacher numbers position represents positive action in relation to investing in our children's education.

The point that I made to Mr McArthur is relevant. As well as having bespoke initiatives, we are building on a strong universal offer, whether that is the curriculum for excellence, the work that we are doing in the early years, getting it right for every child or our work on attainment advisers. We have been doing a wealth of work. We know that the equity gap in attainment is not an issue that belongs to Scotland alone, but nonetheless we are determined to pick up the pace.

Last week, the First Minister launched our new Scottish attainment challenge, which is backed by a fund of £100 million over four years, with £20 million committed for the coming year. To start with, we will target the local authorities with the highest concentration of pupils who live in deprived areas. I am pleased to inform the Parliament that, initially, the fund will be concentrated on the Glasgow, Dundee, Inverclyde,

West Dunbartonshire, North Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire and North Lanarkshire council areas. Many of those authorities are already doing well, but we are confident that, with further support, they can do more.

However, I fully recognise that there is need across Scotland. During the coming year, we will continue to work with other local authority areas, such as East Ayrshire and Fife, which are geographically diverse and socially mixed but where there are pockets of severe deprivation, to dig deeper into addressing the local need.

The attainment fund will be directed specifically to improving literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing in primary schools. If we can close the attainment gap when children are young, the benefits will continue into secondary schools and beyond. There will be a bespoke improvement plan and access to resources and expertise in each area. We will measure improvement rigorously and ensure that lessons are learned nationally about what works and what does not.

I have asked Education Scotland, as part of its review of inspections, to consider with partners how we can measure outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. That will be part of a wider piece of work with key partners to establish a national improvement framework, which will provide a resource for teachers and allow us to gauge progress across the country.

We know from the evidence that some of our looked-after children face particular disadvantages. We know that children and young people who are looked after at home have the poorest educational outcomes of all, but we also know that mentoring, especially long-term mentoring, can make a significant difference to that group of young people. That is why, in addition to the £10 million investment to support the implementation of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, I am pleased to confirm today the Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring that all looked-after children and young people are offered the support of a mentoring relationship with a trusted adult who will remain alongside them for as long as the young person chooses.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** I am sure that the cabinet secretary is aware of the concerns of kinship carers about not just financial matters but access to educational psychologists and support, which a child in a care home would get. What progress has she made in ensuring that such services are made available to children in kinship care?

**Angela Constance:** It is a fair point that, to increase attainment, particularly among children who have more disadvantages, we must look

beyond the classroom and into the home environment. An important piece of work is being taken forward—previously by Aileen Campbell and now by Fiona McLeod—to find a resolution to issues that kinship carers in particular face. I will be happy to update Ms Lamont on that separately.

An important point about mentoring and looked-after young people is that we will be actively taking forward a key recommendation of the LACSIG—the looked-after children strategic implementation group—mentoring hub to establish a national mentoring scheme for children between eight and 14 who are looked after at home. Funding was allocated to the education portfolio as part of the autumn budget statement and I can announce today funding of £500,000 from that for the first year of the scheme. The Minister for Children and Young People will announce further details of the scheme in due course.

In our whole approach, we will continue to be led by lessons from the very best of practice elsewhere. We must continue to look at what is happening internationally and in other parts of the UK. Our attainment challenge will learn from the London challenge, but we will not import the model wholesale and will instead adapt the learning to the Scottish context. We are also learning from Ontario's special secretariat for literacy and numeracy, which has had a big impact.

Scottish education has always looked to the world; so, too, have others looked to what Scotland is doing. In the past 12 months, Scotland has received more than 20 overseas delegations from countries such as Australia, India, China, Norway, Finland and Holland. Next year, Scotland will host the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement, the president of which has praised Scotland for having

“continuously proven to be a show case for better education for all.”

That exchange of ideas is in the very fabric of our education system. It is how we do things. We take the best practice from elsewhere and adapt it to our circumstances and our context. That is our uniquely Scottish approach to education.

We know that prosperity and fairness must always go hand in hand. I believe that there is nowhere else in the UK or Europe that is prioritising educational attainment as we are. Our recent steps are providing a fresh impetus on closing the attainment gap. In our education system, we have a strong record of progress. We have all the elements in place: a unique curriculum that is fit for the future and schools that are eager for success and a system that supports them. I am confident that our schools and our workforce can deliver on the attainment programme.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that school education in Scotland has improved in recent years, with record exam results and a record number of school leavers in work, education or training; recognises that the curriculum for excellence is delivering improved outcomes, using evidence-based approaches to raise attainment including a focus on strong leadership, high quality learning and teaching, literacy, numeracy and parental engagement; further recognises that more can be done to address the attainment gap; commends the establishment of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, backed by the £100 million Attainment Scotland Fund, to build on the work already underway to drive forward improvements in educational outcomes in Scotland's most deprived communities and help tackle inequality; welcomes that providing Attainment Advisors for every local authority and the introduction of the Read, Write, Count literacy and numeracy campaign will also help educational outcomes, and believes that education is both key to the future of Scotland's children and an investment in the future of Scotland's economic health.

14:38

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** We on this side of the chamber welcome the debate, and today that is much more than the usual opening platitude. It is eight years since the Scottish National Party Government came to power and long past time when it should have woken up to the need to act on the achievement gap.

In fairness, the First Minister flagged that up as an issue that she cared about when she was elected leader by her party, but it has taken about three months for the Government to bring forward any action to Parliament. Still,

“joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth”,

as the previous First Minister used to like to misquote.

All of that matters so much exactly for the reason that the cabinet secretary outlined—that if there is any investment we can make in our future, collectively and as individuals, it is in education. If there is a path to the chance of a better life, it lies through education. If there is a silver bullet to slay the spectre of poverty, it is education.

George Washington Carver called education

“the key to unlock the golden door to freedom.”

He should know, given his journey from slavery to scientist.

Indeed, the idea of educational equality is woven through the very history of this nation, from the “Book of Discipline” in 1561 to the School Establishment Act of 1616 and the Education Act of 1633, which were passed by our predecessor Parliament to create and implement the idea of a school in every parish.

We like to tell ourselves that we gave universal education to the world and that we have the best schools anywhere. However, sometimes we are

too complacent. The OECD report from 2007—I have a copy here—should have set alarm bells ringing then. It praised the strengths of Scottish schools, but said that

“Children from poorer communities ... are more likely than others to under-achieve, while the gap associated with poverty and deprivation in local government areas appears to be very wide.”

That is the not-so-secret shame of Scotland's schools: who someone is, and how much their parents earn, will define their educational attainment and their life chances more than anything else.

The cabinet secretary pointed out that school leavers from the most deprived 20 per cent of areas currently do only half as well as school leavers from the least deprived areas. In truth, the situation has not been improving. Our PISA—programme for international student assessment—results show a decline in our relative international standing, and no real change in the attainment gap. The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training remains stubbornly high at around 30,000, and the Scottish Government's survey showed that numeracy levels are falling at every level. This year, we will see the results on literacy.

The situation will not improve until we do something specific about it. We cannot close the attainment gap by raising attainment for all. The Government's attainment fund is very welcome indeed, but the trick now is to spend it in ways that make a real difference. It cannot be spread too thin, or it will not work. It must be significantly targeted, especially at primary and pre-primary intervention, because we know that the pernicious gap in achievement is already significant at the age of five. It must include a major focus on literacy and numeracy; it must support the families of children at the wrong end of the attainment gap, because school is not the only answer; and it must raise the quality of teaching and leadership in those schools where pupils face the greatest barriers. In addition, it must provide particular support for looked-after children.

The Government's announcement today contains much of those elements, which is to be welcomed. We are certainly willing to give the attainment fund a fair wind, but we simply believe that we need to do—and we can do—yet more. We have proposed that, when this Parliament gains power over income tax, we should choose explicitly to tax higher earners by reintroducing a 50p tax rate and to direct some of the revenue towards redoubling our efforts to end this stain of inequity on our society.

We propose to devote £25 million every year, and £125 million in the next session of Parliament, to attacking the attainment gap at its sharpest by

focusing on those schools—perhaps around 20—at the very front line. We will focus not only on high schools, but more importantly on their associated primaries. All that will come on top of the four-year attainment fund.

Some of those schools will not be covered in the local authority areas that the cabinet secretary has announced today. In this city, for example, there are two or three schools that need that kind of support because they are at the sharp end of the gap. I taught in schools like those, and I make it clear that they are not failing. In fact, many of them are overperforming, and delivering improvements to young people's life chances above and beyond anything that we might reasonably expect. As an ex-teacher, I know that they are the schools that we should look to first to see the best and most innovative and inspiring teaching and teachers. However, the barriers that are faced by young people in these schools are so great that they need more additional support to overcome them. Their families need more support, too, as do those who teach them.

That is why we propose to double the number of classroom assistants in the primary schools concerned, thus freeing up teacher time, and to introduce specialist literacy and numeracy teachers in those schools for parents as well as for pupils. We also wish a new chartered teacher scheme to be introduced to reward those who devote their skills, experience and career to changing lives in the classrooms at the sharpest end of the attainment gap.

The truth is that we will not resolve that in the four years of any attainment fund. We need an on-going, guaranteed and relentless effort. We will not succeed if we do not target pretty ruthlessly, at least for part of our efforts. Our proposals do not contradict the Scottish Government's ideas; they complement them, doubling the resources for them from a different and new source of funding, to which we will have access soon.

There are some basics that the Scottish Government needs to get right. The problem is not helped by the loss of more than 4,000 teachers from our schools since 2007. It is not helped by schools closing and subjects disappearing because of teacher shortages. It is not helped by the disappearance of 140,000 students from our colleges or by the ending of successful schemes such as the schools of ambition programme for no good reason at all.

The cabinet secretary needs to get those things sorted. She could start by telling the Scottish Qualifications Authority to drop its ridiculous charging scheme for exam reviews, which discriminates in favour of private school pupils against state school pupils and in favour of those with engaged parents against those who do not

have them. That is just one more barrier in the attainment gap, and the cabinet secretary could fix it today.

**Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Iain Gray:** I am really short of time.

The big thing that the cabinet secretary could do today is to seize a golden opportunity: to match our support for the Scottish Government's attainment fund with her support for our proposals to go further. Let us double the resources to which we commit ourselves, not for four years but for as long as it takes. Let us make this our national purpose in education: that someone's success and life chances will depend on their ability and hard work, not on where they were born or what their parents earn.

Let us put every hand on Carver's golden key to freedom. That was the unique, far-sighted educational vision that Scotland gave to the world: a school in every parish, with every child having the power and freedom to read the Bible and any other book they wanted for themselves. This was a country that could produce a ploughman who yet read Greek and Latin and penned poetry that entrances the world to this day.

To that purpose and to that end, I move amendment S4M-12316.2, to insert at end:

“, and further welcomes cross-party recognition of the blight of educational inequality on the life chances of pupils across Scotland and proposals by Scottish Labour to tackle this with a further £25 million per year programme of investment, totalling £125 million over a five-year parliamentary session, including doubling the number of teaching assistants in the associated primary schools of the 20 high schools facing the greatest challenges of deprivation, in addition to the Scottish Government's plans and paid for through a 50p top rate of tax”.

14:48

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** We, too, are pleased to be having another debate on attainment, following the Scottish Conservative debate on the issue in October.

It will surprise no one that we do not support the 50p tax rate proposed by Labour in its amendment.

The amendment in my name affirms our willingness to work together with all parties on this issue, with better support for pupils with additional support needs, and notes the need for more science teachers and the need to address the uptake of science, technology, engineering and maths—the STEM subjects—and much more.

Like Iain Gray, I was a teacher. I was an economics lecturer in further and higher education for 20 years before coming here, and I know well

how many pupils failed badly at school but absolutely flourished when they were given a second chance in further and higher education. I want them to get that best chance at school, rather than when they are 30, 40 or 50.

We welcome the additional funding and the additional measures to focus on attainment, but that must be accompanied by robust data, a rigorous strategy and targeted spending in order to achieve the desired outcomes and a more focused approach. I think that Liam McArthur alluded to that.

It is interesting that the Scottish Government had to go to London to get advice on attainment when in fact similar advice and recommendations are available much closer to home. The Audit Scotland report “School education” from June last year and Professor Sue Ellis from the centre for education and social policy at the University of Strathclyde, along with the London challenge, all focus on the need for data and data literacy, a culture of accountability, improved leadership, better professional development and more.

The unsightly rammy between the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities will benefit no child in Scotland. Moray Council has done its level best to recruit supply and permanent teachers. It has a higher rate for supply teachers and it is working with private housing providers to provide excellent accommodation for new teachers coming to the area. However, there are 11 experienced teachers who are spouses of Royal Air Force personnel at Lossiemouth and who cannot get through the bureaucracy of the General Teaching Council for Scotland. They are primary and secondary teachers who are perfectly capable of teaching in England but, according to the GTCS, they are not fit to teach in Scotland.

More could be done to help Moray Council. It will not get any of the additional funding from the Scottish Government, despite doing its best. John Scott, the Deputy Presiding Officer, has raised some excellent points about South Ayrshire Council, which is another council that has maintained its teacher ratio below 13.2 since 2001. Although South Ayrshire has kept to the letter and the spirit of the national agreement, it is unlikely to get any of the additional funding from the Government. As John Scott said, the Government does not recognise falling school rolls. South Ayrshire could have a surplus of 10 to 15 teachers with no job, at a cost to council tax payers of £0.5 million. The council is actually being penalised for doing everything right over the years.

**Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mary Scanlon:** Not just now.

Let us look at where we are now. I am concerned about whether the £100 million of funding will do what we want it to do. The Audit Scotland report states:

“there has been no independent evaluation of how much councils spend on education and what this delivers in terms of improved attainment and wider achievement for pupils.”

Therefore, although we welcome the money, how can we be sure that the £100 million plus will make any difference?

According to Sue Ellis of the University of Strathclyde, the GTCS should

“review whether sufficient weight has been given to literacy teaching”

in teacher training. I find it incredible—unbelievable, even—that, as Sue Ellis points out,

“Scotland currently offers no national literacy tests for primary and early secondary pupils”

and that

“Two-thirds of local authorities buy commercial tests—an expensive option offering little support in understanding, interrogating and using the results.”

That is incredible. Sue Ellis also says that we should

“encourage schools to create positive cultures for data-use, and provide free, nationally available tests, standardised where appropriate”

for literacy development.

My worry is that the £100 million will be assumed to be a measure of success. We have thrown £100 million at it, but unless we actually measure what works, that will not have the outcome that we assume.

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

**Mary Scanlon:** The Audit Scotland report points out that the councils with the highest spending on teachers and teacher numbers in urban areas are Labour run, yet we have had this unsightly rammy and argument that Labour is reducing teachers. In fact, the lowest spending urban and rural council in Scotland is an SNP-controlled council. Can we perhaps put politics aside and concentrate on the children?

My final point is that we all need to ensure that teaching—[*Interruption.*] I know that the SNP members do not like to hear about it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that you will have to stop.

**Mary Scanlon:** Teaching should be a career of choice. Teachers should be valued for their contribution and not shouted down by the SNP, as we have heard today.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The Presiding Officer had to shout too, sadly.

**Mary Scanlon:** I move amendment S4M-12316.1, to leave out from “notes” to end and insert:

“believes that the greatest challenge facing Scottish education is the significant pupil attainment gap between different schools and different communities; is encouraged by some improvements in Scottish education in recent years, such as the increased number of school leavers in positive destinations, but is concerned that these improvements have been slow and have not resulted in equal improvements across all communities; welcomes the £100 million Attainment Scotland Fund, but believes that education policies should have a renewed focus on improving basic literacy and numeracy skills, as was highlighted by Audit Scotland in 2014, on increasing the number of trained science teachers in schools to help address the weak uptake of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects and on greater support for pupils with additional support needs, including better tracking of pupil attainment to help support learning; urges the Scottish Government to invest in the expertise of Scotland’s colleges, universities and employers to help pupils succeed, and hopes that it will engage constructively with all parties in the Parliament to help deliver for all of Scotland’s pupils.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much. We move to the open debate.

14:55

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I, too, welcome the debate. Attainment is one of the most important issues that we must address. For too long, people from certain backgrounds have not had the same level of educational attainment as others. Over the years, there have been many reasons for that, but I welcome the First Minister’s remark that

“a child born today in one of our most deprived communities will, by the time he or she leaves school, have the same chance of going to university as a child born in one of our most affluent communities.”

Surely that is something on which we can all agree. It is an investment in the future of Scotland’s children and one that can provide a better future for many of our young people.

The Scottish Government has achieved much during its time in government, but we must recognise that attainment is an important area in which we must all seek to improve performance. As the cabinet secretary mentioned in her speech and the First Minister said when she announced the Scottish attainment challenge, school leavers from the most deprived 20 per cent of areas currently do only half as well as school leavers from wealthier areas.

I agree with Nicola Sturgeon that

“too many children still have their life chances influenced more by where they live, than by how talented they are, or how hard they work.”

That can be seen in my constituency, where there is an east-west divide. One end of Paisley is the wealthier area, while the other is one of the most deprived areas in Scotland and deals with the many challenges that that entails. We must continue to strive to ensure that our children do not become societal victims because of the communities of which they are a part.

During its consideration of the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill, the Education and Culture Committee found that the University of the West of Scotland is one of the few universities in Scotland to have managed to ensure that 20 per cent of its students come from the lowest-waged backgrounds. That is excellent but also gives the university many on-going challenges. The young people might still need to deal with difficulties that other students do not have. They might not have difficulties in year 1 but, in year 2 or 3, a situation might arise that leads to a student dropping out.

UWS is working with other educational institutions on attainment in the west of Scotland on the focus on college and university study—west of Scotland, or FOCUS west. FOCUS west works in 37 secondary schools that are located in 11 local authority areas, all of which have a progression rate to higher education of 22 per cent or less. The west of Scotland is home to 41 per cent of Scotland's population and has nearly 70 per cent of Scotland's most deprived areas. Since the inception of FOCUS west in 2008, the programme has worked with nearly 22,000 pupils and contributed to an average increase in progression to higher education across its core schools.

There is much good work going on throughout our nation but we must aspire to do much more. That is why I welcome the Scottish Government's new Scottish attainment challenge, which will be backed by an attainment Scotland fund of more than £100 million over four years to help pupils from our most disadvantaged communities. The Scottish attainment challenge will draw on the experience of the London challenge, which helped to transform school performance in London, and other international experiences.

Incidentally, I recently attended the University and College Union's national conference in London. It was heartening to hear so many England-based educationists using Scotland as a beacon of hope and a way forward for education in the rest of the UK because of key Scottish Government policies such as free education, curriculum for excellence, getting it right for every child, the early years framework and opportunities for all. They used all of those as examples of best practice and the way forward.

However, we are all aware of the costs of Westminster education policies for the rest of the

UK. Research from SPICe recently found that, since fees rose to £9,000 three years ago, they have cost students in the rest of the UK £14 billion and that Scottish students studying at Scottish universities saved £1 billion over the same number of years. Moreover, Westminster's continuing austerity plans are causing despair throughout Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Although the Scottish Government is making progress in reducing the attainment gap, it can go only so far in mitigating the damage that Westminster policies cause. An additional 100,000 Scottish children will be living in poverty by 2020 because of UK welfare reforms—and that is before the next round of cuts that are due in 2017-18. It is unacceptable that, due to the decisions of the UK Government, children and families in Scotland are suffering.

Even with the on-going problems that have been created by Westminster, the Scottish Government is challenging itself to achieve better attainment levels. A fund will be targeted initially at schools with the biggest concentration of households in deprived areas and will provide additional teachers, materials for classrooms and resources to develop new out-of-school activities. It will focus on improving literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing in primary schools, with the clear objective of giving all primary school-age pupils—regardless of background—the best start in life.

Not all parts of Scotland will need the same ideas to address those issues. That is why the bespoke improvement plan is important, as it is appropriate to local circumstances and will be agreed for each school or cluster of schools. It will include an agreement to gather, in a proportionate way, the data that will be required to measure the impact of the supported interventions, which will ensure that we are reaching the right people at the right time. This year's initial funding of £20 million was announced in the Deputy First Minister's budget.

We already know that there are many great things happening in our schools but, through the provision of greater access to funding, expertise and resources, schools will have more opportunity to offer the creative and innovative teaching that helps our young people to succeed.

It was interesting to read Save the Children's view of the fund. It said:

"We welcome the £100m commitment to a Scottish Attainment Fund over four years and the first £20m tranche in the 2015/16 Budget to support the Scottish Government and its partners. The focus on the poorest children within these new commitments is particularly important."

For me, that is the most important part of this issue. Surely it is something that we can all agree on.



15:01

**Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to take part in today's debate about educational attainment as well as the recognition across the political divide that we must work to end the educational inequality that continues to undermine the life chances of thousands of children and young people in Scotland. Addressing the attainment gap in our schools is a top priority for the Scottish Labour Party, and I know that it is certainly a priority for my constituents in Dunfermline. It might have taken eight years, but I am pleased that these plans are now on the table and that the issue is right at the top of the political agenda where it belongs, because closing the gap must be the number 1 education priority, not just for the next 15 months until the 2016 elections but for the next Scottish Government, too.

It should anger us all that, in 21st century Scotland, family income continues to have more influence over children's learning and outcomes than children's talents or skills. Thousands of children right across Scotland are caught up in a cycle of disadvantage from which there is little prospect of escape and which carries on throughout life.

Education should be about opening up opportunities and ensuring that every child reaches their potential. However, we all know that no child can ever achieve their full potential when they turn up at school hungry, when they are living in damp, overcrowded housing or when they have a chaotic family life.

According to Save the Children, children living in poverty are twice as likely as other children to start school already behind in their learning and development. One in five children living in poverty are leaving primary school not reading well and one in two are underperforming in their writing ability by the early secondary years. Save the Children has found that the attainment gap between the richest and poorest young people when they leave school is equivalent to around three A grades at higher level, which is pretty staggering. Inequalities in education have a direct influence on future incomes too, with more than one in five school leavers from deprived areas going straight into unemployment, which is double the national average. We need decisive and radical action if we are going to break the cycle.

The new attainment Scotland fund and the attainment challenge are welcome steps forward, as is the focus on the poorest children, although it is disappointing that no money has been announced for Fife.

It is absolutely vital that we focus on supporting children based on what we know works, so I

welcome the recognition that we need to learn from successes elsewhere, such as the London challenge programme that was delivered by Labour when we were in government. However, we want to go further, which is why our amendment today highlights Scottish Labour's proposal to use the additional revenues from a new 50p tax rate for the better-off to invest a further £25 million every year in tackling the attainment gap in schools. That will enable us to target even more support where it is needed most and to invest in more teaching assistants and in literacy projects to support pupils and parents, including special literacy support programmes for looked-after children.

The attainment debate must never be viewed in isolation, so I am pleased to see the recognition across the chamber that plans to close the gap must go hand in hand with plans to tackle poverty and to support families. I would like more initiatives such as family centres to be developed in our most deprived areas. We cannot ignore the fact that, while the education system works well for many children, for children from the poorest backgrounds, it simply does not work well enough. Poverty continues to be a barrier to children and young people accessing the widest opportunities in learning and in life.

Not having enough money makes it harder for mums and dads to provide the experiences that children need to flourish in and out of school. Constantly struggling can make parenting difficult and stressful. The reality is that we can only change that if we have a radical solution that addresses the persistent poverty and inequality that too many of our children in Scotland and across the UK are brought up with. Breaking the link between poverty and attainment is key, and it must be the driver behind our policies.

In Fife, which has the third-highest number of children living in poverty in Scotland, the Labour-led council has embraced a radical approach to closing the gap that is based on early and targeted intervention, to support children and families most in need and to break the cycle of disadvantage. Intervening early to encourage secure attachment between children and their parents through embracing a family nurture approach meets the needs of children and families from pre-birth to pre-school and onwards into the classroom and beyond.

The approach provides extensive parenting support programmes and works especially with young mums and dads to build their skills and to develop their confidence and self-esteem. It ensures that families get support and know where to turn to access intervention in a non-stigmatised way and that they get as little or as much support as they need, such as help with drug and alcohol

issues. The approach is based on developing nurture schools that are as inclusive as possible for all children. In those schools, teachers, early years workers, educational psychologists, social workers, health workers and other agencies all work together to ensure that every child is supported at all stages of their education, focusing on literacy and numeracy in the school as well as on what happens beyond the school gate, in the home learning environment and in all aspects of wellbeing.

Fife has also embraced the workshop for literacy approach and I have visited a number of schools in my constituency to see it work in practice. The approach uses high-quality story books that are not only read to children but used as a theme for learning, with reading, writing, listening, drawing, drama and talking activities based around each story. They really capture the imagination of every single child and bring learning to life. It is amazing to see how many learning opportunities can evolve from one book and the approach is delivering results in classrooms.

One of the most important ways in which we can address educational inequality is by ensuring that every single child is reading well, and I welcome Angela Constance's statement that that will be a top priority. I also commend the excellent read on, get on initiative, which is aimed at ensuring that every child in Scotland is reading well by age 11. I hope that we can all get behind that campaign.

All children have the right to the best education. It is simply unacceptable that some children are born into a life of disadvantage from which it is difficult to escape. It is time to break the cycle, and that will only happen if resources are prioritised and targeted and if we reach out to the children who are being left behind and ensure that they catch up before they leave primary school.

Scotland will only be the best place to grow up when every child has the support that they need to be the best that they can be and when no child is left behind. I am pleased that members across the chamber are united in our aspiration to close the gap and I hope that we can work together to make that happen.

15:08

**Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP):** Ensuring that all Scotland's children reach their educational potential is an ambition that I am sure is shared by all members. It is an issue of fundamental importance to pupils and parents across the country.

As convener of the Education and Culture Committee, I want to inform members about some of the work that the committee is undertaking on educational attainment. We have committed a

significant part of this year's work programme to examining the progress that is being made in reducing the attainment gap in Scotland.

The committee's inquiry on attainment will begin by holding a series of evidence sessions to explore specific issues around attainment in more depth. First, we will examine the Wood report and the implications for schools, teachers and pupils of the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce. That will be followed by an evidence session examining how parents and guardians can work with schools to raise all pupils' attainment, especially those whose attainment is lowest. Finally, the committee will gather evidence on the role of the third and private sectors in removing barriers to educational attainment.

The committee's focus on attainment builds on our previous work examining the attainment of Scotland's looked-after children. Improving the life chances of Scotland's most vulnerable children must continue to be a key focus of Parliament. In April, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 will come into effect and I hope that it will help to deliver the best possible start in life for children in Scotland.

**Johann Lamont:** Does the member agree that under the act that he mentioned, the financial review for kinship carers has not yet been completed? That group is in particular need of support and concern about its prevalence in relation to low attainment is shared across the chamber. Does the member agree that we need to do something about that financial review?

**Stewart Maxwell:** I agree with Ms Lamont and of course we share the ideal of ensuring that kinship carers get the best outcome possible. It was the SNP, when it came into government in 2007, that first turned the proper attention of Parliament to that issue. The cabinet secretary mentioned the on-going work on that very issue by the Minister for Children and Young People. When Fiona McLeod publishes the results of that work, I am sure that the member will be very interested in it.

Members have engaged constructively with the committee's work in this area. I am delighted by that and hope that it will continue to be the case as we gather evidence to inform our examination of educational attainment. I very much welcome the announcement on mentoring for looked-after children at home, particularly given the work of the committee and its report on that issue.

It is worth highlighting that there is plenty to applaud in Scotland's education system. National exam results are at an all-time high. We continue to benefit from a world-class higher education sector. School leaver destinations are also the

best on record, with 90 per cent of school leavers going into work, training or education.

Of course we must never stop striving for better. The difference in educational attainment for children from deprived backgrounds compared with that of children from better-off families is not acceptable and we must do all that we can to address it. Therefore, I am greatly encouraged by the First Minister's determination to build on the progress that we have made so far and to do more to raise attainment for Scotland's most disadvantaged children.

I very much welcome the new £100 million attainment Scotland fund, which over the next few years will go a long way towards giving children from Scotland's most disadvantaged communities the support that they need to fulfil their potential.

Last year's report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlighted some of the challenges that Scotland faces in closing the attainment gap. This is not new—it has been going on for decades. The report suggested that just 28 per cent of children from poorer backgrounds perform well in numeracy, compared with 56 per cent of those from better-off backgrounds. Children from deprived households are also more likely to leave school earlier and with poorer qualifications.

Research also suggests that parental involvement programmes can have a significant impact on attainment, with the "Growing Up in Scotland: Parenting and children's health" study from 2011 concluding that improving parent-child learning opportunities in the home may be beneficial. The Education and Culture Committee is currently running an online survey to gather the views of parents about how schools work with them to support their children's learning. It is aimed at people who currently have children in school and I would urge members to encourage their constituents to submit their views to the survey before it closes on 7 March.

Another significant finding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation paper is the importance of closing the attainment gap in literacy. Reading is particularly beneficial for enhancing vocabulary and supporting achievement in other areas. The 2009 programme for international student assessment survey shows that increasing reading engagement has the potential to reduce approximately 30 per cent of the attainment gap associated with poverty.

Therefore, I again very much welcome the First Minister's announcement that a new literacy and numeracy campaign will be launched for children in primary 1 to primary 3. The read, write, count initiative will ensure that every child will have access to a library of books and will deliver locally

run sessions to support parents to better link education at school and in the home.

Studies illustrate that the link between poverty and poor literacy attainment can be challenged and changed. Dr Sue Ellis of the University of Strathclyde, whom others have already mentioned, who is one of the authors of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on attainment, has said that an important issue is how well we equip our teachers with the knowledge of how to teach literacy.

In 2013, I wrote to universities across Scotland to ask about the number of contact hours allocated to literacy teaching in Scottish primary initial teacher education courses. I have to say that I was somewhat disappointed, because the response revealed significant variation, with some courses allocating just 20 hours in a four-year degree and others allocating four times as much.

I would be very grateful if the minister would comment on what can be done to ensure that teacher training courses adequately equip teachers with the necessary knowledge to teach literacy to as high a standard as possible.

I will conclude by looking briefly at how poverty impacts educational attainment. Evidence from the OECD suggests that in Scotland the socioeconomic background of a child's parents has a greater influence on educational outcomes than the school attended. Social and economic inequalities mean that some parents struggle to provide a supportive learning environment for their children at home. In Scotland, one in five children grow up in poverty and the reality is that decisions at Westminster on welfare and social policy make addressing the attainment gap even more challenging.

I share the First Minister's view that a good education is the greatest gift that we can give Scotland's young people. Therefore, there is no doubt that a quality education offers the best route for young people to escape the poverty trap.

15:14

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I, too, welcome the debate, which provides an opportunity not only to reflect on the progress that has been made under successive Administrations in the lifetime of the Scottish Parliament, but, more important, to recognise the scale of the task that we all accept still lies ahead of us.

The investment of £20 million over the coming year to support efforts to improve educational outcomes for children in Scotland's most deprived communities is most certainly welcome. The promise of funding thereafter is also one that I know is welcomed by those active in the field. An

attainment fund of £100 million is, of course, a suspiciously round figure. It bears all the tell-tale hallmarks of an initiative aimed at catching the eye ahead of an election, although that in and of itself is no reason to diminish the welcome that the initiative receives. Where we need to be careful, however, is in ensuring that we do not lose sight of what we should be seeking to achieve and some of the difficult and complex choices that are inherent in that.

In that regard, it may be best to avoid a Dutch auction about whose attainment fund is greater. If we all accept that it is unlikely that we will ever have enough money to do everything that we would wish to do, then it becomes a question of how best to target the resources that we have to make the greatest impact where there is greatest need. The remainder of my remarks will focus on that aspect of the debate.

I echo some of what others have said about the problem that we face. The disparity between the outcomes—both educational and more widely—of those from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more affluent peers is marked. That inequality scars lives by preventing the realisation of the potential of each and every individual. It is also a drag on our economy and invariably a cost to society.

Save the Children makes it clear that the foundations of the attainment gap are established in the earliest years, often before a child is even born. The longer that goes unchecked, the more deeply entrenched the disparities become and the more difficult and costly it is to turn the situation around. That is why the Scottish Liberal Democrats have placed such a high priority on targeting resources on the early years and those most in need. It is an approach reflected in our consistent argument in favour of extending free early learning and childcare to two-year-olds from the poorest backgrounds.

While ministers were initially content to focus on universal provision for three and four-year-olds, ultimately—thankfully—they accepted the case made by my party and a range of children's charities that additional, targeted support was needed before the age of three. They were right to do so. All the evidence shows that educational investment before the age of three delivers the greatest return. For every pound spent before a child is three, £11 is saved later in life. As well as helping to close the attainment gap, there is an opportunity to invest in our economy and the social wellbeing of our country.

I applaud ministers' decision last year to accept the case that we made for expanding the provision, but the fact remains that whereas 40 per cent of two-year-olds from the most disadvantaged backgrounds south of the border now receive that

support, the equivalent figure in Scotland is still short of 30 per cent. I therefore urge the cabinet secretary and her colleagues to go further and match the levels of spending delivered by the coalition Government in the rest of the UK. That would give a further 8,000 two-year-olds in Scotland the opportunity that they need to get on in life.

I turn to the proposed attainment fund and stress again that I welcome any additional resources. I have no doubt that the £20 million can deliver genuine improvements, but if the intention is to focus on areas of poverty rather than individuals in poverty, I fear that there is a real risk that many of those in most desperate need stand little chance of receiving resources.

Last year, the Scottish ministers talked of using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2012 as the basis for targeting efforts to widen access to higher education. In the end, they had to accept that that ignored the interests of those from poorer households who happened to live in better-off areas. It appears that lessons have not been learned. The situation could be made worse by the fact that those who find themselves excluded from the fund through an accident of geography are already likely to face higher costs from living in or adjacent to more affluent areas: a possible double whammy. A more effective way of targeting the resources and reducing the postcode lottery would be to adopt the approach underlying the pupil premium, which has been introduced south of the border, in which funding attaches to the pupil, rather than the school or a neighbourhood. Save the Children points out that

"targeted initiatives that support pupils living in poverty to catch up quickly if they start school already behind"

can be hugely effective, using a range of measures including one-to-one teaching and parental involvement.

**Angela Constance:** Will Liam McArthur take an intervention?

**Liam McArthur:** I am very sorry, but I am running out of time.

Acknowledging that poverty is not confined solely to poor neighbourhoods is essential if we are to tackle inequality and close the attainment gap fairly and equitably.

We should also acknowledge, as, to be fair, the cabinet secretary did, that while there is a link between poverty and attainment, nothing about it is inevitable. Save the Children recently provided a briefing to the Parliament that said:

"Some schools and local authorities are achieving great things for the poorest children in their areas, ensuring that their ability to do well in the classroom is not hindered by growing up in a low-income household."

There are many other points that I could have raised had I the time, but I will briefly conclude by highlighting one initiative that dovetails well with the read, write, count campaign referred to in the Government's motion.

As Cara Hilton said, Save the Children's read on, get on initiative aims to ensure that all those entering school this year are confident readers by the time that they leave primary. My involvement in the campaign has seen me take part in reading sessions in the Hope community and Shapinsay primary schools in my Orkney constituency, with others to follow. "Mr Gum and the Dancing Bear" and "Green Eggs and Ham" make a pleasant change from trawling through my papers for the Education and Culture Committee; I am sure that the committee's convener will empathise.

We can be proud of much of what our schools achieve, but Stewart Maxwell and Iain Gray were right in pointing out that the evidence shows that our record on closing the attainment gap remains poor. Future success will depend on our willingness both to learn from what has worked, wherever that may be, and to ruthlessly focus on targeting resources where they are most needed and as early as possible.

I welcome the debate and the consensus that obviously exists to tackle this stubborn and complex problem.

15:21

**Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** Attainment, accomplishment, feat, fulfilment, realisation, ability, capability, competence, proficiency, skill and talent: I aver that there is not one of us who would disavow that those tenets have all been features of our pupil development and the basis of our nation's collective aspirations for pupils. The aspirations are historical; they have not existed over just the past few years.

We diminish ourselves and our educationists, teachers and pupils by focusing the debate on issues such as targets. Targets are there for a moment in time, yet we focus on whether those targets have been met instead of establishing whether there has been a basis for continuous improvement—a betterment of educational outcomes and attainment. We should use that as the basis of mature discussion about the way forward, rather than meaningless propositions about numbers that are set on the basis that they are right at that moment in time.

Debate should be about continuous improvement. We have achieved that, but I accept that we face many challenges. Continuous improvement is enshrined in the raising attainment for all programme, which was launched last year. The programme talked about not targets but

improved educational outcomes for learners over an agreed period. It embraced all the tenets that I mentioned at the start of my speech. Despite the overall cuts that we face and the challenges of economy and demography, we are making improvement through performance. More young people are gaining work, are in further education or are seeking training opportunities. There are challenges; some are outwith our control. Let us not blind ourselves with targets that may change over a limited period.

Mrs Scanlon mentioned South Ayrshire Council. I am a bit closer to the issue than she perhaps is. Of course, the proof of the pudding regarding her claim on teacher numbers will be whether the council votes to accept the moneys offered by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy. I suspect that it will vote to accept that offer.

Given the reduction in the growth of South Ayrshire's child population, we may have a situation in which there are sufficient teachers. That provides us with the opportunity to further improve outcomes and to extend leadership where it should be—in the classroom.

As I have said, in recent years, there has been a general across-the-board improvement.

**Mary Scanlon:** Will the member give way?

**Chic Brodie:** No, I am sorry—I am carrying on.

In recent years, curriculum for excellence has been embraced and outcomes have improved. Exam results are an example of that improvement.

I welcome the Government's acceptance that more must be done to address the attainment gap. The establishment of the Scottish attainment challenge and the £100 million that we have talked about are there to tackle the challenge. The biggest challenge, however, is to tackle the link between poverty and underachievement. It is quite right that we should seek information to extend our knowledge in that area and I shall come back to that in a minute with an example from further afield.

I was raised in a prefab in Dundee. Some may say that I have never achieved anything, but what little I have achieved is due largely to the dedication of my parents and teachers. We lived in what was considered poverty at the time, although it was not as bad as what some people face today. Although all of us continue to work to eradicate the penal inequalities in income in our society, let us evangelise for more parental support and involvement so that we can close that inequality and attainment gap. I suggest that we start by removing the charitable status of public schools as an intent.

Let us not imagine that our system is perfect and that money or funding is the only solution to deficiencies in the system. It is not. I have talked to people in schools in some parts of Asia about attainment. Increased attainment is blessed by many features in systems where, from day 1, there is little or no inequality and where children are encouraged to become inquirers, developing natural curiosity, inquiring and researching, and showing independence in learning. They are encouraged to think critically and creatively, to communicate confidently and to act with integrity and honesty. The main buttress against inequality is the fact that there is no large disparity in the parental incomes of those families.

I believe that we should embrace what happens in such situations, as we should anything that improves attainment. We should set personal attainment alongside the basic curriculum needs. In the interests of our deserving teachers and keen pupils, let us recognise together the factors that hinder the closing of the attainment gap, poverty being the key one. Let us work together to overcome those factors in the interests of the political and economic future of Scotland.

15:27

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** We all recognise the importance of the debate and it is essential to focus on the purpose of addressing the gap in attainment. First, it is simply an issue of equality and fairness. It offends me as a mother, as someone who taught for 20 years and as a citizen that somebody's life chances are inhibited by the time they are three years of age and that we do not do more to address that. We also understand education's role in achieving potential and overcoming barriers, whether those are physical, financial or emotional. People should have the opportunity to learn in order to address the barriers that they face.

It is also critical to the economy to have an educated population. Every child who does not attain is a wasted talent that could be used and harnessed to create a stronger economy. Through closing the attainment gap, we have the opportunity to strengthen the economy and harness that energy.

Of course we should care, but caring is not enough. It has been quoted in the chamber before that an American senator once said, "Don't tell me how much you care. Show me your budget." In this debate, I believe that members across the chamber need to test to destruction our presumptions and assumptions about why such a gap exists and what the solutions are. There is a recognition of the importance of universal provision and targeted provision, which too often are posed as opposites to each other by those on

the SNP benches, when in fact they are complementary.

I hear the argument about targeting according to geography and targeting individual pupils. I would simply say that the reality in many schools is that there are many children together who are poor and who are challenged. Even a child who is completely supported at home is working in a system in which resources are very much under pressure, but there is an important debate to be had about getting that balance right.

Of course, we recognise the extra funding and welcome it, but there is a deeper question about the choices that we make. All young people in Scotland deserve the best start and universal provision of the very best quality, but we need to understand and address the things that act as blocks in the road that deny young people the opportunities they deserve. We also have to confront whether our spending choices amplify the gap rather than diminish it. As a simple example, to fund our ambitions in higher education at the expense of further education is to amplify that gap rather than to close it.

I urge the cabinet secretary, in focusing on the educational attainment gap, not only to ask the right questions but to please have the courage to respond where the answers take her. Do we need to talk about increasing taxation, as we have said? Do we need to change our priorities or do we need to reflect on the consequences of cuts to local government that have closed the projects that have supported young people in poverty to access education?

We know that educational attainment is not just about schools; it is about childcare, early years provision, libraries and opportunities for young people to learn outside the school setting. It is also about health and wellbeing. Some excellent projects were run during the time of the social inclusion partnerships, which the cabinet secretary may want to look at. All those things are important, but we should not be overwhelmed to the extent that we end up doing nothing. We should take what steps we can.

**Liz Smith:** I do not wish to interrupt a very interesting speech, but when the member talks about universality, does she agree that that does not necessarily mean uniformity in provision?

**Johann Lamont:** Absolutely. I believe that it is really important that education follows the needs of the child and the community. For example, I am a great advocate of Gaelic education. There are examples of the needs being different in different communities.

We must find ways of delivering real change. It is not just about school, although we recognise that schools are critical. I recommend that the

Government look again at what Strathclyde did in terms of areas of priority treatment. Projects such as my own, in Castlemilk high school, worked on these very issues many years ago. We do not always have to reinvent the wheel, because some really good work is already happening. Nevertheless, we recognise how critical schools are in creating the opportunity to address young people's needs in nursery, primary and, especially, secondary education, which is where young people often fall off the radar altogether.

We have to understand the pressures on schools, not just on teachers but on the support that they are given: classroom assistants, administrative support, specialists in learning support, behavioural support and attendance officers. I describe the job that I did as the educational equivalent of giving a hug. That support allows teachers to focus on children's learning. Critically, it can also make a child want to come to school and can help them with whatever issues they are facing, whether bereavement, problems at home or problems in school. It helps them to settle and learn. My concern is that the things that go first when budgets are cut are the simple little projects that can make a difference. I ask the cabinet secretary to please look at what is happening to the support, to classroom assistants and to personal assistants. Are young people being denied the opportunity to flourish in mainstream education because those things are disappearing?

In conclusion, I make one last plea. The attainment gap can be closed at an early stage in someone's life, but it can also be addressed through second-chance education. I understand why we are focusing on 16 to 19-year-olds, but we also need literacy programmes for adults in further education and part-time opportunities to learn and reskill for those who are distant from education and work. That second chance allows an adult, as a parent, to ensure that their children are given a better start. It is a virtuous circle that we should be supporting with funding in the early years and, critically, at the further education stage to achieve what we all desire, which is all youngsters reaching their full potential.

15:34

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** The evidence that we have clearly shows that attainment can for many Scots provide a route out of poverty and deprivation at an early age. I am sure that the Parliament is in no doubt that education is a key factor in determining where a life can be led. When our young school leavers do not have the opportunity to progress to an initial positive educational destination, not only are they being denied the right to better

themselves, but the subsequent knock-on benefit to our communities will never be felt.

Most of us will have welcomed the First Minister's recent announcement of £100 million investment in the Scottish attainment challenge, which will be used to reduce inequality in educational attainment.

Scottish education has been improving in recent years. In my constituency, the number of school leavers who go on to positive destinations rose by more than 7 per cent in Midlothian and almost 8 per cent in East Lothian between 2007 and 2013, but we cannot rest on our laurels. Despite those increases, we have work to do to ensure that no one misses out on fulfilling their potential.

Statistics consistently show that attainment levels are directly linked to deprivation levels; a recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation spelled out some of the facts. By the age of five, there are gaps of 10 months in problem-solving development and 13 months in vocabulary between children from high-income households and those from low-income households. That indicates clearly just how early the attainment gap begins.

The report goes further. By the time they reach the age of 12 to 14, pupils from better-off areas are more than twice as likely to do well in numeracy than those from the most deprived areas. The report also notes that children from poorer areas tend to leave school earlier, and that low attainment is strongly linked to a poor post-school destination, which can have a major long-term effect on future education and job prospects.

School leavers from the most deprived backgrounds are only one third as likely to go into higher education, while by the age of 22 to 23 low attainers are three times more likely to be unemployed and twice as likely to be working part time, to be in low-status jobs or to be earning substantially less than high attainers. The difference is even more pronounced for women: the difference in earnings between low attainers and high attainers is £44.94 per week, whereas for men it is £23.45 per week.

One of the key points that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report makes is that the socioeconomic background of parents has more influence on children's attainment than their school does. The clear implication is that if we can improve the destinations of pupils through increased attainment levels, we can improve the backgrounds of future pupils and thus break the constant cycle of low attainment. The figures may—in my constituency, at least—be improving, but complacency will only enhance and reinforce that vicious cycle.

In welcoming the £100 million investment that the Government intends to use to minimise the attainment gap, I note that various reports have examined what can be done with such investment. The report, "School education", which Audit Scotland published last June, was clear in its methodology and conclusions. It examined how effective and efficient local councils were being with their resources, as well as how much they spent on education and what that money was spent on. It was noted that the majority of council funding goes on staff costs. The report was careful to point out that councils need to be aware of the risk of increased workloads for staff. We must be vigilant to ensure that teachers have the resources and support that they need, because without them we can never hope to reduce the attainment gap.

The report further noted that although levels of deprivation have a large influence on attainment, some schools achieve better results than the levels of deprivation in their areas suggest. That implies that deprivation levels cannot be the sole reason for the gap between the highest and lowest-performing schools. Therefore, it is crucial that we apply any measures that are implemented across the board, and that all schools can benefit from them, instead of—as Jim Murphy would like us to do—merely focusing on the 20 worst-performing schools. Why should the next 20 schools not benefit, or the 20 beyond that?

As part of the Scottish Government's raising attainment for all programme, which was launched last spring, a raft of measures have been introduced that will, we hope, influence where the investment will be spent. The introduction of insight, which is an online benchmarking tool, should provide local authorities with the ability to compare their performance with that of other councils and to share good practice, which was the subject of one of the key recommendations of the Audit Scotland report.

There are also plans to examine and learn lessons from other successful schemes. One of those schemes, the London challenge, undoubtedly contributed significantly to the improvements that have been made in London's education system. According to a report in *The Guardian*, in 1997 only 16 per cent of students gained five GCSEs at grades A to C. That was in an area of the country that it can be argued had the most money and investment. Just two years after its launch, the London challenge improved the performance of London schools to above the national average, and by 2010 the Office for Standards in Education declared that London had a higher proportion of good or outstanding schools than any other area in England.

We can easily learn the lessons from the London challenge and implement them in

Scotland. One of the most successful steps in the challenge was the appointment of a team of highly experienced advisers to support schools and local authorities. Those advisers acted as the first point of contact for improving monitoring and seeking financial or other forms of help. In the light of that success story, I hope that we all agree that the Government's plan to appoint attainment advisers in each local authority area is a sensible move that will pay substantial dividends.

There is no easy or quick fix for reducing the attainment gap, but we can see what challenges have been met elsewhere and learn from those lessons. The Scottish Government is having to fight hard against continuous and unprecedented austerity measures, which I need not remind the Parliament are failing dismally to improve the lives of ordinary people the length and breadth of the country.

Since the SNP came to office, we have seen improvements in the attainment gap, as is evidenced by the increase in the number of school leavers who are going on to positive destinations. There is undoubtedly more work to do, but if we listen to the advice from experts and those with experience, we will be able to invest the funding where it will have the most impact.

15:40

**Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I am pleased to be able to speak in the debate, and in particular to support Labour's amendment, which highlights the impact of inequality on educational attainment and the need for investment in front-line resources in schools that are dealing with the highest levels of deprivation.

Addressing the attainment gap in schools is a top priority for the Scottish Labour Party. We are developing a strategy that focuses on reducing the gap before children start school through increased and improved pre-school provision, on removing barriers to young people's opportunities and learning at school, and on supporting families directly through initiatives such as the provision of family centres in the most deprived areas. So, I welcome the Scottish Government's proposals to address the attainment gap—albeit that they have come only after the SNP has been in power for eight years. I will closely monitor the outcomes of the Government's approach.

It is clear that local councils play a vital role in addressing inequality in educational attainment not only by providing the building blocks of schools, staff and equipment, but by providing leadership in setting policy priorities and making the spending choices that turn them into reality. That reality can mean supporting families at home and in communities, investing in early years education



and childcare, providing safe and sustainable environments for play and sport, leadership in forging and supporting links between schools, colleges and local employers, and supporting life-long learning and help with literacy and numeracy.

I am proud to highlight the work of one authority in my region—Fife Council—where a great deal of work is going on in a number of areas to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. Fife has the third-highest number of children living in poverty in Scotland. However, that fact can be masked by other factors, depending on how the figures are presented, including because of the significantly higher wealth in north-east Fife. It is well documented that communities that exist right next to each other can nevertheless report differences in terms of vastly unequal life chances and economic realities. So, if we are serious about tackling unequal educational attainment levels, we must keep the most disadvantaged individuals and communities at the centre of our thinking. We must also look at particular support for schools where a very small number of pupils have achieved five good highers, among other factors.

In some areas we need to do as much as possible to bring about change so that young people have the best possible chance of a positive future. That is why I am proud that Fife Council is currently building a new high school for the Levenmouth area, which is one of the most disadvantaged areas in Fife and Scotland. The new school will bring together pupils from the existing Buckhaven and Kirkland high schools. The new school will have about the same number of pupils living in SIMD 1 and SIMD 2 areas as Clackmannanshire does as a whole.

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jayne Baxter:** No.

To be clear: that one school in Levenmouth will have more pupils who live in deprivation than the entire number of pupils who live in deprivation in the whole of Clackmannanshire. The catchment area of the new school includes significant areas of deprivation, with very significant numbers of disadvantaged pupils, but its sheer scale—a roll of about 1,800 pupils—means that they would not be identified through a focus on average statistics based on local authority areas. That is why it is so important to understand local circumstances. The rationale for the new development is to provide a single purpose-built facility for the community, with a clearly established sense of identity and ambition. It will provide single-site education and training facilities, and links to local employers, which will allow a clear focus on employability and life skills. That is precisely the sort of approach that is needed to reduce successfully inequality in life outcomes, including attainment and

achievement. That starts at the earliest opportunity.

A family nurture approach is increasingly being used across Fife to improve life chances for vulnerable families by providing effective support for child development and attachment. The approach is based on learning from and developing what works. Although it is in its early stages, it is already showing early indications of success. Engagement with and provision of support to vulnerable families have increased, and there is also evidence that outcomes are improving with, for example, improvements in readiness for primary school.

There is evidence that Fife is beginning to break the cycle of disadvantage in literacy skills. Although literacy attainment for secondary 4 pupils rose in all social contexts, the increase was significantly greater in Fife's most deprived areas—an achievement that is attracting national attention. However, it remains unacceptable that any child should in the 21st century leave a Scottish school without being able to read and write properly. That is why Scottish Labour will introduce a new literacy programme, which will also see support offered to parents so that they can learn with their children.

Fife Council is working to ensure that all school leavers progress to positive destinations and that they do so equipped with key skills, evidenced through attainment and wider achievement. An important part of that is the learning environment, which must engage all children and young people and equip them for positive life outcomes, regardless of their social context. Fife Council has delivered outstanding new education facilities including Dunfermline high school, Auchmuty high school, Carnegie primary school and Burntisland primary school, and new high schools are under way in Kirkcaldy, Anstruther and—as I mentioned—Levenmouth. Those new facilities will ensure that Fife is better able to equip young people with the employment skills that are needed in a modern economy. We now need Scottish Government support to ensure that the teaching in them is the best that it can be.

I hope that I have shown that awareness of the factors that contribute to inequality in educational attainment, combined with a willingness to target resources where they are most needed is the sure way to close the gap. Scottish Labour's vision is to create communities where fairness and fulfilment can be achieved for all children and young people.

15:46

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** I welcome the £100 million attainment fund. Although we are making progress in reducing the

attainment gap, we must recognise that we can only go so far in mitigating the damage that is being caused by UK Government policies. The priorities of Westminster seem to be to continue the policies of austerity, to continue to allow tax avoidance and to continue to spend £100 billion on a new generation of weapons of mass destruction. I believe that our priorities should be to eliminate austerity, to invest in our public services and to create a fairer and more equal society.

We know that, by 2020, an additional 100,000 Scottish children will be living in poverty because of UK welfare reforms, and that is before the next round of cuts, which is due in 2017-18, is taken into account. It is galling that due to the decisions of the UK Government, children and families here are suffering greatly. That is why the Scottish Government's submission to the Smith commission called for more powers and set out the need for Scotland to have full responsibility for welfare.

**Iain Gray:** Will the member give way?

**Kevin Stewart:** The Scottish Government's child poverty strategy for Scotland expresses its commitment to focus on the need to tackle the long-term drivers of poverty through early intervention and prevention, partnership and holistic services.

I will give way to Mr Gray.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** May I have Iain Gray's microphone on, please?

**Iain Gray:** I apologise, Presiding Officer. My card was not in the console.

The Smith commission agreed that income tax should be devolved to this Parliament, and it will be. Will Kevin Stewart support our suggestion that when it is, a 50p tax rate be invoked and some of the money be used to address the attainment gap?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will give you some extra time, Mr Stewart.

**Kevin Stewart:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I would like to see things including the minimum wage and all welfare devolved to the Scottish Parliament. I am glad that taxation is going to be devolved here. As I have said in the chamber previously, I cannot understand why the Labour Party voted to reduce the top rate of tax in the first place.

Only full powers over welfare, the minimum wage and social policy will allow us to tackle child poverty and allow Scotland to become a fairer country. Only full responsibility over tax and national insurance will allow us to create jobs and build the more prosperous Scotland that is

necessary to support our ambition of creating a fairer society.

As has been said, in her speech on the Scottish attainment challenge the First Minister reiterated the target that she set out when she came to office: that a child who is born today in one of our most deprived communities will, by the time he or she leaves school, have the same chance of going to university as a child who is born in one of our most affluent communities. That task would be much easier if we held all the levers of power that are required to tackle poverty and create fairness in our society.

There has been much talk of various projects that have helped to increase attainment. I commend the reading bus project, which has been about in Aberdeen for some time and has led to improvements in literacy. Lessons can be learned from the project, and I urge the cabinet secretary to visit Aberdeen at some point to see what the reading bus has been doing in deprived communities throughout Aberdeen.

I applaud, too, the efforts of bodies such as North East Scotland College and the Robert Gordon University for collaborating on 2+2 courses, which allow students, many from poorer backgrounds, the opportunity and flexibility to experience further education before moving on to higher education and gaining a degree.

I also commend the University of Aberdeen for schemes such as S6@uni and aim 4 uni, and for its involvement in the aspire north programme. Aberdeen university also has a renowned summer school for access programme, which I benefited from a number of years ago. The programme allowed me and others aged 18 to 80, many from poorer backgrounds, to take part in an intensive programme over a short period in order that we could gain access to university. The way the course was designed instilled camaraderie among students. There were inspirational lecturers and tutors, and the course often led to moments of epiphany about what we could aspire to and achieve. Unfortunately, I did not finish my degree because I was flat broke and instead returned to work. However, many did finish their degrees and have moved on to much greater things.

The Scottish Government should look at comments from Universities Scotland, which has asked for our support in encouraging the Scottish funding council to look beyond the limitations of the Scottish index of multiple deprivation as a focus and measure for widening access to university. I urge the Scottish Government, as well as the Scottish funding council, to look beyond the SIMD when allocating funding to boost attainment and widen access across the country.

In Aberdeen, we have poverty amid plenty. Often, poor people do not live in the data zones that the SIMD identifies as being the poorest. We cannot and should not forget that fact, and we must do all that we can to ensure that all less well-off folk have the help that they need to aspire to greater things.

15:53

**Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Throughout the education sector in Scotland, from schools to colleges and universities, we can see many examples of excellence and high achievement. As Jayne Baxter said, many new schools in Fife and Scotland have been built by the SNP Government. We should take pride in our higher education sector, which deserves to be called “great”. That said, the independent commission on school reform suggested that, although our schools are very good, there is always room for improvement.

Improvements can be delivered. This Government is one that listens and has set its sights on making these improvements so that our schools can, without any doubt, be called “great”. That is being done to improve the opportunities for every child in this country and ensure that we meet the vision of Scotland being the best place to grow up. We all need Scotland’s schools to be the very best, because they provide the foundation for further progress in life, be that through attending college and university or through employment, training and modern apprenticeship schemes.

Our schools system is the root of this country’s current and future success. As has been said, a child born today in one of our most deprived communities should, by the time he or she leaves school, have the same chance of going to university as a child born in one of our most affluent communities.

Our children deserve the best, and we should all join together to ensure that they get it. Scotland is a nation that values education and has done throughout its rich history. In essence, we are a learning nation, filled with innovation, creativity and—above all, as this debate has shown—passion.

I understand that the Scottish Government has a long-term plan for success through the introduction of curriculum for excellence, which tackles issues with bureaucracy and unnecessary paperwork in order to free teachers to concentrate on what they do best: teaching and delivering learning. We must resist any attempts to change that.

It is widely known that the success of any country’s education system depends on the quality of its teachers and education leadership. High-

quality people in teaching achieve high-quality outcomes for children in education. I am sure that the Government has taken the steps to enhance further the excellence that exists in our teaching profession.

I believe that Scotland must offer not just good education but great education to all. When we face difficulties in doing that, we must redouble our efforts to overcome the attainment gap. That means not just improving access to university or college, as important as that is, but ensuring that all Scotland’s children and young people are engaged in education at all levels so that they have the skills that they need to succeed in work and in life.

We must do all we can to equip tomorrow’s citizens. With that in mind, it was with great interest that I read the First Minister’s announcement last week of the new £100 million fund, which is aimed at driving forward improvements in educational outcomes in Scotland’s most disadvantaged communities. As has been said, the fund will, over four years, focus on improving literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing in primary schools, with the clear objective of providing all our primary school pupils, regardless of their background, with the best start in life.

The schools in those areas will benefit from great access to expertise and resources, including additional teachers, materials for classrooms and resources to develop new out-of-school activities. The fund will also allow bespoke improvement plans that are appropriate to local circumstances to be agreed for each school or group of schools.

Great things are happening in our schools. Providing schools with greater access to funding, expertise and resources will give them more opportunity to offer the creative and innovative teaching that helps young people in Scotland to succeed.

The new fund—along with the Government’s policies and programmes such as curriculum for excellence, the teaching Scotland’s future programme, getting it right for every child, the early years framework and the opportunities for all strategy—sets out clearly what needs to be done to support every child and young person on their journey from early years through school and post-16 learning, which can include college or university.

I use the word “journey” quite deliberately, because for all our young people it is just that. Young people go on a journey through school and then come to choose whether they should go to college or university, or into employment or training. In my region of North Lanarkshire, the activity agreement and the 16-plus learning hub

provide an opportunity for young people to access training, employment possibilities and support for becoming a modern apprentice, which this Government has a record in delivering.

The learning hub supports our young people by meeting their needs and providing a personal programme of learning activity through a person-centred learning and development approach. It shows that, here in Scotland, we can adapt and work with young people, and that we are committed to recognising learning as a journey from school to further education, employment or training.

While this Government is doing all that it can to enhance attainment, it is hindered—as has been said—by the policies of Westminster. An additional 100,000 Scottish children will be living in poverty by 2020, which is unacceptable. Despite the Scottish Government's best efforts to alleviate the pressures on families, the UK Government's decisions have resulted in children and families suffering. That needs to change.

15:59

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):**

Addressing the attainment gap in our schools has to be one of our top priorities, and we welcome the Scottish Government's recently announced plans to tackle it, after eight years in government.

Educational inequality is a symptom of a deeper problem of poverty, which we need to address, so the focused nature of any programme is vital. I live in Cumbernauld, and the variation in educational attainment across the town is massive. In the council ward of Cumbernauld North, the child poverty level is 8 per cent, which is far too high. When we cross the footbridge over the M80 into Cumbernauld South, which is a two-minute walk, the level of child poverty jumps to a staggering 23 per cent. That difference in child poverty impacts on the educational attainment of young people, which can prevent them from breaking out of the vicious cycle of poor health and low pay.

The measures that we agree on to tackle the attainment gap must therefore be focused on our most deprived communities. With that in mind, Scottish Labour would use the additional revenues from a new 50p tax rate, redistributing resources from those who can afford them to those who need them most—which is something that SNP members seem to avoid talking about at all costs. The additional £25 million per year over and above the Government's proposals would supplement the programme.

We would double the number of teaching assistants in every primary school associated with the 20 secondary schools facing the greatest challenges of deprivation. We would introduce a

new literacy programme for schools, and we would recruit and train literacy specialists to support pupils in the associated primary schools and first-year and second-year pupils in each of the 20 secondary schools. We would also support parents so that they can learn with their children, and we would introduce a special literacy support programme for looked-after children.

We would ask Education Scotland to carry out an annual review on progress in tackling educational inequality in Scotland's schools, through the schools inspectorate programme. That would include a specific report on looked-after children, and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning would report to the Parliament on the progress made annually in reducing the attainment gap, so as to allow progress to be monitored and scrutinised.

There are other issues related to poverty and inequality that are impacting on educational attainment, such as the increase in the use of private tutors and the use of the placing request system for schools.

There has been a 300 per cent increase in the use of private tutors in the past year alone. Wealthier families have the ability to give their child an extra boost compared with children in families who cannot afford private tuition. That can be used when a child is struggling in a particular subject, or it can help in the run-up to exams. In itself that is not a bad thing, but where is the support for the pupil from the poorer background when they are struggling with a particular subject or need support during exam time?

We have supported the provision of high-quality wraparound care for primary school pupils, including breakfast clubs and homework clubs, to give pupils a productive start and end to their school day while supporting the needs of working parents. That would give all pupils, regardless of their family income, extra support in their learning.

Supported study sessions are often run in schools in the evenings at exam times to support pupils, but those are offered by committed, motivated teachers, who offer up their own time to support pupils they care about. That is an excellent way of supporting pupils at exam time, but it is patchy across the country and across subjects. There is an issue of transport costs for pupils who would normally get a school bus home and who cannot afford alternative means.

The placing request system is creating a two-tier system of education and is causing problems for education authorities in managing school staff and the school estate. As soon as a school starts to attract a perception or—perhaps unfairly—a reputation for slipping or failing, or if another school in the area starts getting a reputation for

excellence, parents who have the means will start to pay for transport so that their children can move out of the catchment area and go to an alternative school. I have seen that happen in my authority, which is North Lanarkshire Council. In some schools, only the children from the poorest families attend, and the impact on attainment is clear.

**Liz Smith:** The member makes an interesting point. Does he accept that there is a real need to ensure that standards in schools that are perhaps not doing so well are driven up? Would the Labour Party consider offering additional payments to staff who teach in those schools?

**Mark Griffin:** We have spoken about reintroducing the chartered teacher scheme to give teachers in those schools an incentive. I do not like to use the term “failing schools”, but we are talking about schools that face the challenges of extreme deprivation and in which placing requests are reducing the school roll and reinforcing the cycle of low attainment.

I am glad that the SNP is making educational attainment a priority after eight years in government. I hope that it will look at the areas where our proposals can improve its plans by redistributing wealth and increasing the available resources. I look forward to working with the Government on some of the other issues that I have mentioned in tackling educational inequality.

16:06

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** I thank the Scottish Government for lodging the motion, as attainment in schools, particularly for young kids, is an absolutely excellent subject to debate. I thank the cabinet secretary for the recognition that education can be a postcode lottery and that the way forward to attain quality in the delivery of education must be through strong leadership and high-quality learning and teaching to enable all our children to reach their full potential.

The Labour Party amendment and Iain Gray in his speech mentioned the importance of early years learning and of tackling the attainment gap, particularly in our most deprived communities. The cabinet secretary also mentioned that, as does the Conservative amendment, so it seems that we have cross-party support on that issue. However, as with everything else, I take issue with the Labour Party and the Conservatives on a number of points.

If the Labour Party wishes to tackle the attainment gap, why did it vote against the additional £20 million that was provided by John Swinney in the budget?

**Iain Gray:** We voted against the budget because it failed our health service, our colleges

and local government. Frankly, the argument that we therefore voted against everything in it is juvenile.

**Sandra White:** Mr Gray mentions juvenile—I presume that he is talking about his party. He mentioned that his party wants to provide extra money, but it voted against that £20 million, which is pretty juvenile. As someone said, “Labour says no.”

The Labour Party constantly goes on about deprived areas, and it is absolutely correct that we need to target moneys at those areas, but let us not forget—although the Labour Party tries to forget it—that, especially in the Glasgow area, which I represent and come from, most of the deprived areas where there is low attainment have unfortunately been ruled by Labour for decades. So, please, the Labour Party should not lecture people about poverty, as it did nothing about that in the decades for which it has controlled parts of Glasgow. Labour members should really hang their heads in shame on that particular issue.

I will touch on the Conservative amendment and speeches. I take on board the genuine points that Mary Scanlon and Liz Smith made, but we have to look at the situation in the areas of poverty that we are targeting. How will the benefit changes and austerity help people in those areas to get out of the poverty that they are in? I ask the Conservatives to think about that.

I will use my remaining time to give an example from my constituency of a school and early years centre that have high attainment but which are threatened by the actions of Glasgow City Council: Hillhead primary and the Kelvin Park early years centre. The school was created after the closure of four primary schools and is now the largest primary school in Glasgow. In fact, it is so large that it cannot cope. It is so overcrowded that classroom space, information and communication technology provision, art and drama and even toilet provision are all compromised.

There was consultation. I went along to some of the consultation meetings and was absolutely amazed. Some of the nursery schools were left out of the consultation, the numbers did not even add up and all that some of the parents who went along to the meetings could say was, “It’s an absolute sham.” However, the council went through the motions and there was a consultation.

We now have a divided community, unfortunately. The early years centre and Hillhead primary—two excellent facilities with very high attainment levels—share a campus. One of Glasgow City Council’s ideas was to take the kids from the final years of the primary school and send them to Hillhead high school by creating extra space in the grounds there. That school is pretty

overcrowded as well, so the council did not consider it.

Thankfully, we managed to get a call-in to Glasgow City Council. The Green and SNP councillors spoke against the approach and said that we had to re-examine the issue. However, the call-in fell and the Labour Party majority won again.

The pupil numbers have now been capped and the catchment area has been changed. Someone who stays across the road and used to be in the catchment area cannot go to the school any more. A sticking-plaster has been put over something that should have been looked at long ago. It will come back year after year for that area.

I have written to the cabinet secretary about the matter, as have the schools and parents. Scottish Government guidance states that a school with 22 class bases should have a minimum of four general-purpose rooms. Hillhead primary has one. The ICT provision is poor and there is no ICT suite. Now we see the same happening in Merrylee and the surrounding areas on the south side of Glasgow.

I said to the parents that I would highlight the matter. I ask the cabinet secretary whether she will meet me to discuss the issues. They are very important and will not go away with a sticking-plaster. It is sad that we get two excellent facilities with excellent attainment that, although they share the campus, now do not speak. I blame Glasgow City Council for its lack of foresight in creating the biggest school in Glasgow and the problems that that has created.

16:12

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** It is always good to start on a positive note, although I realise that such debates focus more often on what is wrong and needs improving rather than what is going well. It is clear that our education system is the envy of many countries around the world. That is one of the reasons for immigration to Scotland. Many people from poorer countries want a better life for their children and will go to great lengths to bring their kids here so that they can benefit from our education system.

That hunger for education in whole families—among parents for their children and children for themselves—seems to be missing from some of our home-grown families. We have probably all heard teachers talking about how having children from asylum-seeking, refugee or immigrant families in their schools can be a boost to the whole school, and that enthusiasm for education can rub off on some Scots kids, too.

On the theme of involving whole families, I am pleased that the Government motion mentions parental engagement but somewhat disappointed that the Conservative amendment makes no mention of parents or families whatever.

The amount of money and the number of teachers must be key factors in raising attainment and narrowing the attainment gap. That is especially the case when a youngster has a more difficult background and we look to the school to make up some of the shortfall. I find it difficult to accept the COSLA argument that there is no link between teacher numbers or the pupil teacher ratio and attainment. I totally accept that teacher numbers are not the only factor, but surely they are a factor. I go into primary and secondary schools and, especially if there are two primary 7 classes together—that means 50 or 60 youngsters—it is a challenge to engage with all the pupils at one time.

Nurture groups seem to have been a success in some schools in bringing on kids who have extra challenges and, we hope, enabling them to catch up with the main class. I understand that it is fundamental to such nurture groups that there is a small number of pupils with pretty intensive support from a teacher, so it seems clear that a better pupil teacher ratio must provide benefits, even if it is not the whole answer.

Includem's briefing for the debate was helpful, with its emphasis on child-parent relationships, child-school relationships and parent-school relationships. It says that its work includes

"Proactive work with parents to set boundaries and manage difficult behaviour at home ... Work with parents to access help for health, housing, finance and other problems which undermine their own parenting capacity"

and

"Work with parents on their attitudes to education and responsibilities—giving them the confidence to engage with education".

However, the Includem approach is intensive and fairly expensive and could not be used on a terribly wide scale.

The headteacher of one of my local secondaries said that they often feel that they have two separate schools in one building. The split is based partly on deprivation and the areas that the pupils come from, but it is also based partly on some youngsters having parental support and some not. That does not always reflect the level of deprivation.

Seeing one or both parents going to work every day has a huge impact on young people and on their expectations and aspirations. Confidence or the lack of it can be a factor, too. For example, if parents have not had a good experience in

secondary school, that can be passed on to the next generation.

As for practical issues relating to schools, there has perhaps been too much emphasis on the academic. We have to an extent moved away from that, which is good, and the emphasis on modern apprenticeships is excellent.

**Johann Lamont:** Does the member agree that there is not enough emphasis on the academic abilities of some of our poorer children, who have been denied opportunities through situations such as some schools making it impossible to sit five highers? Surely that is another disadvantage. We should not presume that every child who comes from a deprived background is more prone to doing a vocational course.

**John Mason:** Absolutely. It is a question of having the right approach, the right support and the right opportunities for every child. I totally agree with the point. However, at the same time, we do not want a country with 100 per cent university graduates. I do not believe that that would be good for the country or for all our individuals. In practice, it is clear that many top earners are not graduates and that many graduates are not finding jobs to match their degrees and are therefore not earning what they had hoped. We need a range of skills to make our society work, and how those skills are acquired might vary considerably.

I wonder whether schools are pointing youngsters in the right direction for careers. Recently, pupils from a high school in the east end of Glasgow visited Parliament. I asked how many girls were planning to go into engineering, and the answer was none. I then asked how many boys were planning to go into engineering, and the answer, again, was none. It is all very well young people being interested in politics and taking degrees in that subject, but they can then find a lack of jobs. I wonder whether that is the kind of attainment that we are aiming for.

The Conservative amendment talks of more trained science teachers, but part of the answer must be more and better exposure of young people to the workplace. That can happen through experience in the workplace or through businesspeople, engineers and so on going into schools.

It is good that we have modern school buildings, ICT equipment and so on. However, I remain convinced that the school teacher or college teacher is key to the agenda. We all know of or have heard of a teacher who has gone beyond the call of duty and invested time and interest in one young person in a way that has turned their life around. Therefore, whatever we do, please let us keep investing in teachers.

16:18

**Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate and I also welcome the Scottish Government's investment over the next four years in the attainment Scotland fund. I have no doubt that the Government is sincere in its pursuit of a reduction in the attainment gap. I welcome the initiatives that the current and former cabinet secretaries for education have announced on that, and I hope that we can all work together in the chamber to make progress.

To do that, we have to be realistic about what we will achieve and how we will do that. For instance, I do not see how the current strategy can truly benefit every child and young person in Scotland. As I have said before, achieving that is an ambition that the cabinet secretary and I share. However, as she will recall, we have disagreed on the subject before, because I think that we have to focus more on individual need rather than taking a collective approach. She will recall that I have made that point to her in the many debates that we have had on the modern apprenticeship programme, but she might also be aware that I made similar points during the passage of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. I maintain the point and I will expand on it now.

Children who have additional needs—particularly those who have a learning disability and/or a physical disability—sometimes require a different approach from that for other children and young people. Providing a space for a child to learn in, such as a learning hub, might benefit children who require a space away from home to do their homework in, but it will not help a child who requires additional, one-on-one support to complete the same tasks. I know that members recognise that, but we have to do more than simply recognise it, because those children are being left behind and are as a result seeing their life chances diminish in front of them.

In its briefing for the debate, Includem said:

“Our vision is that young people and their families are supported with targeted and personalised wraparound support as part of core school provision and that those children who face the greatest barriers to involvement in education are given the support they need so they can achieve their full potential ... Whilst we welcome additional funding for and focus on raising attainment, it is important that the implementation of this policy focuses not just on the school experience but the whole approach taken to engaging children and young people in education.”

To achieve the vision that I and many members in the chamber share, we have to invest in more classroom assistants. They are crucial if we are to achieve any progress on the attainment gap. Without them, our teachers do not have the time to dedicate to those who require the most support. Without supporting such investment, we cannot

say that we are truly getting it right for every child in Scotland.

I know that the Scottish Government is focusing on the link between poverty and educational attainment and I welcome that. However, we should recognise that children who have a disability are more likely to come from a deprived background and therefore require more support. That is why it is crucial that we offer support that is tailored to a child's needs rather than take a homogeneous approach. Such an approach is not the best way of tackling the problems that children and young people are facing and is not the best use of public money.

Regrettably, poverty is linked to educational attainment. As Save the Children stated in its briefing, children who live in poverty are twice as likely as other children are to start school behind in their learning and development. Save the Children believes that we should have a more targeted approach and focus on those from deprived backgrounds. I welcome that suggestion, but I offer a note of caution to the cabinet secretary, as focusing on a deprived background does not mean focusing on someone's postcode.

I say that because I am concerned that the Government's approach to getting more people from deprived backgrounds into university relies on a person's postcode and not simply their socioeconomic status. I raised that with the former cabinet secretary, because the policy unfairly discriminated against my constituent. The policy was also brought to my attention during a meeting last week when it was pointed out to me that, if the UK Government adopted the same policy as the Scottish Government, Prince George would be entitled to additional support, as his postcode is in a deprived area. I hope that that example illustrates my note of caution.

In its literacy action plan, the Government states:

"Recent surveys have confirmed that literacy skills are linked to socio-economic status and level of deprivation, with those from more deprived areas achieving lower scores. In primary education, those from more deprived areas often fail to reach even basic standards of literacy ... Early intervention is the philosophy at the heart of our Early Years Framework. During these critical years, it is parents who will have the greatest impact on their child's literacy skills. Where parents need additional support, GIRFEC, alongside guidance on supporting adult learners, will aim to ensure early and co-ordinated intervention by agencies who work together to meet the needs of children and their families."

The standing literacy commission was established in 2011 and I understand that it meets three times per year. I am interested to know what role it has in meeting the objectives that are set out in the Government's literacy action plan, what progress it has made in increasing literacy in our

schools during that time and what role it will play in helping to reduce the attainment gap. I am also interested to know what support parents and carers have been offered to achieve greater literacy skills.

The Wood commission highlighted a number of areas that the Government needs to focus on in reducing the attainment gap. In her closing speech, will the cabinet secretary expand on the areas that she would like to see the most focus on in the next year or so and say how that can be achieved?

16:24

**Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** I welcome the funding announcement from the Scottish Government. It is important to take forward the approach to attainment that it proposes. However, we must reflect on the fact that, by the time a child arrives at the school gate, their life has often been influenced by factors that the school can do little to affect. Work can be done to help that child to achieve above what might otherwise be expected, but we should recognise that many schools and many teachers are fighting against a situation outside the classroom, rather than working with the child to make the best of their education. Wider influencing factors can revolve around poverty, local opportunities and the circles in which the child has grown up.

That is why parental involvement is a crucial issue that should be focused on, and not just through the approach that some Labour members suggested. I thought that Johann Lamont's speech was excellent because she made a lot of constructive points. I heard talk from Labour members of literacy and numeracy support for parents. When parents have those needs identified, we should look at that.

However, parental involvement should also happen through the much wider local promotion of the Scottish Government's play strategy. Through encouraging parents to engage with their children in interactive play and to put their children in situations where they interact socially with other children at a young age, we allow children to take a much greater interest in the world around them, become more open to learning experiences and develop social confidence. Many of the children who arrive at school from the challenging backgrounds that we have talked about do not have that social confidence, which can influence their ability to learn in a classroom environment. Using the play strategy as a vehicle and promoting it more widely will help.

That is why facilities such as the community projects of Middlefield, Printfield, and Fersands and Fountain in my constituency are important.



They are working in some of our most deprived communities to bring young children into environments where they can be given such confidence and support.

I joined children from the Fersands nursery in my constituency at the University of Aberdeen botanic gardens as part of the wee green spaces project, which was designed to encourage children to explore the natural environment. It took children from a locale where they did not have a lot of green or outdoor space to an area where they could roam freely, enjoy the outdoors and enhance their enthusiasm for learning.

Liam McArthur made an interesting point about how we identify the need for funding. As a constituency representative for the city of Aberdeen, I recognise that there are examples in the city of poverty amidst plenty. Two of the schools in my constituency—Manor Park and Bramble Brae—sit in areas of deprivation and, at the time when free school meal data could be used to identify children with low socioeconomic status, they taught significant numbers of such children. A number of things have been done on that. Manor Park school has benefited from a new building, which provides a fantastic environment for learning.

I visited Cordyce school in my constituency recently. It is doing phenomenal work with children who are at the very margins of education, many of whom have backgrounds that many of us could not begin to fathom. The education system has not worked for them, but the work that is being done at Cordyce school is absolutely supporting them. The school's future is unclear, because the council's inclusion review has been taking place and we do not yet know its direction of travel. I think that it would be hoped that the ethos in the school will be continued and replicated, even if the physical structures, which are becoming old and tired, are not.

Siobhan McMahon brought up the issue of children with additional support needs. That issue is close to my heart and I have done a lot to raise it in the chamber. It is absolutely important that we have the appropriate support available for such children and that we have the appropriate diagnosis in place at the earliest possible opportunity.

I was interested by Stewart Maxwell's point on literacy and teacher training. I reissue my request to the Scottish Government to look at how additional support needs are factored into teacher training—particularly needs arising from autism and dyslexia, which are often characterised as invisible support needs. Specific understanding is required for someone to be able to spot them readily. Such training would assist not only with support in the classroom but, crucially, with

enabling children to receive an appropriate diagnosis early, which allows support to be provided. Too many children are still not diagnosed until quite far into their education, which can have a direct impact on the educational outcomes that they achieve. I hope that the Scottish Government will consider taking that forward.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We turn to closing speeches.

16:30

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Six years ago, at the time when the Scottish Conservatives had a seminar on attainment and school reform, the SNP told us that there was no need for any major changes because of the curriculum for excellence. That was despite what Mike Russell said in "Grasping the Thistle", in which he seemed very much in favour of school reform in order to raise attainment, and what he said in *The Times Educational Supplement*, which was that the Scandinavian free school model was "well worth discussing". Curiously he went off that idea and then he rejected outright the Swedish model of schooling, in a parliamentary answer that he gave on 9 February 2012.

Of course, the First Minister has now fine-tuned that. We have a very substantial hint that she does actually believe that some school reform is essential if we are to drive up attainment. However, just when it looked as though we might have the intriguing situation of Nicola Sturgeon as First Minister being on the political right of the latter-day Mike Russell, we then got the message from the First Minister that she is not in favour of any of the "ideological nonsense" that we get down south.

**Angela Constance:** That is correct. We are not in favour of any of the ideological nonsense down south, because we believe firmly and first and foremost in going where the evidence is. Talking about where the evidence is, I thought that Sweden had fallen out of favour with the Tories, given that it is below Scotland in all three measures, whether maths, reading or science.

**Liz Smith:** I think that the cabinet secretary had better speak to her predecessor about that.

Nicola Sturgeon and Michael Gove are actually quite similar. [*Interruption.*] Well, as I understood Nicola Sturgeon in her article in *Scotland on Sunday* two weeks ago, she said that she is interested in what works. So, too, was Michael Gove. We believe very firmly on this side of the chamber that it should not matter a jot who owns or runs a school, so long as it delivers high standards of education.

I think that the SNP is beginning to move, and it is this document—"School education"—that has started to make it think again. As Iain Gray rightly said in his speech—it was very good, although I did not agree with all of it—the facts in this Audit Scotland report are very stark indeed. They expose just how deep-seated the attainment gap is and the entrenched educational inequalities that exist in our current system.

There are other facts. In the international educational measurements such as PISA, OECD and TIMSS—the trends in international mathematics and science study—Scotland has not been performing as well as other countries, even though some very good things are happening in Scottish education. Keir Bloomer, when he examined the case for school reform, produced hard evidence that showed that in the areas of reading, science and maths, our international PISA performance was worse in 2012 than it was in 2000. Just before Christmas, he warned that there is not much sign of any meaningful recovery.

Aside from those facts, some other very interesting things are happening. Sir Ian Wood's commission made plain the need to introduce much greater diversity into education—I am delighted that the Education and Culture Committee is looking at that—which we must do if we are to ensure that all children have the opportunity to develop their talents in the way that Johann Lamont set out in her excellent speech.

The commission's work examined in detail what needs to happen in the vocational training field. It has been hugely influential and has put added pressure on the Scottish Government, as has the hot water into which it got itself because of its extensive college cuts, which happened at the very time when it told us that education for 16 to 19-year-olds was its top priority.

George Adam, Kevin Stewart and John Mason all spoke sensibly about the need to ensure that this Parliament takes advantage of the collective wisdom of our colleges, universities and employers. We must do that, and doing so breeds more diversity in our system.

Another major driving force is the message that is coming from local authorities. Time after time, they are telling the Scottish Government that they simply do not have the cash to maintain the structure of education spending. In the past two weeks, we have seen a massive turf war between the finance secretary, John Swinney, and COSLA about how the existing money should be spent. That is an unedifying sight. Party politics aside, it is also a clear demonstration that the system is not working that well.

**John Mason:** Will the member give way?

**Liz Smith:** In just a minute.

The COSLA structure is under huge pressure, because of all sorts of demands on our education system. That is shown by the fact that four or five local authorities look set to leave it. The unthinkable is starting to happen. A few councillors—even those in the Labour Party—are beginning to question whether those in local authorities are the right people to take charge of education at this time.

**John Mason:** Does the member agree with COSLA that there is no link between teacher numbers and improving attainment?

**Liz Smith:** I would not say that there is no link, but it certainly is not the whole story. A whole host of interests have ramifications for that. As Mary Scanlon rightly pointed out, it is important that we look at the qualitative data. I think that Liam McArthur raised that point, too.

What matters is what works and what can deliver better educational attainment. If that means that we have a more diverse system with different schools, and that local authorities are no longer doing the job that they do now, so be it, because it is important that we drive up standards for every pupil in Scotland, no matter where they come from.

16:37

**Iain Gray:** I sometimes wonder what those in the public gallery who are brave enough to sit through debates such as this think about them. I am not sure, but they probably would have found this afternoon's debate a bit puzzling because we have spent a fair bit of the afternoon violently agreeing with one another.

That started quite early on with George Adam's speech, which featured an impassioned peroration, and which ended on the point that addressing the attainment gap is something that we surely all can support. I make the point to Mr Adam that we do all support it; we are all agreed this afternoon that it is a problem that we must address. However, there is a difference in how we address the problem. Every speaker from the Opposition benches, from whatever party, has pretty fulsomely welcomed the attainment fund and the £100 million over the next four years and, broadly, welcomed how that is to be spent, as outlined by the cabinet secretary. We have asked questions about it and we need to see more detail; indeed, I think that more detail is to be worked out.

I am afraid that that has not been the case with the Government benches. Not one SNP speaker has been able to bring themselves to rise to the challenge that we set them to do more about the problem on which we are all agreed. I always believed that one of the characteristics of an education was that it led to open-mindedness. I

fear that that has been singularly lacking on the Government benches, with perhaps the honourable exception of Mark McDonald late on in the debate. Indeed, we have seen some painfully grim examples of closed-mindedness.

Colin Beattie denounced the Labour proposals because they would not apply in every school in Scotland, which rather missed the point that the attainment fund that he was welcoming will also not apply in every school in Scotland. Indeed, I do not think that it will apply in any of the schools in the area that Mr Beattie represents.

Then we had Mr Stewart, to whom I directly offered the opportunity to support our proposals; he refused. He then went on to complain about the lack of attention that Aberdeen received. Under our proposals, at least one school cluster in Aberdeen would benefit, although those schools will not benefit from the Scottish Government's attainment fund.

**Kevin Stewart:** Would Mr Gray like to name the school cluster that would benefit from the Labour proposals?

**Iain Gray:** No, but having looked at the way in which the decisions can be made, I think that at least one school cluster would benefit for the very reason that, as Mr Stewart said, although Aberdeen is a wealthy and prosperous city, that does not mean that within it there are not areas of significant deprivation.

At least Mary Scanlon was honest. She said that she cannot support our proposal because she does not believe in taxing the better off at a higher rate. She does not believe in the 50p tax rate. If that is the SNP's position as well, please will SNP members be as honest about it as Mrs Scanlon is? I hope that the cabinet secretary will explain whether that is indeed the reason why the SNP cannot support our proposal.

Returning to Mrs Scanlon, I thought that she made a thoughtful contribution. I certainly did not agree with a lot of the Tory clothes, but she raised some important points about the need for robust data and the fact that we do not have national testing. I do not favour national testing in the sense that we used to have it, but there is a debate to be had about what tests are made available for teachers to use, particularly for literacy and numeracy. Her overall point was that there is a lack of a theoretical basis for the way in which the funding would be spent.

Other members such as Cara Hilton, Liam McArthur and Johann Lamont all spoke about the questions that we have to debate in deciding how those funds should be spent and targeted and what works. There has been much talk all round the chamber of the London challenge, which featured an advisory board for those schools

involved in the challenge. It was strong on school-to-school peer support and on the importance of using data, which is core to any evaluation of the London challenge and its success.

Here is a suggestion. As part of what we are doing with our new-found commitment to addressing the attainment gap, why not create in Scotland a centre of excellence in educational equity that would share best practice and allow and create peer-to-peer support for the schools in areas that we have all talked about? It could draw on the research and theoretical work that is already being done in our universities. Mrs Scanlon mentioned Professor Ellis and there are others who are involved in that work, too.

What is the scale of our aspiration on the matter? Rather than talk about being front runners, let us actually place ourselves in the forefront of educational thinking, theory and practice in addressing the attainment gap. Accountability was also core to the London challenge. Our view is that the cabinet secretary should come to Parliament every year and report on progress on the core task that we are setting ourselves.

I turn to Mr Adam and Mr Stewart, because they both quoted the First Minister and I welcome the scale of her aspiration. She has said that she wants it to be the case that a child born today—I have a grandchild who was born last week, so this is pretty close to home—[*Applause.*] Well, it was nothing to do with me. [*Laughter.*]

The First Minister's aspiration is that a child born today will have the same chance as everyone else by the time that they leave school. That is a noble aspiration, but we will not make that transformation in the four years of the attainment challenge. We simply will not, and this is why. There is nothing new under the sun.

Way back in 1978, I lived in Wester Hailes in Edinburgh. I was in teacher training and I did teaching practice in the Wester Hailes education centre. It was the second year that the centre had been open, and it was the most modern, best-equipped school that Scotland had ever seen. In my view, it had the best, most highly motivated, most inspirational teaching cadre that I had ever seen in a school. It had additional resources and more teachers than other schools because it was one of four schools in the Lothian region that had been identified as community schools. The teachers were also paid more than other teachers—they were on an alternative contract, for which they were required to teach adults in the classroom and to teach evening classes for both adults and young people. In addition, they were required to maintain a relationship with parents as well as with their young people.

Five years later, I got a job as a teacher in one of the other community schools, in Inverallmond, Livingston, and by then all that had been eroded. I did not get the alternative contract—that had gone. There were no evening classes or adults in classes. They were good schools, but they were not different. All the advantages had been lost. My point is this: our resources must be targeted, substantial and sustained over the long term if we are going to make the difference that we want to see. That is why we say that the Government should double the fund, make it permanent and focus it ruthlessly.

Nelson Mandela said:

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”.

We are agreed on what we want to do. The question is, how serious is the Government about doing it? Let us combine the firepower of the Government’s proposals and ours. Let us get serious about changing the world and let us really make the difference.

16:47

**Angela Constance:** I congratulate Granddad Gray. He is correct to say that the birth had nothing to do with him, but I hope that he takes his granddad duties seriously and helps out with the babysitting. We often talk about the role of parents in our children’s education and in support of families, but the role of grandparents is a very important one. I am often reminded by constituents, when I am at the school gates, that grandparents are the backbone of the Scottish economy.

**Iain Gray:** That is a correct and powerful point, elegantly made. Well done.

**Angela Constance:** Thank you.

I have enjoyed the range of speeches that have been made this afternoon, although I have not agreed with every word that every member has spoken. It has been noticeable that individuals have spoken about their own experiences of education and of working in the front line of education. Many members across the political spectrum have demonstrated their own particular passions for education.

Johann Lamont raised an issue in relation to kinship carers. A number of issues are being worked through in response to a Supreme Court ruling, and I urge her to speak to the acting Minister for Children and Young People for an update on that. She also made the point that, although what we do in our classrooms is powerfully important in terms of the quality of teaching and learning that the children experience, what happens outside the school gates is integral

to the debate. We know that poverty does not stop at the school gates.

To Stewart Maxwell, I say that initial teacher education does indeed vary immensely. I am happy to speak to providers of initial teacher education particularly in relation to his point about primary schools. To Kevin Stewart, I say that I am happy to visit the reading bus in Aberdeen. I am also happy to meet Sandra White or any other member if they have particular issues to discuss and pursue.

A notable aspect of the debate has been the fact that members have largely accepted that Scottish education is improving. We all have the shared ambition of making Scotland the best place to learn in. The focus of the debate has been on how we take a good education system and make it a great education system for all our children. A year or two ago in *The Scotsman*, Andy Hargreaves, who is based in the school of education in Boston College, commented:

“The great strength of CfE is that it encourages innovation in learning and discretion for teachers, which is quite different from south of the Border, where teachers have become very constrained by testing.”

He went on to say:

“what CfE is trying to do is both catch up with the best in the world and even lead the pack.”

That must be our shared ambition—to move forward collectively and lead the pack.

We know from the PISA studies that the decline in standards in Scottish education has been halted and that some progress has been made in closing the gap in maths, reading and science. It is clear from the PISA results in 2003 and 2006 that Labour failed to do that.

**Iain Gray:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Angela Constance:** In a moment.

However, I am not that interested in the past. It is not good enough to use the past as a baseline. Our aspirations must be about looking to the future and providing a better future for all our children.

**Iain Gray:** Will the cabinet secretary not recognise that the gap in the PISA results has been closed because of a reduction at the top end? That is not how we want to close the gap—we want to raise the performance of those at the bottom, and that is where we should look in the future.

**Angela Constance:** I was going to go on to make the point that regardless of whether we look at the headline figures from the OECD PISA studies, the tariff scores that relate to exam results, literacy and numeracy surveys, school leaver destinations or the number of exclusions, we see improvement.

The biggest improvement has been made with looked-after children, but what we are serious about is raising attainment for all and closing the equity gap—the gap between children from the least disadvantaged backgrounds and those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. In the Scotland of today, it cannot be acceptable that some children are simply left behind. We cannot deny that there is still a gap, which is way too large. We do not demur from that view. As we move forward, our challenge is not to leave any child behind.

We know that the gap starts to develop at an early stage. We know that, by the time some children are five years old, the gap between their vocabulary and literacy and that of other children of the same age can be as much as 13 months. That is massive. We know that, if that gap is not attended to, it will grow as a child progresses through the education system.

I say to Liam McArthur that we are building strong foundations in the work that we are doing on the early years. We are moving forward at pace, but it is a balanced expansion. We will not do what has been done south of the border, where people have overpromised but underdelivered on the implementation of childcare.

**Liz Smith:** Given what the First Minister said in her article, is the Scottish Government willing to accept that, wherever progress is made—whether down south or anywhere else in the world—and something is shown to work, it could be made to work in Scotland?

**Angela Constance:** With respect, I have made that point very clearly in what I have said to date. I am not an ideologue; I am a pragmatist. I will always look at the evidence, whether it comes from south of the border, Ontario, elsewhere in Europe or elsewhere in the world.

The fact of the matter is that some of the reforms that are being implemented down south are not backed up by the evidence. A report that was published by the House of Commons Education Committee in January says that there is no evidence that so-called reforms such as academies and free schools are leading to improved attainment.

It is also really interesting that the chief inspector of Ofsted talks about schools, irrespective of whether they are in the local authority system or some chain of academies, being marooned within their structure, not being supported and not benefiting from the networks, collaboration and sharing of best practice and what works in the classroom on the front line.

**Mary Scanlon:** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Angela Constance:** No, thanks—perhaps later. I want to make some progress.

The point about the attainment challenge, as announced by the First Minister, is that it allows for a step change in progress, because we want to pick up the pace now but are of course looking to the future. We do need to look to the long term. Across the chamber, we have to have the courage as politicians to look to the long term and not to take a short-term view of education. However, doing that does not get us off the hook, because we need to pick up the pace substantially and we need to do that now. In that regard, an investment of £100 million is significant by anyone's standards.

As I indicated in my opening remarks, we are not going to import carte blanche somebody else's system, whether from down south or further afield. Liz Smith mentioned the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce. I was the minister who commissioned that work and who accepted each and every one of the commission's recommendations. Whether it is vocational education or school education, we cannot cherry pick; instead we must look deeply and learn from what works.

The positive thing about the attainment challenge is that we will adapt it to the Scottish context. What we liked about the London challenge was that it was flexible and based on local solutions. It was based first and foremost on the needs of the children, but it was also based on professional judgment and discretion.

**Mary Scanlon:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Angela Constance:** No, thanks.

I hope that those points about the London challenge will overcome some of the concerns that Mark Griffin described around challenges that children from poorer-income households face in comparison with their better-off peers.

The resource is of course targeted, which is never an easy decision to make. I have identified the seven areas that will initially benefit from the funding of £20 million this year and £100 million over the four years. We have looked at the areas that have the highest proportion of children from households in the Scottish index of multiple deprivation's deciles 1 and 2—the children from the 20 per cent most disadvantaged households. The attainment challenge will reach 50 per cent of primary pupils in Scotland who are living in the 20 per cent most deprived areas, including the one in four children in Glasgow who live in poverty. It is a very specific targeted investment that I do not doubt will have a very significant impact.

On the point that Mary Scanlon raised earlier, I reassure her that we are not just chucking money at things. We will look at bespoke improvement plans. We want to use intelligently information that is gathered at a local level in the classroom.

**Mary Scanlon:** Will the cabinet secretary give way on that point?

**Angela Constance:** No. I have been very generous with my time.

As Mary Scanlon knows, we are not interested in national testing. We will of course look to see what additional data and information is proportionate and meaningful and will allow us to make judgments about what works and inform our practice as we move forward.

What this Government is about in terms of our education system is achieving both equity and excellence. It is utterly wrong to believe that an equitable education system that provides equal chances for children and young people cannot also be excellent. Andreas Schleicher, the director for education and skills at the OECD, pointed that out in a recent article for BBC news when he said that

“international comparisons show there is no incompatibility between the quality of learning and equity, the highest performing education systems combine both.”

They combine excellence and equity, which is what we are about.

Everybody in this chamber will have children and young people in their lives. What we must continue to inject into education policy and, indeed, all aspects of public policy is to want for all of Scotland’s children what we want for our own children. We have to believe that all our children can achieve their full potential, and that applies to looked-after children and children with additional support needs. At the end of the day, all those children are our children and we can all help to ensure that Scotland becomes the best place in which to learn and grow up.

## Serious Crime Bill

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-12319, in the name of Michael Matheson, on the Serious Crime Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the amended provisions of the Serious Crime Bill introduced in the House of Lords on 6 June 2014, relating to the prevention or restriction of use of communications devices by prisoners, so far as these matters fall within the competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—  
[Michael Matheson.]

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

## Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-12318, in the name of Aileen McLeod, on the Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015, which is United Kingdom legislation.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament consents to the making of the Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015, a draft of which was laid before the United Kingdom Parliament on 15 December 2014 and which makes provision that would be within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament if it were contained within an Act of that Parliament.—[*Aileen McLeod.*]

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

## European Economic and Social Committee

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-12320, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the Scottish ministers' nominations to the European Economic and Social Committee of the European Union.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament endorses the Scottish Government's proposal to nominate Mr George Traill Lyon (self-nominated), Ms Agnes Tolmie (nominated by the Scottish Trades Union Congress) and Ms Irene Oldfather (nominated by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations) to the UK Delegation to the European Economic and Social Committee of the European Union for the forthcoming mandate from October 2015 to September 2020.—[*Fiona Hyslop.*]

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

## Decision Time

17:01

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

The first question is, that amendment S4M-12316.2, in the name of Iain Gray, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12316, in the name of Angela Constance, on raising attainment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

### For

Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 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, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (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)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (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)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

### Abstentions

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

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 26, Against 81, Abstentions 2.

*Amendment disagreed to.*



**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S4M-12316.1, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-12316, in the name of Angela Constance, on raising attainment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

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)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (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)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (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)  
 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, 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)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**Abstentions**

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

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 46, Against 61, Abstentions 2.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-12316, in the name of Angela Constance, on raising attainment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (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)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

#### Against

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

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 94, Against 15, Abstentions 0.

#### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes that school education in Scotland has improved in recent years, with record exam results and a record number of school leavers in work, education or training; recognises that the curriculum for excellence is delivering improved outcomes, using evidence-based approaches to raise attainment including a focus on strong leadership, high quality learning and teaching, literacy, numeracy and parental engagement; further recognises that more can be done to address the attainment gap; commends the establishment of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, backed by the £100 million Attainment Scotland Fund, to build on the work already underway to drive forward improvements in educational outcomes in Scotland's most deprived communities and help tackle inequality; welcomes that providing Attainment Advisors for every local authority and the introduction of the Read, Write, Count literacy and numeracy campaign will also help educational outcomes, and believes that education is both key to the future of Scotland's children and an investment in the future of Scotland's economic health.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-12319, in the name of Michael

Matheson, on the Serious Crime Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the amended provisions of the Serious Crime Bill introduced in the House of Lords on 6 June 2014, relating to the prevention or restriction of use of communications devices by prisoners, so far as these matters fall within the competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-12318, in the name of Aileen McLeod, on the Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015, which is UK legislation, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament consents to the making of the Public Bodies (Abolition of the Advisory Committees on Pesticides) Order 2015, a draft of which was laid before the United Kingdom Parliament on 15 December 2014 and which makes provision that would be within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament if it were contained within an Act of that Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-12320, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on the Scottish ministers' nominations to the European Economic and Social Committee of the European Union, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament endorses the Scottish Government's proposal to nominate Mr George Traill Lyon (self-nominated), Ms Agnes Tolmie (nominated by the Scottish Trades Union Congress) and Ms Irene Oldfather (nominated by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations) to the UK Delegation to the European Economic and Social Committee of the European Union for the forthcoming mandate from October 2015 to September 2020.

## Stroke Survivors (Support)

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

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-12093, in the name of Margaret Mitchell, on Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland's outstanding support for survivors. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament recognises what it considers Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland's outstanding support for stroke survivors; understands that it provides information and support through its Communication Support Services (CSS); notes that there are six CSS coordinators in its Central West area, who in turn support 17 communication stroke groups, such as the Young Stroke Survivors group, which meets fortnightly in Coatbridge; understands that this group believes that GPs need to be more aware of the signs that might be an indication of a patient either having had a minor stroke or of being at high risk of a stroke; understands that all of the groups raise awareness of the common effects of strokes, including what can be hidden conditions such as tiredness, memory loss, lack of concentration and communication difficulties, and highlight the availability of physiotherapy and speech therapy for survivors, and commends Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland on its community-based services.

17:06

**Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):** I am delighted to welcome the members of Coatbridge young stroke survivors to the chamber this evening. I had the pleasure of meeting that inspirational group towards the end of last year. At that meeting, through listening to the members' accounts of what happened to them, I began to understand the varied issues associated with strokes that survivors face. I discovered, for example, that those who have had a stroke often then experience hidden conditions. Those will be different for each individual, but tiredness, memory loss, a lack of ability to concentrate and communication difficulties are common.

Given that, stroke survivors support groups, such as the ones provided by the charity Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland—CHSS for short—play an immensely important role. Those groups provide the opportunity for survivors to meet and it can be a tremendous relief for a survivor to know that they are not alone and that someone else understands how they feel and what they are experiencing.

The charity also helps stroke survivors to understand and come to terms with new physical and other limitations that can be a product of the stroke. CHSS community stroke groups are self managed, so, although they are linked to CHSS, that allows them the flexibility to reflect local interests and diversity. The groups help their members to take part in activities in their local

community. In fact, when I heard about all the Coatbridge members' activities, including abseiling, I felt like a definite coach potato by comparison.

The charity's community stroke services are provided in partnership with the national health service, which, in turn, helps to establish a link between community services and speech, language and physiotherapy. It is absolutely essential that stroke survivors have access to those services as soon as possible after having a stroke. CHSS says that 110 communication support services across Scotland can offer either one-to-one or group support, which helps to rebuild survivors' communication skills—an often daunting and formidable task. Despite that, the sad and unpalatable truth is that adequate physiotherapy and speech therapy are, in far too many cases, not available. Survivors talk of different levels of provision across health board areas.

That anecdotal evidence was confirmed by a freedom of information request that I lodged with health boards and local authorities, which revealed either different levels of provision or, more worryingly still, a complete inability to specify exactly what provision was available. Surely that lack of adequate provision could and should be tackled as a priority. It makes sense not only from the point of view of preventative spend, because the difference that it can make to the quality of life of survivors, and of their spouses and families, whose lives are also turned upside down, is beyond measure.

In that area, CHSS offers invaluable support to family members who can, virtually overnight, find themselves cast in the new, stressful and intense role of being a carer to a stroke survivor. That aspect is often overlooked, as I heard in graphic, compelling and deeply disturbing detail yesterday when I met some South Lanarkshire carers of stroke survivors. The common thread in their stories was the lack of support that was available from the social work department, especially if the stroke survivor was not hospitalised for any length of time and/or owned their own home.

The same story was repeated: survivors and their carers had been left to flounder and callously told to make the arrangements to source and commission the necessary adaptations, and then had to pay for those adaptations to allow them to live in the familiar and comforting sanctuary of their own home. That happened at a time when carers' stress levels were off the scale, especially if the carers were having to cope not only with their new demanding role but with financial difficulties resulting from a loss of employment, which could mean that they have to sell their home.

Hidden conditions such as extreme tiredness have a knock-on effect for survivors as they attempt routine tasks such as accessing a large supermarket. Often, if they are forced to park several hundred metres from the entrance, although walking the distance might be possible, it is slow and laborious to the point of not being feasible given that extreme tiredness and exhaustion can often set in suddenly.

I ask members to imagine the humiliation of a stroke survivor and blue badge applicant who was asked to attend the North Lanarkshire Council headquarters in Motherwell for an assessment. On presenting, he was met by an occupational therapist and told to follow her to her room. She then proceeded to set off at a pace round the circular lobby. The survivor protested that he could not keep up and that he needed to rest. He was ignored, and he soldiered on to find himself back where he started. Apparently the assessment had been completed, and he was refused a blue badge.

I do not believe for a second that any politician would condone such degrading treatment. When I made the director aware of what had taken place, he was appalled, and he confirmed that a proper reassessment would be carried out. However, the callousness and dehumanising behaviour on the part of some local government officials—including social workers—who are usually far down the chain of command must be addressed, and checks and balances must be put in place to ensure that stroke victims get a fair hearing.

On a more positive note, the awareness-raising acronym FAST is designed to help the public to recognise that someone may be having a stroke. The F stands for face: if one side of the face is drooping, that is a possible symptom. The A stands for arms, and the test is to see whether the person can lift both their arms. The S is for speech: if it is slurred then, together with the above signs, the T means that it is time to call 999.

Early treatment and recognition of a stroke occurring, where blood supply to part of the brain is being cut off, are clearly crucial to minimise long-term damage. However, too many of the survivors at CHSS report that general practitioners are not picking up the signs that indicate that a patient is either at risk of a stroke or having a minor stroke that could lead to a more severe stroke.

Although the FAST campaign is excellent, much more needs to be done to train GPs to recognise other stroke symptoms, which can include high cholesterol, high blood pressure and/or diabetes.

To put the scale of the problem in perspective, every 45 minutes someone in Scotland will have a stroke. It could be anyone at any time. That is why

the issues that tonight's debate raises are so important and why they could, if they are addressed, make a monumental difference to the lives of survivors and their carers, who deserve the Parliament's support. I look forward to the minister's response.

17:14

**Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP):** I start with an apology to you, Presiding Officer, and to Margaret Mitchell and other members, as I will have to leave the debate early for another engagement.

I am grateful to Margaret Mitchell for bringing the debate to the chamber. As the convener of the cross-party group on heart disease and stroke, I am very much aware of the story that Margaret Mitchell has presented to the Parliament this evening.

Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland provides the co-secretariat for the cross-party group. We often hear stories about survivors at the cross-party group—they all have their own individual stories.

A lot has happened, and a lot of good work is going on. The cross-party group was instrumental in developing the stroke charter, which was first proposed by Helen Eadie. When Helen died, I undertook to take the charter forward with a sub-group. The charter was supported by the then Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Alex Neil, before he moved over to his present portfolio.

When the charter was being developed, it was more to do with acknowledging the need for the intervention after a person has a stroke to be quick. That important rehabilitation needs to happen at the time and location that the person requires. Quick intervention could prevent the person's stroke becoming that bit worse.

Margaret Mitchell gave us one or two stories, and those are the sorts of story that we have heard too often at the cross-party group. People can be wrongly assessed for a blue badge, for instance, because the full impact of their stroke is not recognised during their assessment. That is not the fault of the assessment process; it is a matter of not understanding the full impact that a stroke may have on an individual and on their ability to carry out tasks that they had undertaken before.

In my previous work at North East Sensory Services, I came across many people with a visual impairment as a result of stroke. The haemianopia that can occur is initially very difficult for patients, and certainly for their families and carers, but with the right support, understanding and instruction, a person can learn to live with that degree of sight loss as they understand it and are able to adjust to

it. Too often, however, we do not get the right information or the right support at the time of need. That is frustrating not just for patients or sufferers—or survivors, as we say—but for their families and friends.

Margaret Mitchell is absolutely right. Stroke can have a devastating impact not just on a person's mental health but on their ability to go back to employment, to do simple tasks or perhaps just to go out on their own and come back feeling refreshed from a walk. Quite often, the walk that they used to enjoy for leisure is now arduous and tiring; they might get to the point where they do not wish to do it any more.

The peer support that Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland provides is invaluable and immeasurable. Knowing that someone else has survived, has adjusted and has moved on is inspirational for many others. We need to be aware, however, that not just charities such as Chest Heart & Stroke but all of us have a responsibility, including general practitioners and clinicians.

Once again, I thank Margaret Mitchell for bringing the debate to the chamber. I sincerely hope that the Minister for Public Health is indeed listening.

17:19

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** I congratulate Margaret Mitchell on bringing this important debate to the chamber and I welcome, as she did, the young stroke survivors to Parliament today. Key to improving the quality of health and social care services is listening to the experiences of those who have had to use those services. Clearly, Margaret Mitchell has done that: she has drawn to the minister's attention many important issues that need to be addressed.

When I read the motion, I felt that I wanted to emphasise the importance of the voluntary healthcare sector in general, and particularly—in the context of today's motion—the work of Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland. Obviously, it works on all cardiovascular disease, but today we are concentrating on its stroke services. In looking for information, I found that it has 37 communication support services in south-east Scotland alone—I do not have direct knowledge of Lanarkshire—and that 1,333 people who have been affected by speech and language difficulties after a stroke have benefited from those services, which are the centrepiece of the motion. To be honest, I did not know the scale of support that is given to stroke survivors by Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland. We certainly should pay tribute to its work.

Of course, that is not the only area relating to stroke in which the organisation is active. Again in my area of south-east Scotland, it has seven stroke specialist services through stroke nurses, it runs a stroke training programme for professionals in Lothian and elsewhere and it has given research funding—for example, at the Western general hospital, the organisation supports a research project that aims to understand better the relationship between different blood pressure measurements and different types of stroke. Over and above that, the organisation has an advice and information line and it provides personal support grants to survivors of stroke.

The key thing that I want to do is pay tribute to Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland's work. I know from looking at its strategy that it has plans over the next two or three years to involve service users even more than it does at present in planning and design of services, and to develop training for specialist staff.

Also, Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland has been involved in the think FAST—face, arms, speech, time—campaign, which is about the public recognising strokes. It has developed a campaign pack and disseminated it through the health service. Although general practitioner awareness, which Margaret Mitchell highlighted, is important, it is also important that the public can recognise the symptoms of stroke.

I want to talk about more positive developments that have taken place. Margaret Mitchell rightly highlighted all the actions that still need to be taken in relation to physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, social care and blue badges, which is certainly an issue that I have come across recently. However, we need to recognise that, in the years since the Parliament was established and, in fact, the three or four years before that, we have seen significant advances. For example, between 1995 and 2010, there was a 50 per cent reduction in premature mortality from stroke and, over the past 10 years, the number of new cases of cerebrovascular diseases has fallen by 21 per cent. "Stroke Improvement Plan", which I read before the debate, tells us that in the most recent year for which we have figures there was a 10 per cent improvement in delivering key elements of the stroke care bundle. There are lots of issues about getting to a stroke unit and getting aspirin or thrombolysis, if that is appropriate.

We should recognise that there has been consistent progress over the years since the Parliament was created, especially in relation to hospital care for people who have had strokes. However, Margaret Mitchell is right to emphasise what happens after people leave hospital, and there are clearly many issues there that need to be addressed.

17:23

**Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** I, too, congratulate Margaret Mitchell on securing the debate and I welcome the young stroke survivors to the Parliament. It is a privilege to take part tonight, as I personally have benefited from heart surgery, back in 2006, in the middle of my successful 2006-07 election campaign. The repaired mitral valve and single bypass that I had done at that time are still fine, and my cardiologist in Inverness, the excellent Professor Steve Leslie, is very happy with me. I have a lot to thank the NHS for, including another major operation just 18 months ago on a bilateral subdural haematoma, which could have left me much worse off than I am. I have recovered extremely well, for which I am grateful. The NHS would not function so well without bodies such as Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland.

It is a great privilege to be vice convener of the cross-party group on heart disease and stroke, which does much good work under the convenership of Dennis Robertson.

Chest, heart and stroke conditions are wide and varied, which means that the information that Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland provides through its communication support services must be accurate and tailored to suit individual cases.

I have no doubt that we have all, in some way, been touched by the great work that Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland does—even if we have not been fully aware of the tireless work that its volunteers and employees undertake behind the scenes. Therefore, I thought that it would be useful to highlight some of the campaigns with which Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland is involved right now.

First, there is voices Scotland, which is a national network of people who are affected by chest, heart and stroke conditions and who want to have their say. Through free workshops and continuing support, people are provided with the knowledge, skills and confidence to work with the healthcare and social care services to help to plan new and better services.

Then we have the think FAST and save a life campaign, which has been mentioned already. It aims to raise awareness of stroke and acknowledges that, with more than 12,000 people in Scotland having a stroke every year, it is essential that folk recognise a stroke when it is occurring so that they are able to take prompt action.

In addition, there is the aphasia alliance campaign, which highlights the fact that a third of the estimated 12,500 people who have a stroke in Scotland every year will be left with aphasia—a condition that affects the language skills of

sufferers after they have experienced brain damage. It can affect speech, understanding and reading and writing.

For people who have breathing problems, we have the COPD—chronic obstructive pulmonary disease—awareness campaign, which is important because there are more than 115,000 people in Scotland who have a diagnosed COPD. However, it is believed that many more people have a COPD but are unaware of it. Many folk relate symptoms of COPD to smoking or ageing and so tend not to report their symptoms to their doctors. Early diagnosis would hugely benefit those people.

Finally, there is the person-centred activities for people with respiratory, cardiac and stroke conditions—PARCS—project. It is a collaborative project that considers whether different physical activities in a variety of community settings meet people's needs. All those campaigns involve hard-working health professionals, who are also supported by Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland and by many others who get involved.

E-learning resources are also available. There are links to several specific chest, heart and stroke-related web resources, along with national health and social care resources. That is helpful, because it enables people to see at a glance what resources are available in their areas.

For all that it does, I thank Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland and wish more power to its elbow. I have no doubt that without such bodies and charities our health service would crumble. I thank very much indeed all those who are involved.

17:28

**The Minister for Public Health (Maureen Watt):** I, too, thank Margaret Mitchell for lodging the motion and congratulate Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland on its contribution to stroke care in Scotland over the past 20 years. I also add my welcome to the young survivors group who are in the gallery.

Stroke remains the third-biggest killer in Scotland and the leading cause of disability, which is why it has been a clinical priority for NHS Scotland since the mid-1990s. Over the years, the stroke community, of which CHSS is a key stakeholder, has worked together to make excellent progress to deliver the best possible health and social care to people who have had a stroke. However, we will always strive to do more.

I am sorry to hear about the situations that Margaret Mitchell described of the people who have suffered strokes in North Lanarkshire. Those situations are not acceptable and I am glad that she has taken up the issues robustly with the chief executive of North Lanarkshire Council and will

continue to do so. We should not put up with poor customer care and it must be challenged on every occasion. People have to learn that the best possible care and service should be given to those who need it.

I am glad that Margaret Mitchell mentioned adaptations. I was the convener of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, the remit of which included housing, and I know how important housing adaptations are in order that, for example, people can move from a hospital setting back to their homes as quickly as possible.

We have done a lot, and that is reflected in the updated stroke improvement plan that was published in August 2014, which sets out eight priority areas to ensure that we continue to strive towards improved prevention, treatment and care. All those with an interest, across all levels and roles, have an important part to play. It is by working together, learning together and sharing that we will deliver improvements.

We must also continue to strengthen ways to actively engage with people affected by stroke in order to learn from them and identify those issues that are important to them.

I am proud to say that we have supported Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland through collaborative working and that our relationship with the charity extends beyond stroke care, as we work collaboratively with it on improving care around heart disease and respiratory issues.

The CHSS community support service is a good example of partnership working between CHSS and the NHS. The service offers an important bridge for stroke patients between speech and language therapy and independent activities in the community. It provides stroke survivors, young and old, with an opportunity to increase their confidence and ability to communicate in a variety of social settings. Of course, the service that is provided to each individual is co-ordinated by someone who understands that person's needs, and it can be delivered on a one-to-one basis or in peer support groups.

CHSS and NHS Lanarkshire also work in partnership to provide a number of other services, including stroke support nurses, training co-ordinators and financial advice. The services are there, but they are perhaps not being used in the best possible way, or are perhaps not known of. As Malcolm Chisholm said, not every situation is as Margaret Mitchell described.

Since 2010, CHSS has raised awareness of stroke symptoms with 11 successful FAST campaigns, which we support. More recently, in 2013, we provided CHSS with funding to coordinate a FAST campaign along with NHS boards, and it has developed a toolkit for boards to

use locally. That funding also supported the production of a short online video featuring actors from the popular “Still Game” series to get the FAST message across. The FAST campaigns are aimed at the general public and healthcare professionals, including GPs. CHSS evaluations of the campaigns indicate that recognition of the FAST campaign message rose from 32 to 61 per cent, and that the proportion of patients or relatives who called NHS services for help within 30 minutes of the onset of symptoms rose from 46 to 62 per cent. That is really encouraging and shows that we must keep the campaign going so that it reaches even more people. I am glad that Dave Thompson highlighted the other campaigns that are run.

We recognise the importance of supporting stroke survivors to improve wellbeing and quality of life. That is why the stroke improvement plan sets out two priority areas that focus on rehabilitation and life after stroke. Those priorities take a person-centred approach and ensure that multidisciplinary stroke teams offer a range of self-management support. Stroke patients will have an acute therapy assessment and stroke rehabilitation delivered by a stroke specialist, based on the needs of the individual.

Personalised and integrated services for adults who have had a stroke will be strengthened further with the implementation of the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 and the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014.

We are committed to working in partnership with the voluntary sector to support new ways of delivering services. We have the ideal opportunity to publicly acknowledge the good work that has been advanced in partnership with CHSS across a range of long-term conditions. We are keen to continue to work alongside charities such as Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland to make real improvements to the quality of life of people in Scotland.

Finally, I thank David Clark, who has been chief executive of CHSS since 1994 and a member of the Scottish Government’s national advisory committee for stroke since its inception more than 10 years ago. I wish him an enjoyable retirement when it comes in May.

*Meeting closed at 17:35.*



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