



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 28 April 2015

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 28 April 2015

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

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leader is Squadron Leader the Rev Dr Andrew Hill, who is executive director of the Soldiers' and Airmen's Scripture Readers Association.

Squadron Leader the Rev Dr Andrew Hill (Soldiers' and Airmen's Scripture Readers Association): Presiding Officer, members of the Scottish Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, I expect that, if we asked the public what members of Parliament do, we would get a range of answers—some, perhaps, kinder than others. The Review Body on Senior Salaries reported that members of Parliament

"Provide appropriate assistance to individual constituents ... to progress and where possible help resolve their problems."

In this and many other responsibilities, you have been elected to serve the best interests of your constituents.

I am aware that that service to others is seldom easy. Some people have unrealistically high expectations of what you can achieve; others demand results for themselves, but are careless about the needs of others; and you experience painful public criticism and rejection and, in extreme cases, threats and even acts of violence.

The charity that I serve—the Soldiers' and Airmen's Scripture Readers Association—has delivered a Christian mission to our military for 177 years. During that long period, military personnel have served our nation with selfless devotion and sacrifice—but they, too, know how fickle the public can be. Rudyard Kipling wrote:

"In times of war and not before,
God and the soldier we adore.
But in times of peace and all things righted,
God is forgotten and the soldier slighted."

Spurned service and unappreciated labours are, sadly, nothing new.

We find our hope and inspiration in Jesus Christ, who said of himself:

"the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus' life was filled with generous and loving service for others, but his experience was of abuse, torture and death. Yet, as we celebrate each Easter, the Father declared Jesus' service to be perfect and complete by raising him from the dead. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we can know forgiveness from God and have our broken relationship with the Father restored.

Jesus' immensely costly service—the giving of his own life in the place of others' lives—brings believers amazing riches. Jesus calls his servants to find their true purpose in life—not in pleasing ourselves but in serving him and seeking the spiritual good of others. Jesus' exhortation to us all to serve well is this:

"whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"

Thank you.

Topical Question Time

14:04

Nepal Earthquake

1. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I am sure that the whole Parliament will join me in extending sympathy to the people of Nepal.

To ask the Scottish Government what help it can give to the people of Nepal affected by the recent earthquake, and what assistance it can give to the Nepalese community in Scotland. (S4T-01002)

The Minister for Europe and International Development (Humza Yousaf): I thank Kevin Stewart for his question and, of course, I express the condolences of the Scottish Government and, I am sure, the entire chamber to the people of Nepal and the Nepalese community worldwide.

The earthquake that struck Nepal on Saturday was the worst in the region for more than 80 years, and it has caused untold destruction and devastation to the people of Nepal. I have written to the Nepali embassy to offer assistance, should it be needed. As I said, I know that members here will join me in expressing condolences. The Scottish Government is liaising closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and British embassy staff on the ground who are providing help to British nationals in Nepal.

Following the Disasters Emergency Committee's launch of the Nepali earthquake appeal, I am pleased to announce that the Scottish Government has donated £250,000. The funds will be spent by some of our leading aid agencies that are working in the region to provide to the people who have been affected much-needed relief, including provision of clean water, food, shelter and medical supplies.

I take this opportunity to urge the people of Scotland to dig deep and to support our aid agencies in responding to the devastation that has been caused by the earthquake. I know that in the past the Scottish people have dug deep into their pockets and responded generously. I hope that they will do so again.

Emergency response teams are in Nepal assessing the situation and are beginning to distribute relief supplies. I pay tribute to all their hard work.

Kevin Stewart: I know that I speak for people across the country when I say that the Scottish Government's donation is very welcome. It will provide much-needed relief to the people of Nepal, who are going through unimaginable suffering.

A Nepalese family living in Aberdeen has sent me an email. It says:

"Word from our immediate family is that our Nepal home is too badly damaged to occupy, and that story is repeated all across the extended family, where many of the houses have actually just disappeared. They're alive and sleeping outside, hungry and worried."

Folk here are concerned about the impact that the monsoon season will have on their families who are already in an awful situation. Will the minister assure me that we will do all that we can to help, in co-operation with the United Kingdom Government and international bodies?

Humza Yousaf: I thank the member for that additional question. Kevin Stewart can most certainly have the assurance that we will work with international bodies and with the UK Government, which should be commended for the speed of its response. It will consider its future responses as the situation and needs become clearer.

On the Nepalese community in Kevin Stewart's constituency and elsewhere in Scotland, I hope that I have helped by giving him the number for the Nepalese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I will put out that number again on social media. I think that it is also on our website for anyone else in the Nepalese community who is concerned about their family.

Kevin Stewart is absolutely correct to mention the monsoon season arriving—I have heard reports of sleet and adverse weather conditions in Nepal. That will, unfortunately, have an affect in respect of bodies that are unrecoverable at the moment, and the disease and infection that will be spread from them.

I am more than happy to ensure that we have discussions with the Scottish centre for Himalayan research. I have spoken to the Nepali honorary consul general, Sunita Poddar. She is looking to bring together the Nepalese community from across Scotland, to find out the bits of intelligence that they have, to look at the expertise that Scotland might have and to see how, in the long term, we can assist with a fuller response.

I once again urge everyone here to spread the message about DEC's appeal to raise much-needed funds for the immediate relief effort.

Kevin Stewart: Can we play a part in the long-term response in, for example, assessment of material and cultural damage, and in work towards reconstruction and recovery?

The minister mentioned the Scottish centre for Himalayan research, which has a great deal of expertise. I hope that he will be able to meet it and discuss some of the matters that it has raised with me. It would gladden me to hear that he would be willing to do so.

Humza Yousaf: Yes—I will do that. I know that a number of our agencies have great expertise in conservation of historical monuments. I am sure that we can have that discussion with the SCHR to see whether there is anything that we can do in the long term.

Kevin Stewart will understand that the immediate priorities at the moment are shelter and food. No doubt further resilience work will need to be done thereafter. A number of the aid agencies are experts in that longer-term resilience work, including Mercy Corps, which has its European headquarters here in Edinburgh.

I assure Kevin Stewart that it will not be a case of our simply watching what happens this week. Unfortunately, as often happens with emergencies and disasters, they fall off our television screens and people lose interest. I assure him that the Scottish Government and, I am certain, the UK Government will not do that: we will keep an eye on what is going on. We will speak to the Nepalese community here and to our aid agencies and other public bodies to see how we can help in the long term.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the minister's announcement on aid. He will be aware of the urgent logistical challenges that the Government and people of Nepal face in relation to access, transport and, in particular, shelter. He will also be aware of the fire and rescue staff from Aberdeen who have offered to provide urgent assistance at this critical time.

Will the Scottish Government enable further secondments of professional staff from Scotland's emergency services, and of others who are in a position to assist with the urgent challenges of getting access to remote areas of Nepal at this time?

Humza Yousaf: Mr Macdonald is absolutely right to mention our emergency and fire and rescue services and the commendable work that they are looking to do immediately overseas, and which they always do when it comes to tackling disasters that take place.

Emergency relief is the priority: where emergency service staff—or any other personnel—can play a part, the Scottish Government will work closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British embassy in Nepal to ensure that we can facilitate that. We will be able to add value to that in the long term, in seeing to the needs of the people of Nepal. The need may be for water sanitisation or water infrastructure, in which Scotland has a lot of expertise. We will seek to contribute where appropriate and wherever we can. I assure Mr Macdonald that anybody, be they emergency service responders or otherwise, who wants to

help and assist will find that the Scottish Government is welcoming and that it will try to facilitate their contribution.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am sure that all of us will join the minister and Kevin Stewart in offering our condolences. I also hope that Scots will donate generously. The United Kingdom Government has offered £5 million to match the first £5 million that is raised, which is encouraging.

We should also recognise the resilience of the Nepalese people in the face of this tragic event, which has already been reported on. Could the minister ascertain from the minister with responsibility for veterans whether there are any serving Gurkhas in Scotland at the moment, and will he ensure that they are contacted and offered support if that is appropriate?

Humza Yousaf: I will certainly have that conversation with the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities, and with other appropriate Government ministers. We have seen a real rush of response from the UK because of our relationship with the Gurkhas, and I have been heartened by that response, so I shall certainly have that conversation and update Richard Simpson, who is correct to raise the issue.

Another area that I know Richard Simpson takes a great interest in is the psychotrauma that often befalls people who have been involved in natural disasters. Again, I give him every assurance that we will look to facilitate requests for long-term help. It has been heartwarming to see the UK response from the Government—but more so from the people. The relationship between our armed services and Nepal and the vital role that has been played by the Gurkhas is one of the reasons for that response.

Forth Road Bridge (Wire Corrosion)

2. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the wire corrosion on the Forth road bridge. (S4T-01001)

The Minister for Transport and Islands (Derek Mackay): The Forth Estuary Transport Authority provided an update in a press release on 22 April 2015 that noted that, although wire corrosion requires investigation, there are no immediate safety concerns and the cables still have more than enough strength to do their job. The work will be taken forward by FETA and then through the new Forth bridges unit operating contract that commences on 1 June 2015.

David Stewart: The minister will be aware that, since the acoustic monitoring system was installed in 2006, it has detected 93 wire breaks, but 24 of them have been since the end of January this

year. Will he indicate whether that is part of a longer-term problem?

Derek Mackay: Mr Stewart is correct that the acoustic monitoring equipment is providing us with the information that we require, but there will be a further comprehensive investigation over May and June, which will be more intrusive and in depth. That will give us further information on which to make a judgment. Clearly, some of the cracks that have appeared will be worthy of further investigation, but we are still of the opinion that there are no immediate safety concerns and that the cables are perfectly fine to carry the bridge and the traffic on the bridge. Of course, there will be on-going monitoring and investigation, and the work that we have put in place for dehumidification will prevent further deterioration, although some of this is a legacy from when the first cracks and breaks appeared in 2004-05. There is no reason to be alarmed, but we are conducting a close inspection of the faults that have been found.

David Stewart: Will the minister confirm that, even when the new bridge is complete, the Forth road bridge will still be used for school buses, taxis and cyclists? If there are further wire breaks over the next few months, will he agree to come back to Parliament and make a statement, to reassure the public about understandable safety concerns?

Derek Mackay: I say again, for reassurance, that, although the increase in the number of detected wire breaks requires a full investigation, there are no immediate safety concerns. The cables still have more than enough strength to do their job. There will also be the on-going investigation that I have referred to.

After consultation, we will produce a road order that will set out what traffic will be able to use the Forth road bridge in the future. As the bridge transfers to the responsibility of the Scottish ministers and a new operating company contract, it will be designated as a motorway and any traffic will have to be compliant with that status. We will produce a road order imminently, which will go out to consultation, and I will be more than happy to report back to Parliament on that and on any other matter relating to the strength of the bridge. As I say, the concerns will be fully investigated, but there is no cause for alarm.

Scotland's Future Employability Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-13023, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on Scotland's future employability services. I call the cabinet secretary to speak to and move the motion.

14:17

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham):

Today, I will set out how we propose to deliver employment support services in Scotland that will better help unemployed Scots into work, better meet the needs of our labour market and drive sustainable economic growth. I commit to doing that by working with the chamber, with those who deliver employment support services and—crucially—with those who rely on those services.

Today marks the beginning of a process of engagement, within the chamber and beyond, and a collaborative approach to designing and delivering Scotland's future employability services that will put the needs of the unemployed at its centre. First, I will say a few words of context on the Smith commission recommendations on employment support and the challenge that we have faced in securing full and swift devolution of the powers and resources that are necessary to deliver those services in Scotland.

The Smith commission made clear how it expected employment support to be devolved. All employment programmes that are currently contracted by the Department for Work and Pensions for the unemployed should be devolved on expiry of their current commercial arrangements. That includes, but is not limited to, contracts to deliver the work programme, which is the United Kingdom Government's main employment programme for the long-term unemployed, and work choice, which is a voluntary specialist disability employment service. Smith also called for a new governance mechanism to be established that would integrate the reserved functions of Jobcentre Plus in Scotland.

However, we have encountered obstacles to delivering progress on those recommendations. In January 2015, the UK Government published its command paper proposing a draft legislative basis to implement the Smith recommendations that would limit our future support to those at risk of long-term unemployment and limit our services to be for a period of at least one year, although Smith had in no way indicated that such restrictions should apply. The command paper is also silent

on how conditionality and sanctions might apply to any devolved employment support, although that is an area in which we want to explore the scope for a less penal approach than that which is currently applied. I have repeatedly pressed the UK Government for clarification on that point, but with no response.

The week after publication of the Smith outcomes, the UK Government took a decision to extend the contracts on its programmes in Scotland. In the case of the work programme and work choice, the contracts have been extended until 2017. That decision was made despite the Scottish Government's express request that the contract extensions not be entered into.

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): It is my understanding that the Westminster Government signed that agreement prior to Smith coming into force. Is that correct?

Roseanna Cunningham: In the case of one of the programmes, I believe—if my memory serves me correctly—that that took place in October. It was a bit of an example of bad faith on the part of the Westminster Government.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): The cabinet secretary said quite clearly that the decision was taken after Smith, but I have seen correspondence between her and the DWP that makes it clear that the UK Government's decision was taken in August. Is that not correct?

Roseanna Cunningham: The contracts were extended after Smith, despite this Government's express request that that not happen. There is no way that any Conservative in the Scottish Parliament can argue that that is in keeping with the spirit of Smith.

Decisions have also been taken to extend other programmes that we believe will fall within the scope of the Smith commission recommendations, such as mandatory work activity and specialist employment support, and we have still to see substantial progress on the fiscal framework that Smith proposed. We continue to press the UK Government on those issues, because its actions undermine Smith's recommendations and fundamentally impact on the timescales for devolution.

However, the UK Government decided to proceed with those contract extensions before the general election and deferred a response on the revised legal clauses that we provided until after the general election. Those obstacles are frustrating and the frustration is felt widely in the Parliament and beyond, but I am determined to press ahead on how employment support can be devolved effectively and in a way that best meets the needs of Scotland.

The work programme is a pay-by-results/outcome-based approach. Arguably, it does not focus enough on the quality of services that people need, nor is it effective at helping those who are furthest from the labour market. Typically, the contractual costs to the DWP of supporting the hardest to help is a fraction of the level of support that is provided to those who are closest to the labour market. That approach simply entrenches inequality rather than removing it.

As at 31 December 2014, 22.8 per cent of eligible referrals to the work programme in Scotland had achieved a job outcome. That is slightly above the 19.7 per cent of eligible referrals that had done so across Britain. Again, as at 31 December 2014, of those who had completed the two-year DWP work programme across Scotland, approximately 69 per cent were unemployed at the point of completion and returned to Jobcentre Plus. That is hardly a resounding success rate.

The performance of the work programme has been improving, but only for some and not for everyone. I challenge anyone to say that 11 per cent sustained job outcomes for those who face the greatest barriers to work is acceptable. One work programme provider—not one of the Scottish ones, I must stress—was quoted in *The Guardian* on 28 February as saying:

"It's not about supporting 100 customers. It's about getting 50 of them into a job. The other 50 are collateral damage. At the end of the day, they"—

UK ministers—

"don't care about that other 50. It's an outcome contract, not a service contract."

I cannot and will not accept that unemployed people are "collateral damage". There are lessons to learn, both as regards the effectiveness or otherwise of that programme and how we can deliver an alternative and better offer in Scotland.

In comparison, the work choice programme works somewhat better. Around a third of those who go on work choice enter work. The programme focuses on those who are furthest from employment and it has a client-centred approach and elements of third sector provision, which are all characteristics that I expect to form part of our future approach. However, given that there have been only slightly more than 9,100 starts on the programme since October 2010, it is clear that many disabled people in Scotland simply cannot access the service.

We believe that there is more that we can do and more that we must do. The devolution of these services gives us an opportunity to make real change. Working with a broad range of stakeholders, I propose to develop a more integrated approach to the programmes that builds

on the strengths of the current employability delivery landscape in Scotland.

This is our opportunity to develop a Scottish approach. It is our opportunity to develop employment support in partnership and in a systematic and holistic manner. It is our opportunity to develop employment support that reflects our core aims of sustainable economic growth, inclusion, fair work and social justice. It is our opportunity to deliver an approach that can be less outcome focused and more client centred; to have a range of provision, including local and third sector provision; to focus on those who are furthest from employment; to reflect the needs of both unemployed Scots and employers in Scotland; to build on our strong local delivery and specialised support; to learn from good practice elsewhere, both domestic and international; and to align with other services for public service efficiency—for example, for unemployed disabled people by linking to areas of health and social care.

Our track record is good. We are targeting youth unemployment through programmes such as the youth employment Scotland fund, community jobs Scotland and our commitment through opportunities for all, ensuring that every 16 to 19-year-old has an offer of training or education and making a real difference to the lives of many young people in Scotland.

Gavin Brown: The cabinet secretary mentioned the youth employment Scotland fund. What percentage of those who go through that programme are now in long-term employment?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I can give you back the time that you have taken for interventions.

Roseanna Cunningham: Right.

I will endeavour to get that figure to Gavin Brown before the end of the debate. I do not have it in front of me right now. He may shake his head, but if he had asked me before the debate I would have been able to have the figure for him off the top of my head.

Through the devolution of powers to support disabled or unemployed people, we can and will achieve more for those who have not benefited from current UK Government schemes. Employability is embedded across a wide range of our policies in the health, justice and equalities portfolios and beyond. With devolution, we can develop a distinctive approach to employment support in Scotland that builds on that broad approach and delivers our ambitions for fair work, social justice and sustainable economic growth.

We have the opportunity to focus on addressing barriers to employment for those who continue to

be excluded from the labour market and our economic growth, such as disabled people, older workers, care leavers, individuals with caring responsibilities, ethnic minority groups, service veterans and those with convictions. There is an opportunity to consider a broader range of delivery models for devolved employment support that draws on the expertise, experience and strength of partners across the private, public and third sectors, with integration driving our approach.

We have a well-developed framework for engagement on which we can deliver the Scottish approach through groupings such as the Scottish employability forum and the groups that support it. We can also draw on recent research through the SEF on how employability services are being delivered in Scotland by the UK and Scottish Governments and local government to establish a shared agenda with local and national partners, to better join up services, to deliver joint working through clarity of shared purpose and to better target and align the estimated total investment of £660 million in employability support in Scotland—that is across all those different areas. We can build on that evidence base, drawing on the work of Skills Development Scotland and others, and develop an intelligence of the Scottish labour market that reflects and meets the challenges and opportunities at sectoral and regional levels in Scotland.

There are key principles that we must share and follow. We will aim to design and deliver effective, sustainable and appropriate employment support that provides seamless support to those who are on the journey into work; ensure a smooth transition of services so that essential support for those who need it most is available as soon as the existing contracts expire; not simply replicate existing approaches, but aim for an asset-based approach that compares with the best national and international practice; apply a robust, costed and evidence-based approach to our work; deliver through a consultative approach to policy development that is consistent with the empowering of communities and individuals in shaping the public services that they receive; build on our delivery strengths, including Skills Development Scotland as our national skills and training agency; and work closely with the UK Government and the DWP to ensure an adequate transfer of knowledge and expertise, and to learn what they know and what we need to know from that.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary plan to mention the really serious problem in the modern apprenticeship programme in Scotland? I will give figures on that in my speech. The programme is substantially different in terms of its application to those with a learning disability and other

disabilities. Will the cabinet secretary mention that as part of integration?

Roseanna Cunningham: I agree that there are distinct challenges around disability employment in Scotland. That applies across a variety of sectors. We have taken steps through community jobs Scotland to ensure that a slice of the money is targeted on disabled employment. SDS is actively working to increase uptake of the modern apprenticeship programme by disabled individuals. The issue here is not just about disabled people; there are other minority groups with which we have to work very hard in the modern apprenticeship programme. There would be no point in pretending that that is not the case—it is the case.

There are some next steps. I intend to set out details and timescales shortly for a public consultation during the course of this year on the development and delivery of devolved employment support. That consultation will be delivered in line with the approach that I have outlined today, and I hope that it will gain the engagement and support of everyone in the chamber. Once our consultation is concluded, I will confirm the process for commissioning and implementing our new services. I will, of course, seek to bring my proposal back to the chamber for further input from members.

Margaret McCulloch: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Roseanna Cunningham: I am coming to a conclusion, and I would like to finish at this point.

Scotland's economic strategy makes it clear that tackling inequality and delivering economic growth are mutually compatible, not mutually exclusive. Our stakeholders have already expressed clear aspirations about how devolved employment support can be delivered differently and in a way that better reflects the needs of Scotland. That includes taking advantage of the opportunity to help more people into better work. That will benefit individuals, their families and their communities, as well as benefiting our economy, and it includes seizing the opportunity to develop the employability services that will help to deliver a socially just, equal and prosperous Scotland.

I commit today to working collaboratively, while being bold and ambitious, in meeting those ambitions. In keeping with that commitment, I will be generous and accept the Labour Party amendment. Much of it we agree with and, indeed, are already doing. The remainder will be the basis for a good discussion and, who knows, perhaps even negotiation after 7 May.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of effective and targeted employment support for individuals, their families and communities, while helping deliver sustainable economic growth, and agrees that collaboration and engagement is needed to focus on the requirements of service users, to align service delivery and develop employability services that help deliver a socially-just, equal and prosperous Scotland.

14:32

Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in this debate on future employability services. It is timely that the Parliament is hosting a debate on employment on international workers memorial day. I will say more about this significant day later, but I want to begin with some remarks about the current employability model that has been adopted by the Scottish Government and its partners.

As members will know, the strategic skills pipeline model is the recognised framework for supporting the effective delivery of employment services. That work is mainly done through the employability learning network, which is co-ordinated by the Scottish Government's employability team and is primarily delivered via the Employability in Scotland website. The website states that it

"provides a practical resource for all those involved in funding, planning and delivering employability services in Scotland. It has links to a number of useful resources, such as service guides, case studies, news items, events and workshops and policy and research."

However, it seems to me that a lot of what is good about that initiative is out of the reach of the most disadvantaged people in our communities. That is something that we have to change. Web is not always best. I understand that the website will be of great help to organisations that deliver programmes for those who are seeking employment opportunities, and that is to be commended. However, it should be more than a resource. The employability learning network promotes prevention on the website, but a lot of the content is about reaction. I ask the Government to examine that aspect of the network's function so that it can reach its full potential.

The main problem with the current system, particularly the pipeline model, is that it is not fluid. Therefore, the people who have been out of the job market for the longest time or who have additional support needs, including mental and physical disabilities, are often let down before they even reach stage 1.

One of the key ways to start on the employability journey is through self-referral. However, people who do not have the skills to do that, particularly if they lack confidence as a result

of being out of the job market over the long term, will find that hurdle harder to overcome.

The Scottish Government's motion mentions

"the importance of effective and targeted employment support for individuals".

I agree that that is key, and that is why I support an initiative that helps people to take their first step on their employment journey.

Many people, especially those with a learning disability, are eager to take their rightful place in the world of employment, but the pipeline model is yet another barrier that they face. That is why I support the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability in its fantastic work to develop the project search model. Project search is an initiative that aims to bring a significant number of people with learning disabilities and autism into competitive employment. It does that by bringing together relevant organisations to work together effectively.

At a time when many programmes propose pre-employment training, project search provides an 800-hour employer placement over an academic term to expose young people to a real workplace. Uniquely—and this is key to the success of project search—the only positive outcome is a job. Students who move into training or further education are not counted as successes for project search.

The employment rate in our country for those with a learning disability is currently 26 per cent, but with programmes such as project search, we can achieve a lot more. That approach could be part of the targeted, individual support that the Government has outlined in the motion, and I would be delighted if the Government took it up.

The main employment programme that is used in Scotland seems to be the modern apprenticeship scheme. However, the Equality and Human Rights Commission has stated:

"The uptake of Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland is typified by significant gender segregation, with ethnic minorities and disabled people also appearing to have low levels of access to all forms of apprenticeships."

Members will know that I have raised that issue on numerous occasions in the chamber and during my time on the Equal Opportunities Committee. It is a sad fact that less than 0.5 per cent of all modern apprenticeship placements are taken by someone with a declared disability. The Government has known about the issue for a number of years, yet the figures are not getting any better. In fact, the EHRC report states:

"Scottish Government agencies are not paying sufficient attention to their leadership role"

and

"there is a danger that current practice reinforces rather than dismantles occupational segregation and the widespread exclusion of disabled people".

I therefore ask what action the leadership has taken to address that significant problem.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Does the member accept that the Government has committed an additional £3 million to increase access to modern apprenticeships for minority ethnic young people, young people with disabilities and care leavers? The EHRC welcomed that funding by saying that it was

"delighted that the Government has matched the ambition of the Wood Commission report with the resourcing needed to ensure that everyone in Scotland gets a chance to participate in skills development programmes".

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give Siobhan McMahon her time back.

Siobhan McMahon: I welcome the money. I welcomed it at the time, and I have said that I welcomed it previously in the chamber. However, the problem is that it has taken so long to provide. I have been a member of the Scottish Parliament for four years and I have said, at every budget stage, that the situation is not getting any better. The money is welcome but my point is that we could have been doing a lot more, a lot sooner.

Although the problem is not a new one to face the Government, it has not taken any significant course of action to address it. The Government cannot come to the chamber to discuss employability services and be taken seriously if it cannot address such an inherent problem in its flagship policy. Scottish Labour is therefore calling for a review of all the employability services that help disabled people to find work so that we can best utilise the further powers that the Parliament will receive in a matter of weeks.

The Tory-led Government's failing work programme has seen fewer than one in 10 of those on disability benefits helped into work. The vital support offered through the access to work programme has failed to reach all who could benefit from it. That is why Labour will work with local authorities to deliver a new specialist work support programme to replace the work programme.

As I said, today is international workers memorial day. It is an atrocious fact that, every year, more people are killed at work than in wars. That is why this day serves to

"Remember the dead, but fight for the living".

I understand that this year's theme is

"removing exposure to hazardous substances in the workplace".

I hope that the people who are taking part in today's commemoration activities have a productive day. My thoughts and every best wish are with them.

On Friday last week, Scottish Labour launched our workers manifesto. In that document, we committed to deliver legislation on culpable homicide, which will give families of victims the genuine possibility of justice through prosecutions. We also stated—and not for the first time—our commitment to a review of the cases of convicted mineworkers in the 1984-85 strike and to set up a transparent and public inquiry to examine the issue of blacklisting. For many in our communities, the fact that they have been blacklisted in the past is a further barrier to employment today. That is why the issue has to be considered as part of any future strategy for employability services in Scotland.

Work should be available to everyone—there should be equal opportunities for all. In order to achieve social justice, employment should be open to everyone, regardless of their background—their ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion or physical and mental abilities.

Scottish Labour wants a Scotland where people earn a fair day's pay for a fair day's work—a Scotland that protects and provides for its workers. It is a fact that across the United Kingdom, average wages have fallen by £1,600 a year since 2010. That is why it is so important that we promote and utilise the living wage.

Scottish Labour has stated that we will encourage employers to pay the living wage with make work pay contracts, in which companies that pay the living wage will receive rebates of £1,000. We will also establish a living wage unit in the Scottish Government to promote the living wage in the private sector, and we will extend payment of the living wage to public sector contract workers. Far too many people go to work to provide for their families but do not get the pay that they deserve. We have to address that by making sure that those in work get the pay that they deserve—pay that provides for them and their family.

Although the living wage is not a magic bullet, it provides a decent day's pay for a decent day's work. Any future contract that delivers employability services in Scotland must commit to paying the living wage. We must utilise all our procurement legislation to make that a reality. It can and should be done. The time for excuses has ended on this issue.

The Scottish Trades Union Congress estimates that more than 100,000 Scots are trapped on zero-hour contracts. As things currently stand, the Conservatives would rebrand the term "zero-hour contracts" and the SNP Government would review

the contracts. That is not nearly good enough. As members know, Labour would ban them. That would mean that any job secured through any employability service in Scotland would be just that—a job.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Can I just clarify something? The member says that Labour would ban zero-hour contracts. Does she include the zero-hour contracts at Glasgow City Council?

Siobhan McMahon: Yes.

It would not be a few hours here or there when it suits the employer, but a full-paid job that would guarantee payment each and every week—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Siobhan McMahon: We need to utilise our people's skills and talents a lot more than we do now. As a member of the Education and Culture Committee, I have heard and read a lot of accounts of the attainment gap as part of our current inquiry. It is vital that any future employment programme recognises the challenges that the attainment gap gives our workforce.

One way in which the problem faced in employment could be addressed is by promoting the future fund, which is a Labour-led initiative. The fund would be used to allow young people who are not in education, employment or training to develop the skills and tools that would help them secure meaningful employment. We know that we need to address the problem of attainment from an early age, but we believe that that approach would help the employment prospects of those who are already through their education.

Today's debate about the future of employability services is important. It is important that everyone who relies on such services is given the help that they deserve in achieving work and a desirable income for that work.

I have outlined the challenges that employability services currently face and, equally, the challenges that those seeking work face. We have a duty to change the situation. That is why future employability services in Scotland must have enough flexibility to achieve the desired aim for all in our society, but in particular for those who face additional barriers to the employment market.

We also have to make sure that the jobs that people secure as a result of those services are fit for purpose and pay a decent wage for a decent day's work, and that they do not use exploitative zero-hour contracts.

We have a chance to change the way that things have been done in the past when the new

powers are delivered to this Parliament. I hope that we take that opportunity.

I move amendment S4M-13023.1, to insert at end:

“; further notes the report from the Human Rights Commission on the low levels of disabled people on modern apprenticeships, recognising the work being done by the Scottish Government with third sector organisations to help prepare disabled people for work; calls for an early review in the context of Scotland taking over disability benefits, with the expected implementation of the Smith Commission proposals; believes that wider reforms of employment policy are required to deliver a more socially-just Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to use International Workers Memorial Day to both remember the dead and fight for the living by committing to use its powers of procurement to extend the living wage, to back Scottish Labour’s initiative to promote Make Work Pay contracts, bring an end to insecure employment with a ban on exploitative zero-hours contracts and invest in the next generation of workers by setting up a future fund for all young people not in education to give all young people in Scotland the best possible employment support”.

14:43

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): This is a critical debate. Employability is something that we all need to be mindful of and think about deeply. Over the past couple of years, the Finance Committee has spent a lot of time looking at it, through a formal review, a number of debates and a number of separate inquiries.

I was struck by a comment from the Improvement Service in its written evidence to the Finance Committee on the issue. It said that the bottom 20 per cent in school at age 15 perform

“as if they have 5 years less schooling than the top 20%”.

The simple question to ask is: what chance does somebody have if they have approximately five years less schooling at that stage when they try to go out to the world of work?

It is critical that we look at what we are doing, that we analyse the results carefully and that we make sure that we try to create sustainable employment for those who are furthest from the labour market. That would create the right outcomes for communities and, obviously, it would create the right outcomes for those involved. However, if one were to look at it purely through the prism of public finances, it would also ensure greater revenues and therefore less pressure on public services. Therefore, all of us ought to be thinking about and acting on that over the short, medium, and indeed long term.

I want to share with members some of the conclusions of the Finance Committee’s report on the matter. Some of the issues are just as pertinent today as they were when the committee initially reported.

First, we all need to take a longer-term focus than we currently take. Obviously, the Scottish Government, the UK Government and many Governments across Europe want to make the numbers look good. We focus on what are known as “positive initial destinations”, which are usually interpreted as destinations after six months. What use is a “positive initial destination” if the long-term destination is just the ending of employment after six months and the person moving on to a different programme? It will take a brave Government to put more of a focus on the longer term, because, by their very nature, the results will not be quite as impressive. The figures will not be as great after six months, but until we focus on the long term, we could be putting people through different programmes that just repeat themselves, and those people may be no better off afterwards.

Secondly, the committee talked about the complexity of the landscape.

Margaret McCulloch: Gavin Brown is talking about the success of programmes for long-term unemployed people. The new deal programme, which preceded the work programme, had a much higher success rate. Why did the Conservative Government do away with it and bring in the work programme?

Gavin Brown: I am not sure that I agree with the member. Yesterday, I read a National Audit Office report that came out at the tail end of last year and which seemed to suggest that, when the report was written, the work programme was marginally more successful than the new deal programme. It also seemed to suggest that the work programme was improving and was projected to improve in the coming year. We may have to agree to disagree on that point.

The complexity of the landscape is partially due to there being different layers of government, of course, but it was pretty obvious to those from the third sector and, indeed, the private sector who gave evidence that, even within those layers of government, the landscape was too complex. It would be interesting to know what progress the Scottish Government has made on that point. The Government set up the better alignment of Scotland’s employability services—BASES—project, and it would be useful to hear from the minister in her closing speech what progress it has made.

We also heard complaints about the fact that, even after years of discussion, many of the third sector organisations involved still get only single-year funding. It is almost impossible for them to plan for the long term and for clients who have complex and long-term needs if they operate on only a single-year funding model. Councils, the national health service and others were criticised. It appears to me that, although some progress

may have been made, the majority of third sector organisations in the sphere still operate with single-year funding, whereas most Government organisations have a three or four-year funding mechanism in place.

We need to develop a stronger culture of evaluation. We need to look at the investment that has been made and establish what works and, if I may be straightforward, sometimes look at what does not work. In a 2010 study of all the initiatives in the devolved nations, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said:

“we are unable to conclude that there is unambiguous evidence that the overall strategies, composed of a variety of initiatives, have worked.”

Programmes may have improved slightly since then, of course, but I think that the point still stands. The Scottish Government and Governments more widely need to invest heavily in evaluation so that we pour resources into programmes that we know work as opposed to those that do not.

Perhaps the last substantive point that was made in the committee report was that all of us need to get better at private sector engagement. We need to engage with the private sector proactively at or before the point at which a programme is shaped instead of creating a programme and hoping that we can get the private sector involved afterwards. That is particularly true for small and medium-sized enterprises, which in most cases do not have a dedicated employee who looks at all the programmes as part of their job. It is critical that we have greater engagement with SMEs, which represent a huge proportion of the workforce and the potential.

In my final minute, I want to throw some questions back to the Scottish Government. Siobhan McMahon made a very fair point about apprenticeships for those with disabilities. A Inclusion Scotland briefing paper said that out of more than 25,000 modern apprenticeships only 63—or 0.2 per cent—went to young disabled people, and a briefing note from the Scottish children’s services coalition suggested that the figure in England is 8.7 per cent. I do not know whether those figures are correct but, if they are, that should be a huge wake-up call to all of us and particularly to those with direct responsibility. Why are the figures 8.7 per cent in England but 0.2 per cent in Scotland?

I return to the question that I posed to the cabinet secretary earlier. In 2012, the youth employment Scotland fund was heralded as a landmark development. It was the flagship policy of that year’s budget. The Government said that it was going to create 10,000 jobs for young people. My simple question was: how many jobs have been created and what percentage of the people

going through the programme are still in work? It is critical that we evaluate that.

I was told that I should have asked the question before the debate, but the problem with that is that the question was asked before the debate—by Tavish Scott, who I think asked a parliamentary question on that specific point last year. He was told that there was going to be a review and that the results would be published in early 2015. The early 2015 excuse has probably run out now, so I hope that the Scottish Government can give us clear figures. It promised us 10,000 jobs, so let us hear what has actually happened. Before the Scottish Government starts to judge the success of other Governments’ programmes, it should first get its house in order.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

14:51

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): The UK Government, through the DWP, is currently responsible for employment services in the form of the work programme, which is for the long-term unemployed, and the work choice scheme, which is for disabled people. The contracts with providers were due to expire in May 2016 for the work programme and by October 2015 for work choice but, despite many organisations making representations to the Smith commission to seek devolution of the programmes, the UK Government extended the contracts to 2017.

That would have been understandable if the programmes had been successful, but the National Audit Office’s report of July 2014 on the work programme’s value-for-money aspects found that, in relation to the easier-to-help groups,

“performance has not so far achieved the Department’s higher expectations”

and was “approaching minimum performance levels”.

The situation with the harder-to-help groups was worse. Performance was “still below expectations”, and the report highlighted that that meant that claimants on employment and support allowance who had completed the programme had an 11 per cent success rate in finding employment, which was half the expected rate. The report found that, faced with that lack of success in helping the work programme’s harder-to-help clients,

“Providers’ own estimates show that they plan to spend 54% less on each participant in harder-to-help groups than when they bid.”

The report’s conclusion on value for money was:

“Contrary to the intentions of the Work Programme, contractors are spending less money on people in these

groups and there are signs that some people receive very little support. The Work Programme is also not working as the Department intended in the way it rewards contractors for performance. Flaws in contracts and performance measures have led to unnecessary and avoidable costs."

Given those findings, it does not make sense that the UK Government, through the DWP, has extended the contracts to 2017.

If we are to wait until 2017, we must use the time effectively to design an integrated support package that helps people back into work and reflects the needs of unemployed Scots and of Scottish employers. Submissions to the Smith commission supported that approach. The Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland highlighted the need for local solutions to unemployment. It said:

"Devolution of the Work Programme potentially allows for programmes to be developed that are more suited to the local labour market, local skills and local employers, minimising the imposition of arbitrary and inappropriate job-seeking tasks that can undermine claimants' current efforts to move into work and create unnecessary risk of benefit sanction. However, devolving the Work Programme without wider powers relating to social security benefits and operation of Jobcentre Plus would limit the Scottish Parliament's ability to effect meaningful change."

The Employment Related Services Association also favoured the devolution of Jobcentre Plus:

"We would question whether it is feasible to conceive of a system whereby Jobcentre Plus remains a Westminster Government responsibility whilst employment support schemes are devolved to Scotland. All parts of the employment support system need to work in tandem, with clarity about the overall 'customer journey', responsibility for support at all stages understood by all players and with arrangements in place to allow systems to work effectively, including those related to data sharing. Any other arrangement risks a fragmented and expensive system insufficiently focused on moving people into work."

Capability Scotland outlined the need to include welfare benefits:

"A new work programme which genuinely addresses the barriers that disabled people who are found 'fit to work' face in securing employment and provides tailored support is desperately needed. Yet if the Scottish Government itself introduced such an improved scheme, without also having power over Welfare Benefits, there is no guarantee that those participating in the scheme would be protected from having their benefits sanctioned by the DWP."

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations submission stated:

"Importantly, it has often been emphasised that the devolution of powers cannot be merely administrative. In order to create the integrated, coherent, whole government approach we desire to help people into work, Scotland must have the power to both design and deliver employability services. Administrative power over the Work Programme would not support this ambition."

One Parent Families Scotland saw the opportunity for a more integrated approach with existing devolved responsibilities:

"The ability to design back to work support in partnership with currently devolved spending budgets such as health and education would make services more joined up and with the capacity to be proactive. It is particularly important that workplace health, equality and decent employment are considered to be integral parts of back to work programmes and these could be more effectively pursued with enhanced devolution."

The DWP programmes are failing Scotland and the new, incoming UK Government should devolve all employment-related powers to Scotland so that we can design a system that is fit for purpose and delivers for the people of Scotland.

14:57

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Lab): I will concentrate on people with disability or health problems, as that is an area of expertise, rather than on straightforward employability. One in five of the Scottish population are disabled. That is around 1 million people. Although their employment rate has improved by 10 per cent since the introduction of disability discrimination legislation, the gap is still 30 per cent.

There are three UK employability programmes in Scotland: the work programme, work choice and access to work. The work programme is not particularly relevant to disabled people—only tiny numbers go into it as it does not really work for them—but work choice has a much higher success rate of 45 per cent, with Scotland outperforming the rest of the UK.

The individual placement and support—IPS—service should be widely available through work choice, because it integrates employment support into community mental health teams so that people can access health and employment support in one place. The Centre for Mental Health reports that the IPS model can achieve a success rate of 60 per cent, compared with an average of 20 per cent for other approaches.

According to the last report that I read, no one with a mental health problem found employment through the work programme in 12 out of 59 Scottish constituencies—20 per cent—compared with only 10 per cent of English constituencies. One of the themes that I harp on about in the Parliament is that we must consider variation, so I ask the minister to look closely at areas in which the programme is clearly not working.

The third programme is access to work. It is a call-centre-based system, and some horror stories are emerging. It can take up to three months for people to get equipment, and it is available only to disabled people who have a job offer or a start date.

Disability Agenda Scotland's principles and aims are fairness, respect, equality, dignity and

autonomy for those with disability, and who could disagree with that? It has 10 asks, two of which are relevant to the debate. One is to

“Devolve and improve Access to Work fully in parallel to the devolution of Work Programme”.

The other is to

“Support disabled people to prepare for, access and stay in meaningful paid work by broadening the function of Jobcentre Plus and employment programmes to include job retention and readiness.”

DAS has also called for

“A process within the Work Capability Assessment for Employment Support Allowance ... to ensure health and social barriers to employment are properly identified and information is shared with supported employment providers of choice”.

We need a revision of the current payment-by-numbers system for getting jobs, which the minister referred to, so that, as a minimum, in the case of those with disability—certainly those with more severe disability—agencies are paid by the level of preparedness for employment, as a staging measure.

On draft clause 22 in “Scotland in the United Kingdom: An enduring settlement”, the Scottish Government will need to work hard and fast with stakeholders to create a better system, and I welcome much of what the minister said about that. We will need additional funding for unmet needs, especially for people with mental health problems, learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorders. We also need the scope of the work that is done to be widened, to provide on-going support for people who are at risk of falling out of the labour market.

The issue is all about equalisation of opportunity for those with disability. On Radio 4’s “In Touch” programme—I recommend it to anyone who is interested in people with partial sight or blindness—Peter White presented a graphic account of the difficulties that blind people face because of ignorance and stigma. We need to work harder to support employers to remove workplace barriers and understand the benefits of employing blind people. The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland’s campaign entitled my skills, my strengths, my right to work shows how much of a problem such issues are across the disability spectrum.

The reduction in full-time-equivalent disability special advisers by 30 per cent since 2011 does not sit well with the UK Government’s intention of work for all. That reduction must be reversed, and I ask the Conservative member who is in the chamber, Gavin Brown, to take that message back to his party.

It is regrettable that one in four of all sanctions are against those with disabilities. We also need

more support for help to work, which is the post-work programme.

Apprenticeships have been addressed by two speakers, who have slightly stolen my thunder. I had different figures—mine were 79 people with disability out of 26,000. Whatever the figures are, the minister has accepted that there is a problem, which we need to look at carefully. As a start, we should collect data on the different types of disability in the figures, because that is not being done. That is not a hard first step, and it will enable us to understand the problem better and to understand why there is such a difference between England, with 8.6 per cent, and Scotland, with 0.2 per cent.

The Scottish Government could also address the fact that the European social fund is running out. Many smaller organisations rely on that funding and are having to make staff redundant and cut provision for people with disabilities. The new programme is being delayed only in Scotland, so the Government needs to look at that and ensure that funding is provided in time. The time has gone for organisations to issue temporary redundancy notices to workers. Either the Government should continue funding from a different fund, until a decision can be made, or some provision must be made at least four months before the end of the funding.

Another issue that must be addressed is getting offenders back into training and work. When I was a minister, I introduced Apex Scotland to Barlinnie, and I know that Roseanna Cunningham developed that when she was a justice minister. We need to go further in that area.

I also recommend that we examine the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. The Howard League has had good debates on that and has shown that the issue of expunging offences needs to be reviewed quickly.

Roseanna Cunningham: I reassure the member that we are dealing with those issues. The money that was announced for the community jobs Scotland fund this year is carefully categorised. It supports 1,000 jobs—for which people will be paid the living wage—and 300 of those jobs will be for vulnerable young people, such as care leavers and ex-offenders. We are considering that carefully. It is a good programme that delivers exactly what it says on the tin. It is not employer led—that is the approach that the youth employment Scotland fund takes.

Dr Simpson: I thank the cabinet secretary for her intervention. In my last sentence, I will say that another group where there is a problem is looked-after children. I welcome the fact that the Government is supporting the Labour amendment.

15:05

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank the Scottish Government for bringing forward the debate. I do not wish to rehearse all the Smith commission statements on the subject, but it is worth repeating that the commission stated that the Scottish Parliament would

“have ... powers over support for unemployed people through the employment programmes currently contracted by DWP ... through the Work Programme and Work Choice ... on expiry of the current commercial arrangements. The Scottish Parliament”

would

“have the power to decide how it operates these core employment support services.”

Some would say that that was a vow. However, in the last few months of the previous UK Parliament, UK ministers took the conscious decision to extend those programmes to 2017, despite that vow.

As the cabinet secretary will know—because she was there—in March she and the social justice secretary, Alex Neil, met David Mundell to discuss the issue. In their statement following the meeting, they rightly called for the devolution of powers to build a more effective, targeted and fairer employability system at the earliest opportunity, which would allow us to continue to build a focused and sustainable economic growth programme. It is disappointing that, despite that request, no action was taken before the dissolution of the UK Parliament and no cost assessment of existing services was arrived at.

To allow Scotland to deliver effective employment support, we need all job creation and employment alignment powers in Scotland. It makes sense for all those powers to be aligned, controlled and prioritised by this Parliament in line with the economic strategy.

The work programme is, frankly, a dodo; it is not alive to employability or the economic strategy that I mentioned, and its life extension is meaningless and, some might say, mischievous. The UK Government did not even consider the Cambridge Policy Consultants review that looked at the resource implications for employability provision across Scotland.

We have set out the economic strategy and the vision for Scotland. There are four key areas of Scotland's economic strategy—investment, innovation, inclusive growth and internationalisation—and each has a key role in improving the Scottish labour market and, therefore, the economy.

Investment in people, and young people in particular, is key. Actions include the implementation of the Wood report's

recommendations by providing 30,000 new modern apprenticeships across Scotland by 2020.

On innovation, there is the establishment of a fair work convention to draw on best practice and facilitate a joint approach with partners.

On inclusive growth, the Scottish Government will continue to lead by example by advancing greater merit-based gender equality and ensuring that all staff covered by Scottish Government pay policy receive the living wage, which is rapidly becoming the liveable wage. The expansion of childcare hours from 475 to 600 per year will help those with young children to participate in the labour market. Intervention on that is critical.

On internationalisation, the globalscot network of more than 600 business leaders, entrepreneurs and executives across 51 countries with a connection to Scotland provides Scotland with invaluable insights and advice when doing business in particular markets and sectors.

All those initiatives have their origins and plans in Scotland. Supporting that are the employability strategy entitled “Action for Jobs—Supporting Young Scots into Work: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy”, which is giving young people the chance to channel their talent, enthusiasm and energy, and the opportunities for all programme and so on, which indicate that to be successful we should have responsibility for all such programmes.

It is not just the Scottish Government that supports the full devolution of the work programme. The SCVO responded to the UK Government's decision to extend work programme contracts by saying:

“We are utterly appalled by the UK Government's move to extend its Work Programme contracts when it was agreed by the Smith Commission that it would transfer to the Scottish Parliament as soon as current contracts expired.”

It continued by saying that

“it's impossible to justify why such a broken and failing system would ever be continued.”

While the work programme is expected to come with a hefty price tag of £3 billion to £5 billion, community jobs Scotland—which is delivered by the SCVO in partnership with the Scottish Government—has to date helped nearly 5,000 people into jobs at a cost of just £35 million. The SCVO also said:

“All the evidence tells us that the Work Programme simply does not work. In fact, only ... 18% of people in the scheme actually get a job. We're completely dismayed by this delay in ridding Scotland of this exploitative, punitive and under-performing programme.”

We could go on like that about all the things that we have to do.

Fundamentally, as in any business, organisation or association, alignment of an employability support service to the end objective of economic growth, as we have in Scotland, is paramount. The strategic direction of having one strategy that embraces Scottish agencies and programmes under the Scottish employability forum is the only way to allow us to grow our economy so that we create sustainable jobs and, above all, tackle the curse of inequality.

15:11

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests.

Those of us who have a background in employability will remember a well-known line from the Peter Hawkins book "The Art of Building Windmills":

"To be employed is to be at risk, to be employable is to be secure."

That is a simplification, but there is a kernel of truth in what Peter Hawkins said. A worker on a zero-hours contract can be employed but is not, as we know, necessarily secure. A worker on a casual or temporary contract can be employed, but is not necessarily secure. Even a worker in high-value well-skilled job can find that an economic shock, a dip in investor confidence, a spike in commodity prices or a corporate restructuring can deprive them of job security.

It seems logical to think that the workers and jobseekers who are better skilled, better experienced and most able to adapt to changing labour-market conditions would be best able to secure employment and continue to receive an income, but the labour market is complex. People are different—our needs are not all the same—society is unequal and the market sometimes defies logic and breaks orthodoxies.

Opportunity and job security are not just about the sum of an individual's experience, skills and human capital. It can also be about the ambitions and obligations of an employer, the effectiveness of trade union organisation in a workplace, the way in which labour markets are regulated, the performance of the economy as a whole and the performance of different sectors of the economy within it. The purpose of any progressive Government's employability strategy should not be to meet the changing needs of a growing economy, but to ensure that we bring some security and hope to those who are most at risk, are least secure and are furthest from the labour market.

I want to make it clear that employability schemes cannot work in isolation; we cannot ignore the gap between the kind of economy that

we want and the kind of economy that we have. We need a more holistic approach—we have to strengthen demand in our economy and we have to ensure that our employability programmes keep pace with wider changes in the labour market.

We are seeing a recovery but, as the Labour amendment suggests, that recovery is not reaching everyone equally. Almost one in six of our young people is locked out of employment and, according to the Office of National Statistics, 3 million people across the UK were underemployed last year, working fewer hours than they wanted to, and maybe even less than they needed to.

We have to build a better economy on firmer foundations by ending the abuse of zero-hours contracts, by making work pay through a higher minimum wage and a living wage, by raising productivity and by growing our key industries. We must reshape our economy to make it rich with jobs and opportunities not just for some, but for all. Full—and fulfilling—employment comes from promoting better employability, hand in hand with a better balanced and fairer modern economy.

I welcome the further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament by the Smith commission—particularly the full devolution of training. In implementing the vow and putting this key element of the Smith commission into practice, we can deliver a more joined-up range of employability services here in Scotland, and find an alternative to the flawed and failing work programme. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations has said that the immediate devolution of powers to support people into employment should be followed by a wider debate on how employment and employability support should be shaped. I hope that today's proceedings are part of that wider debate, because people's futures depend on our getting this right.

Although the SCVO has highlighted the need for a new programme that takes account of the distinctive Scottish labour market, it has also highlighted regional variations within that labour market. I believe that the client group that is currently served by the work programme would be better served by a new scheme that is more integrated with devolved services, but which is also more flexible. We need national standards and a national framework, but there must also be a greater role for the councils and communities who understand their own local economies best.

I will say a few words about apprenticeships. The modern apprenticeships programme is crucial and life changing, and every young person who is qualified should have the chance to be part of it. However, the truth is that training providers will struggle to maintain the standards and the numbers that we have come to expect from the

programme unless there is a fundamental rethink of funding rates. Contribution rates have remained more or less static for 10 years and, under the new rates, some occupational areas will see cuts, and some training providers might, I fear, find that it is no longer economical for them to participate in the programme as they have done until now. We cannot allow that to happen.

I once again welcome the additional powers that this Parliament is gaining to tackle unemployment and to make people who are removed from the labour market more employable. We need a broader debate about how we put these powers to work for the people of Scotland, alongside the powers that we already have, to ensure that we can reshape our economy and build a recovery for all.

15:17

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): At the heart of the Scottish Government's work since 2007 has been the idea that in order to create a fairer, more equal and prosperous society we must ensure that everyone receives the training and employment opportunities that they require to succeed. That idea has been particularly relevant to our young people, and we have prioritised policies that help to equip our young people for work in order to ensure that they can share the benefits of Scotland's economic success. Like the cabinet secretary, I am proud of what we have been able to achieve with the Scottish Parliament's limited powers, but it is absolutely vital that we build on that success and that we continue to reduce levels of youth employment and improve access to fair work.

Our ability to tackle poverty, create social mobility and improve our economy starts with providing the best possible support to individuals as they move from school and on into work. Indeed, in April 2012, the Scottish Government introduced the opportunities for all programme to ensure that all 16 to 19-year-olds who are not already in employment, education or training were offered an appropriate place in learning or training. By November 2013, opportunities for all had already reduced the number of young people claiming jobseekers allowance by almost 30 per cent. I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to a further reduction of 40 per cent by 2020, which will maintain our position as one of the European Union's best-performing nations with regard to youth unemployment.

We have also been successful in developing the modern apprenticeships programme, which has offered support to almost 100,000 people over the past four years. Modern apprenticeships have played an important role in getting our young people into positive work destinations and giving

them the skills that they need to pursue their chosen careers. I am sure that other members will join me in welcoming the Scottish Government's year-on-year commitment to increasing the number of new modern apprenticeships to 30,000 by 2020.

Margaret McCulloch: Is Stewart Maxwell able to confirm that the increase to 30,000 new apprenticeships will be reflected in an increase in funding and that funding for the current 20,000 apprenticeships will not be diluted in order to stretch it out for the increase to 30,000?

Stewart Maxwell: I think that that was an intervention that Margaret McCulloch should have made on the cabinet secretary, rather than on a back-bench MSP. The point is that when the Labour Party was in power the figure for apprenticeships was less than half that number. The increases that we have seen over the past seven years have been extraordinary; the investment in the modern apprenticeships scheme has been incredible. It has been a success, so it ill behoves Labour Party members to criticise a Government that has ambition for our young people when that party did not take such action.

The programmes are just examples of a range of actions that have been taken by the Scottish Government to improve employment opportunities, particularly for young people. It is in large part because of those measures that youth unemployment in Scotland is at its lowest level since 2009. However, we must also ensure that when people take up employment, they are paid a fair wage for a fair day's work.

Adam Smith theorised that it is imperative that social progress accompany economic progress, and that our workers' wages should at least be sufficient to maintain them and their families. However, many families have in recent years had their personal finances put under increasing pressure because of stagnating wages and Westminster's mismanagement of the economy. Therefore, the Scottish Government is leading by example by paying the living wage to all staff who are covered by the public sector pay policy.

Work that has been undertaken by the Scottish Government in conjunction with the Poverty Alliance has led to the creation of a living wage accreditation scheme for private companies. More than 100,000 employees are covered by the scheme. McKean Development, which is a small business in Barrhead in my region, is the 100th accredited company. The Poverty Alliance's work on that has been vital to implementing the Scottish Government's strategy. Undoubtedly, employability is important for the country's future economic success; in order to ensure that success, we need to seek consensus not only with outside organisations, but here in this chamber.

The Labour Party, in its submission to the Smith commission, called for the work programme to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. I welcome that. Margaret Curran MP also echoed the SNP's submission in hoping that the work programme would be devolved immediately. I was in agreement with her when she stated that

"Scotland has been failed by the Work Programme, with as few as 15% of people on the programme in some parts of Scotland finding a job."

I suspect that that is the first and possibly the last time that I will quote Margaret Curran.

I am sure that Ms Curran's Labour colleagues in the chamber will join us in expressing disappointment that UK ministers have refused to cancel renewal of the work programme contract in Scotland, which is resulting in a delay in devolution of the programme to the Scottish Government until 2017. That delay is entirely contrary to the Smith commission recommendation that the programme be devolved to Scotland as soon as the current contract expired. The UK Government has also failed to provide vital information about the programme that would enable the Scottish Government to redesign how the service works. Despite those unnecessary and unfortunate delays, the Scottish Government will press ahead with the redesign of the service in preparation for its devolution in 2017.

I am aware that a primary criticism of Westminster's handling of the work programme was the lack of engagement by the UK Government with relevant stakeholders. In that light, it is important for the Scottish Government to ensure that stakeholders are adequately consulted in developing any policy, so that a programme is created that genuinely delivers for its users. I am confident that the Scottish Government will take all the necessary steps to encourage an open and constructive dialogue with relevant organisations in developing its plans.

The Education and Culture Committee has discussed a number of issues relating to improving employability through the education system. We have taken evidence on the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce and we have discussed the educational attainment gap and the role of employers on the issue. As other committee members are aware, examining the Scottish Government's role in reducing the educational attainment gap will take up a significant and important part of the committee's upcoming work programme.

We all have a responsibility to ensure that this Parliament is providing the best possible support for people who are moving into work. I am confident that with a collaborative and consensual approach we can all deliver lasting benefits for the people of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

We have quite a bit of time in hand this afternoon, so we have time for interventions and, indeed, invention.

15:24

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): It is always dangerous to say that at the beginning of one of my speeches, Presiding Officer.

I think that most people who undertake an objective analysis of Scotland's economy would recognise the progress that is being made. Employment has increased by 46,000 over the past year, while unemployment has fallen by 14,000 to a level 70,000 below its recession peak in 2010. Youth unemployment is at its lowest level since 2009. That last statistic is important, because the Scottish Government, uniquely among the Governments of these islands, took decisive action on youth employment by appointing a minister with responsibility for youth employment. I do not think that it would be a stretch to look at both Scotland's strong performance in driving down youth unemployment and the creation of that Government position to focus and channel efforts, both within Government and more widely in Scotland, to tackle youth unemployment. All of us in the chamber recognise that, although welcome progress has been made, work still remains to be done and we cannot rest on our laurels in that respect. Both the cabinet secretary and the minister have shown that that is their position in the work that they have done since taking up office.

The briefing that we received from the SCVO referred to the work that the third sector is doing to provide employability support across Scotland through successful programmes. The SCVO believes that the sector has the drive, the vision and the ability to create a supportive, empowering environment to support people who are making their journey back into work or into their first job. I want to explore a couple of local examples from my constituency that demonstrate strong work by third sector organisations and which perhaps offer examples of good practice that could be used as models elsewhere in Scotland.

My first example is an organisation that I believe the minister has visited—Station House Media Unit, which is based in Woodside in my constituency. SHMU offers a variety of different things, from community radio and publications through to the so-called SHMU train, which sounds like an innovative transportation method but is actually a programme that delivers training and employability services to young people in hard-to-reach communities. It does that as an accredited Scottish Qualifications Authority centre and has been delivering the employability award

since October 2012. In the near future, it expects to be delivering qualification awards in radio, music and film.

SHMU operates two specific programmes through the SHMU train initiative. The first is early interventions, for those in school who are identified as being at high risk of not securing a positive destination on leaving school, and the other is positive transitions, which is a 12-week training course supporting 16 to 19-year-olds to overcome barriers, develop core skills, identify opportunities and progress to a positive destination of employment, education or training.

The positive transitions programme targets and engages people in school between the ages of 14 and 16 who exhibit early identifiers such as learning difficulties, lower literacy and numeracy skills, lack of confidence and intermittent attendance. It engages those young people and encourages their re-engagement by providing motivating and appealing opportunities to build on their interests and encourage them to challenge themselves, because many individuals who struggle at that stage demonstrate neither a desire nor an aptitude for some of the more academic subjects in the curriculum. SHMU channels the interests of those individuals to ensure that they can fulfil their potential.

The most recent figures that I have seen show that there has been a 82.5 per cent success rate in getting participants to go on to a positive destination. Northfield academy in my constituency has a programme that has enabled young people to work on a project in conjunction with SHMU press to produce a youth page for the *Cumming North* community magazine, which goes out in the Cummings Park area of my constituency.

Positive transitions participants take part in weekly employability sessions, working on CV writing, interview presentation and job search skills. The course encourages them to focus on issues such as attendance and timekeeping, confidence, communication skills, personal presentation, and appropriate language and behaviour. All those elements are monitored and addressed during the course. The aim is to have young people job ready so that they can not just gain but sustain employment in the labour market following completion of the course. The success rate over the period from 2009 to 2012 was 72.5 per cent. I have met a number of the individuals who have undertaken the positive transitions programme at their graduation, and I am always struck by the difference between the videos that they record at the beginning of the process and the young people who graduate at the end of the process.

I will talk briefly about Pathways, which is a charity that was formed in 1998 and is based in Manor, in my constituency. Pathways delivers support to encourage people's participation in lifelong learning and promotes positive mental health by removing barriers to employment. Since it began, Pathways has helped more than 1,100 people to find work, supported 700 people through counselling and provided adult learning classes to more than 1,000 people. It receives support from a mixture of sources and seeks to assist service users to secure a job or training that is right for them. It also assists with CV development, interview preparation and application form completion, and ensures that people are able to make the transition into the workplace.

A final area that I will focus on, Presiding Officer—you said that there was a little bit of time in hand—is autism. As members know, I have a strong interest in that area. As well as providing employability support for individuals with autism, we need to provide support for employers to make the necessary alterations or changes to the workplace environment that will enable individuals on the autistic spectrum not just to gain but to sustain employment. Many individuals on the autistic spectrum would be a great asset to any workforce, as they have a range of skills and aptitudes that employers could take advantage of. Jobs that might be considered boring or repetitive by many people, which might be very difficult to fill and keep filled, could often be filled by individuals on the autistic spectrum who would enjoy doing them.

Lastly—honestly, Presiding Officer—I will mention interviews, which can be difficult for individuals on the autistic spectrum. Maintaining eye contact is often a challenge for them and they can come across as nervous and underprepared. Support for those individuals needs to be put in place, along with support to enable employers to recognise the difficulties that may be faced. For example, at a recent young Scotland's got talent event, I saw the "My Video CV" app that has been created by Values Into Action Scotland, which allows individuals to record a video CV. That gives employers the opportunity to see the individual and understand their skills. We should promote such things more widely, as they would be of great benefit.

15:32

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Employability in Scotland—much as in any country—is a crucial indicator of the strength of the economy and is one of the key components in eradicating poverty and ensuring equality throughout our society. We know that unemployment can have tremendously damaging

long-term effects on young people. From a financial perspective, someone who is unemployed at a young age is more likely to suffer low wages and further unemployment in their career. That is not to speak of the personal issues that are likely to arise, including poorer health, lower job satisfaction and greater susceptibility to depression. When combined, those negative effects are liable to make it difficult for someone to find sustainable employment.

The Scottish Government's youth employment strategy is a range of practicable, focused and sensible measures that will provide the necessary steps to enable Scotland's young people to join the employment market. The global financial crisis in 2008 set employment opportunities back drastically, but the Government's response is bearing fruit. As the cabinet secretary set out in the document entitled "Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy", the ambition is to improve the level of youth employment to beyond where it was in 2008 and to reduce youth unemployment from its 2014 level by 40 per cent over the next six years.

That can be done through a range of steps. The report by the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce concluded that we need to examine fundamentally how a range of learning that leads to a wide variety of jobs can be provided, promoted and valued. At the most basic level, employment opportunities must begin with an educational experience that is vocationally relevant and focused. In order to achieve that, we must seek the input of employers and councils alike.

When we examine the situation, we can see that some of the groups in our society clearly suffer from a greater lack of employment opportunities than others. Four out of every 10 young people who attain qualifications at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 3 or below become unemployed on leaving school. Young people from our minority communities comprise only 2 per cent of all modern apprenticeship entrants, despite those communities accounting for 6 per cent of all young people. By the time that young people with a declared or assessed disability reach the age of 26, they are four times as likely to be unemployed as their non-disabled peers. One in three looked-after children will be unemployed nine months after leaving school. We really must look after them better. It is obvious that the Scottish Government's work policy needs to ensure parity for all to end that inequality. If we engage with councils and employers, we can find the means.

The Government's work with employers is already beginning to pay dividends. Many employers are now encouraged to work towards the recently launched investors in young people

award. Rob Woodward, the chief executive of STV, is chairing the national invest in young people group, which has been tasked with the implementation of regional invest in young people groups. Those local groups will create a bridge between employers and education and will support employers in employing young people while providing a resource for teachers and practitioners. The first regional invest in young people group, which was launched in Glasgow in February, includes representatives from Scottish Water, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and the Weir Group. I look forward to that initiative spreading through the rest of the country, particularly my constituency of Midlothian North and Musselburgh.

The positive steps that the Scottish Government is taking are already beginning to show positive results in my constituency. The most recent Skills Development Scotland update for Midlothian includes some examples of that. The statistics from April to September 2014 show that SDS funded 223 modern apprenticeship starts in Midlothian, while there were 625 modern apprentices in training. SDS provided more than 3,100 career information and guidance engagements to more than 1,600 people in that period and funded 128 people through the employability fund, thereby helping to support their pathway into work.

The figures for East Lothian are no less impressive. Over the same period, 240 modern apprenticeship starts were funded, with the result that there were 639 modern apprentices in training. Almost 3,000 career information and guidance engagements were provided to more than 1,700 people. Over those months, SDS funded 120 people through the employability fund.

Of course, that is just a snapshot of where we are at present. There is much more work to be done if we are to hit our target of reducing youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021. The Government's road map clearly lays out the steps that will be taken in the coming years to reach that ambitious but achievable target.

For young people, we will be taking the approach of ensuring that they have as much information as possible about the opportunities that are provided by the developing the young workforce programme. That approach will ensure that Scotland's young people are aware of the possibilities that are available to them on leaving school and will thus enable them to maximise their potential.

By the second year of the programme, we expect there to be more opportunities in place for young people to undertake learning that connects directly to employment by means such as school-college partnerships. By the third year, more

schools will be delivering a broader range of qualifications in partnership with colleges and other providers, and there will be more partnerships between employers and schools to inform curriculum design and delivery and to provide work-related learning experiences.

By the seventh year of the programme, we should see enhanced employer satisfaction, more young people completing vocational qualifications and achieving qualifications at a higher level and, ultimately, more young people across Scotland progressing from secondary school to college, training, university and employment.

We will also work with employers to expand work-based learning via the modern apprenticeship scheme. Such apprenticeships are one of the most fundamental ways of providing work-based skills, experience and a qualification while in employment. By year 7 of the programme, there will be at least 30,000 new modern apprenticeship starts each year and the invest in young people groups will be firmly established, which will result in significantly increased levels of sustained employment among young people.

The Scottish Government has a clear commitment to fairness, equality and social justice. We can help achieve that by working with employers, local authorities and the education sector to give the next generation the tools that they need to get a head start in their working lives and ensure that no one is left out. For example, there is the introduction this year of the equalities pilot action, which creates new opportunities for those from currently underrepresented groups, and next year's publication of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council's plan to reduce gender imbalances on courses. The necessary steps are being taken to safeguard the futures of all Scotland's young people.

15:40

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in this debate and I will take the opportunity to highlight some of the issues that are faced in my region of Dumfries and Galloway around employment and employability, and some of the approaches that are being developed in order to address them, which are examples of good practice and demonstrate the importance of local flexibility in service delivery.

In advance of developing its new economic strategy, Dumfries and Galloway Council commissioned the Crichton institute—which is a collaborative venture between the Crichton campus academic institutions and their wider partners in the business, local government, health and voluntary sectors—to carry out a baseline study of the local economy. The findings of the

research were not a great surprise to those of us who live in the region, but they are worth repeating because they indicate the scale of the problems that our region faces in terms both of growing the economy and of tackling employment and underemployment, which is a problem in the region, too.

As in many rural areas, overall economic productivity in Dumfries and Galloway is relatively low, with the gross value added per hour worked being just 82 per cent of the Scottish average. The workforce is less well qualified than the Scottish average: 20 per cent of the population are educated to degree level compared with 30 per cent across Scotland, and the proportion of people of working age with no qualifications is 12 per cent, whereas the national average is 6 per cent.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I wonder whether Elaine Murray is perhaps not looking at the benefits of the structure that she has in her constituency—and which I have in parts of mine—in that we cannot simply measure contributions by pounds and pence. If we have an older population, people will be supporting that older population. That will have an economic benefit, but more fundamentally it means that we are supporting society and the people in it. So, I suggest that the member might, like me, not measure things by economic measures alone.

Elaine Murray: The measurements are not mine but are from the research that has been produced as a baseline by the Crichton institute; they are what the institute is telling us.

The institute also said that there is evidence of underemployment increasing in the region; 10 years ago 75 per cent of people in work in Dumfries and Galloway were in full-time employment, but the proportion has fallen to two thirds. I should say that that is about people of working age.

On top of that, Dumfries and Galloway has the lowest wage economy in Scotland: average earnings are 15 per cent lower than the Scottish average, with average weekly earnings now at £342 per week. That is a particular challenge in a rural area because of the higher costs of transport and other services. The Centre for Research in Social Policy found that a family with two children living in a small town in south Scotland actually requires an income that is 25 per cent higher than it would in a comparable urban area in order to enjoy the same standard of living. In addition, youth unemployment in Dumfries and Galloway is consistently above the Scottish and UK averages.

All those factors add up to a significant challenge: to develop a more resilient, diverse, inclusive and better-connected local economy; to

provide better-paid, higher-skilled, full-time employment; and to increase the skills level of the local workforce so that they can benefit from economic growth in the region. Tackling low pay also has to be a priority, whether it arises from zero-hours contracts or poor rates of pay.

Several initiatives are being developed to address those issues. A sum of £3.5 million over the next five years from a combination of council funding and European grants will fund the council's economic inclusion programme, the centre of which will be a youth guarantee for Dumfries and Galloway, which will guarantee every young person leaving school or becoming unemployed a place in employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving education or employment. The young entrepreneurs scheme, which helps young people to set up businesses, is to be expanded to include a programme of aftercare to help those businesses to survive and grow.

Dumfries and Galloway total access point—known by the acronym TAP—is to be expanded to support more local businesses. TAP is a partnership between Dumfries and Galloway Council, the Department for Work and Pensions, Skills Development Scotland and the local colleges. It provides a single point of contact to support the recruitment needs of local businesses. It was developed after listening to the needs of businesses—particularly small businesses and microbusinesses, because 90 per cent of the almost 6,000 businesses in the region have a workforce of 10 or fewer.

The local employability partnership, which involves the council, the local colleges, the third sector, Skills Development Scotland, the Prince's Trust and Jobcentre Plus, provides a range of employability services across the region, including one-to-one support to assist people who want to get back into work or training. Locally based link workers provide confidential advice and support, and examine the barriers that can prevent people from achieving the employment that they desire and how those barriers can be overcome. For people who have disabilities, that type of support can be particularly helpful.

A team of employability link workers is dedicated to supporting young people who are aged 16 to 19, and is helping to develop their skills by providing access to a range of tailored activities. They can address numeracy and literacy needs, including the writing of CVs, and they can help people to identify the strengths that those young people have to offer employers.

Scottish Labour's proposals for a futures fund of £1,600 for 18 and 19-year-olds would provide further help, which could be crucial in rural

areas—for example, in helping a young person to gain a driving licence, which is often a necessity in a rural area for getting to work.

There has been frustration in Dumfries and Galloway over the years because the national organisations—Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland—have been perceived as having a one-size-fits-all approach that is more appropriate for the central belt and urban Scotland, and which does not work for small rural businesses. I am told that that is changing, and that there is now recognition that regional equity has been missing in economic policy and national business support. That is very welcome.

As I said earlier, 90 per cent of the businesses in Dumfries and Galloway employ 10 people or fewer. Many of those businesses would love to take on a modern apprentice, but they do not have the capacity to do so, as was highlighted in the Finance Committee report to which Gavin Brown referred. Being able to share an apprenticeship with another small firm that is in the same line of business could provide employers with trained workers for the future while giving young people the chance to develop their skills and employability.

We need national action on low pay, we need the ending of zero-hours contracts and we need implementation of the living wage rather than the minimum wage. The developments that are already under way in Dumfries and Galloway demonstrate the importance of local expertise in developing employability strategies. Power over many decisions is best devolved to local authorities and their partners.

Like Margaret McCulloch, I therefore hope that further powers over employment are devolved to this Parliament and will be further devolved to local authorities to equip them to provide the services that they have identified as being needed in their areas.

15:47

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I am delighted to follow Dr Elaine Murray because I, too, wish to consider the issues in my very rural community—although I hasten to add that I am a little bit nearer than she is to Aberdeen, so I think that the average wage is probably a little bit higher.

In order for folk to find a job, there has to be a job there. In order to make any sense of all this, we therefore need sustainable economic growth. I suggest that rural communities need local jobs. The difficulty is that people have moved out of obvious forms of employment over the years. I am not sure quite how far back we would have to go: people moved off the land probably a century ago,

I suggest. People have also mostly moved out of the large factories across our landscape, and folk are now moving out of the high street: shops are closing down, because we no longer shop like that. Those kinds of businesses are not coming back. Not only do we have to look after our high streets; we have to recognise that people seeking employment have to find ways of bringing jobs to them. Otherwise, commuting will not just be the norm; it will be necessary.

If someone has to move, or if a job has to come to them, they are at a disadvantage—if they have children, if they have disabilities or if they are unskilled. None of that is remotely remarkable, and it has all been talked about before.

The point is that unless we address the issues around education and skills, employability services will not take us very far. We have to have more people who are more employable in order to create the economic growth that is necessary and which is the solution to the employability problem.

Mental health issues are hugely important. I am not sure how many colleagues have been made redundant or have been unemployed for a while—I have that T-shirt. Being unemployed is a mental health issue, regardless of the opportunities that people face.

I will pick up on issues that Gavin Brown helpfully introduced us to earlier. Education is a key element and long-term thinking across every realm is necessary for Governments. We have to get past single-year funding for services because it is no use to anybody. We also need long-term evaluation of what is going on. That gives me an opportunity to say, again, to Governments that longitudinal studies really do provide long-term data that give us clues as to what is going on. Otherwise, we are guessing.

I was grateful to Richard Simpson for his comments about equalisation of opportunity. An employer will instinctively and quite automatically go for the employee who provides the greatest flexibility. It means that they automatically look for the flipside of any disability because that reduces flexibility. To say so is not to be unkind or ungracious; it is just that if there is a choice, an employer will go where flexibility allows them to go.

The issue of disabled folk getting into apprenticeships has been well aired. I am glad, because that issue really needs to be explored. I would like to go a bit beyond that, because the people who might get an apprenticeship are already quite close to employment. My concern is about the people within my communities who are not close to employment. They are the folk about whom we need to worry.

I do not understand why it is difficult for us to recognise that the living wage is an economic necessity. How on earth can we justify people in work also being in poverty? Just to say it makes the point that something is wrong somewhere. We have a situation in which government at whatever level is subsidising bad employers. I am sorry, guys, but that has to be wrong. I wonder when we will collectively get our minds around the fact that we must deal with that. If a UK Government thinks that the living wage is too high for its minimum wage, it needs to understand its role.

It could be argued that programmes to get folk into work are merely state-sponsored recruitment services. If all those employment services do is put people into jobs that already exist, those folks could have found those jobs anyway, and we are merely facilitating it. I suggest, however, that the added value of an employment service is to ensure that folk who are close to being able to get those jobs are upskilled—in whatever sense we use the word—so that economic expansion can take place via new jobs. If we keep our eye on that, there is a much better chance that we will provide the right kind of services. Margaret McCulloch made some interesting points about that.

We need an holistic approach that looks at the individual and asks, “Why is this person not able to get a job? How do we improve their employability so that jobs can be created around them and they will be able to do those jobs?” The alternative is to displace somebody else who might do that job.

I return to mental health. I know well from experience that simply being unemployed creates a mental health issue. If being unemployed leaves a person thinking that they are unemployable, they will have a bigger mental health problem. That is itself a barrier to doing the things that that person should do to change their skills, to look for jobs and to open themselves up to opportunities.

I will pick up on the experience of constituents. As well as coming to see us, constituents often end up going to citizens advice bureaux after they have been to the job centre and been told that they should apply for this, that and the other job, because if they do not, they will not get jobseekers allowance. They apply for jobs that they will never take or that they will never get—jobs that may be a significant distance away. For example, a lady in Montrose was told that she should look for a job in Perth. If someone happens to be able to walk to the station at both ends, that is merely an hour's journey and £16.70 a day. If someone has any kind of transport problem at either end, that makes things probably very difficult unless they are seeking a relatively highly paid job, which, by definition, the person probably is not. There are all sorts of barriers due simply to transport, family

requirements and mental health issues. Folk in rural communities find it much more difficult to work their way around those barriers than people do in urban areas.

I make a special plea that, whatever we do, we bear it in mind that the city opportunity is very much easier for folk than the opportunity in rural communities. We must address that through the systems that we set in place.

15:54

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The Government motion today talks of

“effective and targeted employment support for individuals, their families and communities”

and of the importance of collaboration and engagement in making that happen.

Siobhan McMahon and others have spelled out a number of specific actions that are required to support those furthest from the labour market and the importance of making work pay and promoting safety at work. I am glad that the Government has accepted Labour’s amendment along those lines. However, if employment support is to deliver for individuals and their communities, it must also include people already in work who are faced with the prospect of losing their jobs. Sadly, all too many people in Scotland today are in that position.

We heard yesterday that hundreds of paper workers at Tullis Russell Papermakers face redundancy, hard on the heels of Scottish Power’s decision to close the Longannet power station next year. Both those closures will have a major impact on the local communities in the next few months, and both will require urgent action by all levels of government working together.

The biggest test of the Scottish Government’s approach this year, however, will be in the oil industry in the north-east. Nowhere is there a more pressing example of the need for Government action to help workers to continue to have the opportunity to work.

Today’s Aberdeen *Evening Express* reports that nearly 400 further jobs are at risk at Petrofac, Wood Group PSN and Amec Foster Wheeler. Those are only the latest in a long list of company announcements of job losses in the sector in the past few months.

Thousands of jobs have already gone as major employers have shed either contractors or directly employed staff in response to a low oil price wiping out the short-term profitability of most of the North Sea. Many more jobs have gone from companies in the supply chain, and many thousands more remain at risk.

The question to ask in relation to today’s debate is whether the Scottish Government and its agencies are indeed providing the targeted employment support that people need and whether the right levels of collaboration and engagement are being achieved to make that happen.

Labour called for urgent responses from both the Scottish and UK Governments as the oil price began its dramatic fall at the end of last year. We argued for a resilience fund to allow local councils to support supply chain companies in the face of sudden economic shocks, and Aberdeen City Council hosted a summit to address the oil jobs crisis.

The Scottish Government supported that summit—although it did not support the resilience fund—and it announced that it would set up an energy jobs task force, with Lena Wilson of Scottish Enterprise as chair. That was welcome, and so too was the partnership action for continuing employment initiative that followed and which organised a jobs fair for oil industry workers at Pittodrie five weeks ago. That oil jobs fair attracted some 850 people, reflecting the sheer scale of job losses and the level of insecurity in the sector.

The PACE approach of cross-agency working is the right starting place—it reflects an approach of collaboration and engagement—but it is not enough on its own. The Government approach to the oil jobs crisis has to be about not just supporting those who have lost their jobs but focusing on how to limit the number of redundancies in the first place, so it is good that the energy jobs task force has also begun to address some of the other issues that affect security of employment in the sector. Just as Nigel Don said that we need sustainable economic growth to achieve employability, so too do we need sustainable employment policies in order to maintain jobs that already exist. The issue is how far the good intentions that were expressed by the Government and its partners are reflected in the actions that follow.

The minutes of the March meeting of the energy jobs task force were published earlier today. They show, for example, an oil industry employer making the case for increased trade union representation. He was right—trade unions are best placed to reflect the actual experience and concerns of workers who are faced with the risk of redundancy. I am glad that Unite, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers and the STUC are all involved in the energy jobs task force. However, we have seen decisions and proposals from major employers and from the Offshore Contractors Association to change the terms and conditions of offshore workers in ways

that could damage confidence in the industry among some of its most experienced employees.

If those proposals go through, many offshore workers who currently work two weeks on with three weeks off will be faced with a change to three weeks on and three weeks off without the agreement of their trade unions. That could well have the result that many older, more experienced workers decide that it is no longer worth their while to continue working offshore. That potential loss of experience and expertise could prove difficult to replace. That is a pertinent issue for those of us who are concerned with employability, particularly in relation to older workers.

Last month, the energy jobs task force adopted a new objective to encourage and influence flexible approaches to employment that limit job losses and avoid losing the skills and talent that are vital in the medium term. That is very welcome. It could mean, for example, offering experienced workers more choices over their working hours and securing their continuing employment and the opportunity for younger workers to continue to benefit from their experience. That is the approach that we require in employability policy—a flexible approach to the workforce that makes jobs available to more people than would otherwise be the case.

The reality in the offshore sector is quite different. Longer shifts offshore and fewer colleagues working will make life harder for older workers and put more at risk the skills and talent that are required for the future.

The test for employers, the Scottish Government and its agencies is to turn the right words about employability and future jobs into the right actions. If the Government and employers practise what they preach, they can make a real difference to employment prospects for young and old people, not just in the energy industry now but right across the economy in the future.

16:01

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): As a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, I hope that I will look at the debate from a different angle and widen the scope of the discussion.

It is important to remember from the outset that, although employment services are still a reserved issue, the Scottish National Party Government is taking a number of steps with the powers of devolution that it has to develop an approach to employment support that delivers our ambitions for fair work, social justice and sustainable economic growth. Indeed, in Scotland's economic strategy, investment, innovation, inclusive growth and

internationalisation have a key role to play in the improvement of the Scottish labour market.

In particular, I want to focus on the investment aspect, as the key actions in the strategy are to implement the recommendations of the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce. That was a pioneering piece of work that was commissioned by the Government and which will, I believe, truly deliver a better future for Scotland's young people.

In addition, as part of the youth employment strategy, the Government has increased the number of delivered modern apprenticeships every year to 25,000. The Government plans to increase that number to 30,000 by 2020.

That is the difference between the Government and Labour. We deliver for Scotland's young people from our opportunities for all policy, which is an explicit commitment to an offer of a place in learning or training to every 16 to 19-year-old who is not in employment, education or training. We are the only Government in the UK to have a dedicated youth employment minister, who is working towards our goal of cutting youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021 and, of course, exceeding our manifesto commitment to maintain 116,000 full-time equivalent college places and provide the best student support in the UK.

That is, indeed, in stark contrast to half-hearted commitments by the Scottish Labour Party, which claims in its amendment to want to

"bring an end to insecure employment with a ban on exploitative zero-hours contracts".

If that is not an example of hypocrisy, I do not know what is.

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Richard Lyle: No, I will not.

The Labour Party claims to want to end "exploitative zero-hours contracts". How can it defend that? That is apart from Ms McMahon, who made an admission about Labour-controlled Glasgow City Council. Almost 1,700 workers at that council and its arm's-length external organisations are currently on zero-hours contracts, with no sign of the council helping them.

Siobhan McMahon: Will the member give way?

Richard Lyle: That is a Labour council. It is clear that the Labour Party says one thing and does another; the SNP Government does what it says.

Michael McMahon: Will the member give way?

Richard Lyle: I knew that that would certainly annoy them.

That is why, on 7 May, the people of Scotland will reject Labour and its vision for continued austerity.

I will move on. We should look again at the actions of the SNP Government, which has led by example in being the first Scottish Government to ensure that all staff who are covered by public sector pay policy are paid at least the Scottish living wage. The Labour Party does not like it when we tell the truth. That is the one thing that I love about it—it never likes that.

The Scottish Government has taken that approach since 2011-12. The policy covers 180,000 people in Scotland who work for central Government, agencies and the NHS. While Labour continues to pontificate, we have continued to make clear our support for the principle of the living wage campaign.

Further, the SNP Government has continued to encourage public, private and third sector organisations to ensure that all staff are paid a decent and fair wage, although the Government cannot set the pay levels of employees who are not covered by its pay policy. As well as continuing to be pioneering in our approach, we are the party that is delivering for Scotland.

As the Inclusion Scotland briefing helpfully highlights,

“The Smith Commission proposes that ‘The Scottish Parliament will have all powers over support for unemployed people through the employment programmes currently contracted by DWP.’”

The briefing continues:

“However, both the narrative and draft clauses appear to restrict this power to employment support schemes that last over a year. It is not clear why this restriction has been included and it appears to be a direct contradiction of the Smith Commission proposal.”

Like many others in the Parliament, I tend to agree with Inclusion Scotland that it is indeed important that what the Smith commission proposed for the Scottish Parliament is delivered. That surely is what was agreed through the Smith commission process. That is why it is even more crucial that we elect a strong team of SNP members of Parliament to ensure that we get what we were promised during the referendum: the “closest thing to federalism” and “home rule”.

If Scotland elects a strong block of SNP MPs on 7 May, they will support targeted reductions in employers’ national insurance contributions to support job creation, and the extension of the living wage. They will support action to make work fair, including ending unfair and exploitative zero-hours contracts. They will back a minimum wage of £8.70 by 2020 and support measures to extend the living wage across the UK. That is what the

people of Scotland will get by voting SNP on 7 May.

I have highlighted the many actions that the Scottish Government has taken to deliver change and a fairer future for Scotland’s young people and, more generally, to deliver for Scotland’s future workforce. I believe that we are a party and a Government that are delivering not only for the people of Scotland but for the future of Scotland. It is time that the Labour Party woke up to that fact.

16:07

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): It is interesting that, on the broad sweep of policy, we can make common cause with our colleagues in the Labour Party. I very much welcome that. I see words in the amendment that the Government might pick at and so on but, when we put the people of Scotland who have the category of problems that we are debating into the mix, it is right and proper that we try to build consensus, and I will try to do that.

We should think about labels. Quite a lot of labels have been kicking around in the debate. We talk about young people and disabled people although, funnily enough, we have not talked about old people. I speak as the third-oldest person in the debate. I will be 70 next year, although someone recently told me that I will be a very young 70, so maybe I am both young and old simultaneously—I simply do not know.

There are a number of groups that we have not talked about. Richard Simpson, Siobhan McMahon and my colleague Nigel Don talked about people who suffer degrees of mental ill health. As well as people with mental ill health, we have people who are recovering from addictions, people who have come out of the criminal justice system, people who have literacy and numeracy problems and people who, for whatever reason, are not comfortable with modern technology, perhaps because of disability or a lack of access. There is a wide range of issues.

That brings us to the heart of the matter: we are talking not about categories but about individuals. We will solve the problems that face us in this area of public policy one person at a time and we must ensure that we develop what is appropriate to help each person.

Work is an important part of most people’s lives not because it provides economic security—although it must do that—but because it puts a value in the mind of people who work. It says that they are valued and are making a contribution. Work has a purpose, but it is not to build a stronger economy or increase taxation; it is to help the individuals. It is about ensuring that they have a sense of purpose.

People who have been out of work for a considerable time bring to re-engaging with work or engaging with it for the first time all sorts of issues in their minds and which they may create in others' minds. We must deal with those. For example, although one woman in three and one man in four will suffer some mental ill health at some time in their lives, it is somehow seen as a tiny minority issue that does not affect us and, whenever someone has had mental ill health—as people will from time to time—they are stuck with a label for the rest of their lives. Employers will get a great deal out of drawing in people with a wide range of issues that I have delineated and having people who can contribute from their experience, adverse though it might be, to improve the operation of workplaces.

The Presiding Officer said that there would be room for invention and I will take him at his word. As an older person among others, I suggest that we are perhaps missing a trick in relation to how we use older people to bring in younger people with less experience of work.

As older people reach the end of their working careers—which, through choice rather than necessity, is later than it might have been for many—we have a core of people who can be the mentors of the new. They might wish to work fewer hours but feel that there is a good social purpose in bringing in people who have particular barriers to getting into the world of work that, with their experience, they might be able to help with.

I wonder whether it is time that we collectively turned our mind to how we might make that work because, as one gets older, one might wish to work fewer hours. My father, who was a general practitioner, gave up working nights when he was 65. When he was 70, he gave up working weekends so, from the age of 70, he started to work what he thought was a normal working week. He was a bit different from the generality, but we increasingly see the pattern of people reducing their workloads.

That is an opportunity to engage people and give them a sense of worth and perhaps a tiny skill that enables them to get in through the front door and become depended on. Nothing gives people more sense of worth than the idea that what they are doing is necessary to support other people with much greater experience and far greater skills. The old lags such as me and others might be the key to unlocking that.

Something that we have talked about that is relevant in my area of the country is gender gaps. We have talked about how there is a huge skew, with few women going into many of the traditionally male-dominated industries. I welcome the fact that, when I go to what is now North East Scotland College—previously Banff and Buchan

College—there is always a decent number of women on the oil and engineering courses. It is not yet enough, but a decent number of women can see ahead of them a career that is intellectually and economically rewarding and will engage their mental faculties. However, that pattern is not repeated over enough of Scotland. Women are not challenging men for places in what is a traditionally male industry.

I spent 30 years of my life in information technology. When I started, roughly equivalent numbers of men and women were doing the technical jobs, which is quite interesting. Of course, that is because nobody knew about computers then—I am talking about the 1960s—and they were viewed as not quite being a legitimate area, so the men did not automatically take over. Things have gone downhill since then, and men now dominate the industry.

We have to find new models and new ways of mentoring people, including women, people with mental ill health and—with regard to Richard Simpson's slightly sideways reference—people who have the ability and desire to recover from addictions. That means helping companies that are prepared to make the effort to support ex-offenders who have, while in prison, improved their literacy and numeracy skills and who now need to add employment to their portfolio.

There has been a large amount of agreement in today's debate. The Labour amendment, which talks about wider reforms of employment policy to deliver a more socially just Scotland, is spot on. It captures the whole point of what we are doing.

The amendment also talks about industrial injury. We have moved on a great deal from 1836, when my great-great-grandfather died as a serf in the coal mining industry. He was so low down the pecking order that there is no record of his death.

We can make progress. I hope that this debate contributes to the on-going debate about how we can do that.

16:17

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the debate, which takes place on international workers memorial day. I support the Government's motion, but it does not go far enough, which is why I welcome and support the Labour amendment, which seeks to ensure that we have wider reforms of employment policy.

People need to be supported when trying to find employment and equipped with the right skills to find well-paid and secure work. I will discuss supporting people into work, specifically through third sector support, and addressing insecurity and unfairness in the workplace.

The third sector has been invaluable in supporting people into work. Despite a lack of resources, it has done a great job. That is why it should be involved at the early stages of setting up future employability services. That would ensure that those services moved away from sanctions and adopted a people-centric approach. It is hard enough to find work, but it is even harder for people on a six-week sanction, whose priority becomes how they will pay the bills and feed their family, never mind find work.

The third sector's approach is tried and tested. The community jobs Scotland initiative, for example, provides paid jobs for people in the sector. CJS has provided 5,871 paid opportunities with nearly 600 third sector employers across Scotland. The individual receives real-life employment experience, linked with on-the-job training and development and, in return, the third sector receives increased staffing capacity to achieve its aims and objectives. Almost 67 per cent of people who have taken part have reached positive destinations, which means that, in those terms, it is more successful than the UK Government's work programmes.

With the devolution of the work programme to Scotland, we have a great opportunity to do things differently, and it is important that we involve the third sector from the start. As SCVO states,

"We need to give people a real choice and meaningful control over their support. This requires accommodating different needs, with sufficient flexibility and specialist input as required—an approach already pioneered by the third sector."

In addressing insecurity and unfairness in the workplace, we need to make sure that work not only pays but is secure, so that people can plan from day to day and know exactly how much money they have for essentials and bills.

First, we need to extend the living wage to public sector procurement contracts. The Scottish Government recently missed the opportunity to do that when it chose to vote against Labour amendments, which the unions supported, to introduce the living wage. Boris Johnson sought to do it in London, while the SNP hid behind European Union legislation.

At the time, Professor Christopher McCrudden, who is a leading expert on procurement law, social justice and equality, said:

"To be protected under the Posted Workers Directive, the living wage will need to be provided through 'laws, regulations and/or administrative provisions'. A suitable amendment to Section 39 should meet the requirements of the Posted Workers Directive in this respect."

Nigel Don: The lady quotes a respected person who believes that the proposal might be possible. I merely suggest to her and to the Labour Party that they stop banging this drum. The vast majority of

legal opinion and all those who want to err on the side of safety take the view that we simply cannot do what is proposed. We can do lots of other things around it, but we cannot do it.

Margaret McDougall: When all public sector workers have the living wage, we will stop banging the drum.

If the SNP had been bolder, it would have been possible to avoid any legal challenge. Scottish Labour will ensure that we use the powers of procurement to provide decent wages. Why will the SNP not ensure that? Why did it vote down the living wage for public sector procurement contracts, although achieving it was possible?

We want to see a ban on exploitative zero-hours contracts and to end the insecurity faced daily by an estimated 100,000 Scots. Flexibility in work is a good thing to have, but for too long employers have abused zero-hours contracts. There is evidence to suggest that some companies employ people on them although they work regular hours. That is wrong. If people work regular hours, they should have a regular pay packet, so instead of consulting on those contracts as the SNP wishes to do, we will take action and get rid of them.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Is Margaret McDougall saying that Labour will scrap all zero-hours contracts?

Margaret McDougall: We are saying that there is a need for some zero-hours contracts, but there should be flexibility and employers should not abuse them. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have a bit of calm, please?

Margaret McDougall: Scottish Labour believes in fairness and equality in a Scotland where people earn a fair day's pay for a fair day's work; a Scotland that protects and provides for its workers; and a Scotland that offers the best opportunities to all Scots.

With that in mind, we cannot look at employment and employability as separate issues, as we have heard many times in the debate, so it is disappointing that the Government's motion is so narrow in its approach. When employability services are devolved to Scotland, we need to adopt a people-centric approach that moves away from sanctions and works with the third sector and others to make sure that everyone gets the right support.

However, we have to go further than that—we need to ensure that good jobs are available, end the insecurity of zero-hours contracts and low wages and make sure that no one is worse off in work. For the past five years, we have seen a race to the bottom, and ordinary workers across

Scotland and the UK have suffered. A vote for Labour on 7 May is a vote to say, "No more".

16:24

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I did not know that it was a vote to say "no more"; I thought it was a vote to say "for something, yes"—obviously that was from a different member of the party.

I was a wee bit concerned when Stewart Stevenson said that he was the third-oldest person taking part in the debate. I looked about to see who the other one was; with no disrespect to Richard Simpson, it is thankfully not me.

I will leave the comments about the living wage and zero-hours contracts to one side, because this should be a consensual debate and, in the main, it has been. I think we are all looking for the same outcome here; we just have a slightly different way of going about it.

I am not sure who said earlier that when we saw the wording of the amendment, we could see how it could be quite difficult to accept, but I am delighted that we agreed that the bigger picture was more important than playing party politics with an issue such as this. Not everybody has avoided playing party politics but, in the main, we have done that in the debate.

We have heard a lot about the good work that is being done nationally on employability, and it is true that there are areas of common agreement—we have just talked about devolution of parts of the work programme. We can all agree that that is because where the Scottish Government and this Parliament are able to act we have acted well, and the stats, particularly for women's and youth employment in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK, reflect that. That is in large part due to the particular commitments that we have made to assist more women into the workplace, including through the increase of hours at nursery and the implementation of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which will provide new powers to increase the amount and flexibility of early learning and childcare. The continuation of the education maintenance allowance, which is due to be increased and has been made available to an additional 10,000 school pupils and 12,000 part-time college students, has been crucial in the fall in youth unemployment over the past few years.

Those are all positive things that the Scottish Government has done and are part of the reason why there is consensus around the devolution of the work programme, which is why it is so disheartening to see the UK Government pull back on the agreements made by the Smith commission about it. The SCVO said:

"We are utterly appalled by the UK Government's move to extend its work programme contracts when it was agreed by the Smith Commission that it would transfer to the Scottish Parliament as soon as current contracts expired."

It continues:

"But our disappointment doesn't lie so much in the almost immediate failure to keep to the agreement as in the fact that it's impossible to justify why such a broken and failing system would ever be continued."

I was going to leave this bit out, because in the spirit of consensus I should not say it, but that is another indication of why we need a strong team of SNP MPs at Westminster, to hold it to account for the promises that it has made in the vow and in the Smith Commission.

While the national work is encouraging, and we desperately need those greater powers, local organisations are doing a lot of work to ready people for work. I will highlight to the chamber a couple of examples from my Cathcart constituency.

Last week, I was delighted to welcome volunteers and representatives from Ardenglen Housing Association, based in Castlemilk, to see First Minister's question time, have a tour of the Parliament and spend a day in Edinburgh. Ardenglen, like so many housing associations, is doing great work in its local area with its tenants. One example of many that I could mention is the personal capacity-building programme, the only way is up. Of the 28 learners in the initial programme, 14 stopped attending because seven of them found work, six moved in to further education with Jobs and Business Glasgow and one gained the IT skills that they were looking for. Of the 14 learners who continue to attend, nine attend computer classes that focus on welfare reform requirements such as universal job match, CV preparation and online form filing, and three have moved on to intermediate general IT to prepare them for work.

One of the participants, Thomas, joined the programme after being made redundant from his job of 14 years. He found himself in the not-too-uncommon situation of feeling out of his depth due to a lack of IT skills. He undertook the programme and has found work off the back of it. He said of the experience of the programme:

"'The Only Way is Up' was vital in assisting me with my job search. The staff and volunteers at the hall were so welcoming and friendly and put me at ease right from the start—it has really helped my confidence too. When you have been in work for 14 years and a change like redundancy hits you, your confidence really hits rock bottom. I would recommend joining up to anyone who requires assistance—as the programme says 'The Only Way is Up!'"

Cassiltoun Housing Association has a 30-year history of creating positive opportunities for local people. In an area where there is high

unemployment and few career opportunities, its key objectives are to create employment and develop people's skills. It does that through a variety of successful initiatives, including offering its own housing apprenticeships and ensuring that its major suppliers offer apprenticeships. One local youth has been employed for 10 years and is now a housing officer. He has completed his diploma and acts as a role model for other young people in the area. It also offers short-term work experience placements to schools and local unemployed women, and has had great results with people who undertake those placements moving in to positive destinations afterwards. That is also the case for the Community Job Scotland placements and internships. All 12 of the people who undertook placements that Cassiltoun offered have gone into work or further education upon completion. It also runs a highly successful environmental employability programme in Castlemilk park, which has taken 80 unemployed people through an eight-week training programme.

In the past three years, more than 80 per cent of participants have gained qualifications and more than 50 per cent of participants have moved into employment, with more than a third of those in the programme coming from workless households. It is possible for those in Arden Craig and countless others across the country to offer such programmes to empower local people because of the support that they receive from partners, including the Scottish Government. We should think about how much more we could do if we had all employment powers here in Scotland.

16:30

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I apologise for not being here for the opening speeches. This has obviously been a considerably detailed debate.

The core of the debate is Scotland's economic strategy, which sets out an overarching framework for achieving a more productive, cohesive and fairer Scotland. That is essential no matter which part of Scotland we come from. When someone is looking for employment, there is a difference between Colonsay and Cumbernauld, and between Gigha and Galashiels, but the core issues for the Government are the same: increasing competitiveness and tackling inequality. I will deal with the tackling of inequality, particularly the four priority areas that are focused on in the delivery of Scotland's economic strategy.

The first area is investing in people and infrastructure in a sustainable way. It is vital, particularly in my constituency, that the work of public bodies is to the fore in that. The work of Highlands and Islands Enterprise and business gateway is important. Along with other public

bodies, they have to be focused on securing employment and infrastructure growth because without infrastructure, employment is hard to find.

Some weeks ago, I chaired the first meeting of the Cowal fixed link group. The link is a major piece of infrastructure which is a long way away but it is important that every part of the public sector engages in thinking about how such developments could take place. I have also recently been working with the community in Dalavich, which is one of the most remote villages on the Scottish mainland. The community is keen to establish a hydro scheme but it requires the help of all the public agencies to make it happen.

The second pillar of growth is fostering a culture of innovation, research and development. That is possible in rural areas through investment in bodies such as the University of the Highlands and Islands. I am thinking of the science park at Dunstaffnage and the growing amount of work that is being done there. There also needs to be investment in some of the priority industries. The natural resources of Scotland are very great and the Scottish Government has invested comprehensively in the Scottish food and drink industry since 2007. Such investment produces the opportunity for innovation but there must be more of it.

The difficulties that the dairy industry in Kintyre has experienced and the requirement to sustain the industry because of employment problems arose, to some degree, because of the lack of innovation in that industry. The New Zealand dairy industry has been so successful because it has been an innovating industry. There must be innovation but it will be the public sector that supports it.

Thirdly, promoting inclusive growth is extremely important, particularly in the jobs market. The public agencies and the local member of the Scottish Parliament have roles to play. I have been heavily involved in promoting jobs fairs and jobs markets throughout the constituency, and I have also been encouraging employers to think of different ways of employing young and old and ensuring that people have opportunities, especially where they live, because that is exceptionally important.

Finally, the promotion of Scotland on the international stage is vital. Tourism plays a great role in that, as does the food and drink industry and aquaculture. I know that the cabinet secretary is familiar with that because she had that portfolio after I did. The excellence of Scottish food and drink and Scottish salmon being promoted across the world brings people to Scotland. It makes them think about how people earn their living in parts of rural Scotland.

It is important that everything that we do in the Parliament and everything that the Scottish Government does has a focus on those places that are outside the central belt and that each rural and remote community sees investment in opportunity. That requires support for employment and I am quite sure that it needs to be remembered again and again that the public purse has the largest responsibility for that.

16:34

Gavin Brown: I have realised that, during my opening speech, I neglected to outline how the Conservative group would vote this afternoon, so I will take the chance to do that now. The Scottish Government's motion is perfectly reasonable and we would have supported it on its own. It seems to be a motion that wants to explore issues and look for collaboration among the political parties, so we would happily support it.

There are plenty of parts in the Labour amendment with which I agree and can happily support. I particularly acknowledge the reference to

"the low levels of disabled people on modern apprenticeships".

Ultimately, however, we are not able to support the amendment. I have a particular concern about the last section, which calls on the Scottish Government to

"invest in ... a future fund for all young people not in education to give all young people in Scotland the best possible employment support".

That is obviously a direct link to the policy that Jim Murphy announced a couple of weeks ago. We are not able to support that.

I am surprised that the SNP is able to support the policy. A couple of weeks ago, it was not quite so enthusiastic about it and, to some extent, the Labour Party has had a bit of a coup in getting the Government to commit to it. Who knows? Perhaps by 5 o'clock, it will even have convinced Richard Lyle to support its amendment, too.

Ultimately, the debate was one of two parts. The first part was outlined by Roseanna Cunningham in her opening 30 seconds when she said that we were at the beginning of a collaborative process involving Government, Parliament and other stakeholders. That part of the debate has been a success. We have had some interesting speeches from all parts of the chamber on a huge number of issues that we may have been aware of before but were worth repeating, and on a couple of issues that were fresh and new and can help to complement Government thinking over the coming weeks and months. Margaret McCulloch put it well when she said that we must have a broader debate about how we take the process forward.

A number of references were made to the Finance Committee report from a couple of years ago. I commend the report to anyone who wants to drive forward the employability process. We heard about the specific rural elements, most recently from Mike Russell. Before that, Elaine Murray and Nigel Don made valuable contributions on that issue.

Elaine Murray also talked about an element of the committee report that I had forgotten about, although the matter came flooding back as soon as she mentioned it. A lot of smaller businesses—not only in rural areas—said that they wanted to take on an apprentice, but they quite literally had only half a job available. If an apprentice could be shared among several companies or organisations, we might find that a significant additional number would end up taking on an apprentice. I know that there are difficulties with that and the approach is not quite as simple as putting two and two together. However, perhaps we can make progress, which would be a welcome step forward.

We heard good examples of local activities. Mark McDonald talked about SHMU in his constituency, which has an 80-plus per cent success rate. I would be interested to hear more details about that, because anything with such a high percentage success rate is worthy of further examination.

We also had an interesting contribution, as we usually do, from Stewart Stevenson, who—quite rightly—brought mental health to the fore. When he was freewheeling, his mentoring suggestion was an interesting one. Indeed, the idea of getting those with huge experience who eventually want to do slightly fewer hours passing on more of their knowledge in a more structured way over time was a valid contribution.

As I say, the first part of the debate was a big success, but I was a little disappointed in the second half. In that, the Scottish Government basically said, "We need more powers because the UK doesn't do this terribly well and we do everything completely brilliantly." I obviously exaggerate slightly, but the subtext of what the Scottish Government wanted to say was, "We do it so well here that that's why we need everything."

Roseanna Cunningham: By which Gavin Brown means that we did not say that.

Gavin Brown: When pressed on its policies, the Scottish Government was unable to answer questions or to hold itself to account.

On apprenticeships, the overall numbers are welcome. I think that members from all parts of the chamber talked about that. However, on Inclusion Scotland's figures, there is a difficulty. The Government describes the number of disabled

people with an apprenticeship as a challenge, but the figures from Inclusion Scotland come from 2012-13. We are in 2015, so we should be at a stage when the Government is able to say more than, "It's a bit of a challenge", particularly if the figure in England—I have not had the figures verified; they have come to me from the Scottish Children's Services Coalition—is 8.7 per cent, while the figure in Scotland is 0.2 per cent.

That is not just a small difference; that is a completely different approach, and something that ought to be investigated urgently by the Scottish Government as soon as this debate is finished. That is one issue on which I think that it has failed.

On the youth employment Scotland fund, one of its flagship policies, the Scottish Government has been unable to say, in response to inquiries through the Scottish Parliament information centre, parliamentary questions last year and questions asked again today, how many jobs have been created and how many of the placements turn into longer-term jobs after the initial period.

The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing): The youth employment Scotland fund is an employer recruitment incentive approach and is therefore not directly comparable to the work programme, as I am sure Mr Brown will accept. On his other point about evaluation, it is quite right that there will be an evaluation, and the findings of the evaluation will be shared with Parliament as soon as they are available.

Gavin Brown: I am not sure that that intervention casts the Scottish Government in a particularly good light. The Scottish Government said that it would create 10,000 opportunities. Those are not my words; they were John Swinney's words. The key plank of the Scottish Government's budget for 2013-14 was that it would create 10,000 opportunities, and all that we are asking now, several years later, is how many opportunities have been created. Surely the Scottish Government must know that figure. The figure for 2013-14 is not going to change, given that we are well outside that financial year, so the Scottish Government must know. It told Tavish Scotland in an answer last year that it would tell us everything at the beginning of this year, and it has not done so.

We are simply asking the Scottish Government to tell us what has happened to that flagship policy and whether it actually has delivered results. I hope that the minister, in summing up, will give us some answers to the challenges posed to the Scottish Government, instead of just criticising others.

16:42

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill)

(Lab): Commitments that I had today here in Parliament prevented me from attending the annual international workers memorial day event at Summerlee heritage park in Coatbridge, as I would have liked to do and as I normally do, so I thank the Scottish Government for holding this debate this afternoon so that my colleague, Siobhan McMahon, could lodge an amendment that recognises the importance of today

"to both remember the dead and fight for the living".

It is good that we are debating employability, but we should be looking at not just how we get people into work but what type of employment people should have the right to expect and how we can achieve that. Margaret McCulloch's speech drew those issues out particularly well.

Ms McMahon is also right to raise the fact that the Scottish Government should be committing to use its powers of procurement to extend the living wage and bring an end to insecure employment with a ban on exploitative zero-hours contracts. To assist James Dornan and Richard Lyle further, that means Glasgow, Greenock, Grangemouth and any part of Scotland that begins with or without a G. I hope that that is clear.

James Dornan: Just for clarification, is it with or without the exploitative aspect of such contracts? That was not clear from either of the earlier contributors.

Michael McMahon: I do not know whether Mr Dornan is hard of understanding or hard of hearing. I said, to be of assistance, that it is exploitative contracts we are referring to. There is a clear difference, which the trade union organisations recognise, between a flexible contract and an exploitative zero-hours contract. I think that Mr Dornan should go away and try to understand that for himself.

I am particularly pleased that the cabinet secretary indicated her support for the Scottish Labour Party's amendment this afternoon, because it promotes make-work-pay contracts as well as our commitment on zero-hours contracts. It does not chime with what the Government said when we announced that in our manifesto, and it is certainly not in the SNP manifesto, so I wonder why the Government chose to support our amendment this afternoon, but I welcome it anyway. It is just unfortunate that someone clearly did not send Mr Lyle the memo. He traduced Labour for its position on those issues and he confirmed, in spite of what the cabinet secretary said, that he does not support Labour's position. The SNP should clarify that for us.

As Richard Lyle spoke, I was reminded of the axiom that it is better to stay silent and let people think that you are a fool than to open your mouth and prove it.

Members: Oh!

Richard Lyle *rose—*

Michael McMahon: Go on—do it again.

Richard Lyle: I ask the member to withdraw that. At the end of the day, I have called him for what he is, not what he believes he is.

Michael McMahon: I think that Mr Lyle has continued to prove the point that I was making. I recommend that he look to his colleague Stewart Stevenson, who clearly understood the message that was being delivered from the SNP front bench this afternoon and took us into a broad consensus on the points that we can and should agree on.

Although our amendment recognises the work that the Scottish Government is doing with the third sector—it is right that we do that—and that a lot of help is needed to prepare disabled people for work—we understand that as well—the Government cannot deny the point that has been made in the debate that, according to Inclusion Scotland's statistics, the latest figures show that the employment rate among disabled people in Scotland has fallen to just 40.8 per cent despite the fact that the overall employment rate for the whole working-age population has risen to almost 75 per cent. We have to look at that.

Given those figures, it is worth reiterating that in 2012-13 just 63 out of 25,691 modern apprenticeships went to disabled young people—that is a shameful 0.2 per cent. No matter how much the Government might want to pat itself on the back for its achievement on modern apprenticeships—I take Stewart Stevenson's point that we want to get to 30,000 modern apprenticeships—it should not compare the current figures with the figures that were achieved under the previous Labour Administration, as that would be comparing apples with oranges.

Under the previous Labour Administration, only levels 4 and 3 at SVQ were counted as modern apprenticeships whereas the Scottish Government now counts level 2 and other SVQ in-work qualifications. I am not decrying that—it is not a bad thing—but the Government should please not try to say that it has moved to the figure of 25,000 compared with what was counted before, as the qualifications are being counted differently. It is important to note that.

Given those figures, no one could disagree that disabled people's on-going exclusion from the labour market, through discrimination and a failure to provide the necessary support to enable them to access employment, must be tackled. That is

why Labour has used its amendment to call for an early review in the context of Scotland taking over disability benefits with the expected implementation of the Smith commission's proposals. We believe that wider reforms of employment policy are required to deliver a more socially just Scotland.

My experience of listening to employers tells me that, at present, the expectations of the private sector are far too often at odds with the structures of employment programmes that are designed and run by public sector agencies such as Jobcentre Plus and Skills Development Scotland. Any employment programme must have the earliest possible private sector involvement so that employer initiatives have the best possible chance to succeed in meeting the needs of the business sectors that we rely on to provide the sustainable economic growth that we all desire. I agree with Stewart Maxwell on that point.

Our main criticism, which has been voiced in the debate, is that it seems that Skills Development Scotland identifies the outcome that it wants and then tries to fit round SME pegs into square training place holes that it has designed in order to meet its targets. Elaine Murray highlighted an important example of the SDS one-size-fits-all attitude in her area, and Nigel Don and Lewis Macdonald introduced into the debate perspectives on the need to consider local job market conditions. That is an important aspect.

We often hear that businesses and the Government are under intense pressure to become more strategic in developing and assessing employability initiatives and the skill sets that need to be created to meet current and envisaged skill shortages. Business groups claim to be linking strategic planning more directly with training, development and recruitment, while our education and skills system claims to be moving towards skill-based outcomes.

Government agencies are keen on certifying learners' employability skills, whether through modern apprenticeships, SVQs or other vocational courses, as a means of indicating that people have been enabled to negotiate their transition to the world of work. However, what seems to be missing is the robust evidence that we need to be sure that that is being achieved.

Although there is no doubt that employers and educators know that the development of skills is essential to Scotland's competitiveness and growth in highly competitive global markets, they find it difficult to take effective, concerted action to establish programmes for delivering them. Regardless of whether they disagree with that opinion, there seems to me to be a certain lack of clarity about what employability skills are, how they are connected to one another and how to

approach the process of developing them. Connecting the separate worlds of work and education by developing employability skills should also help to promote a culture of lifelong learning that will provide benefits to the economy at large in the longer term.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I am afraid that you must now draw to a close.

Michael McMahon: A number of members talked about the long-term importance of that, and it is important that we draw that message from the debate.

I look forward to listening to the minister's response to the debate, and I hope that the consensus continues to the point that we agree just how important an issue employability is for Scotland as we go forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Annabelle Ewing to wind up the debate. Minister, I am afraid that all the extra time has been used up, and I would be grateful if you could finish by 5 o'clock.

16:51

The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing): I will certainly do my best, Presiding Officer.

Today's debate has been interesting and wide ranging, and I welcome the contributions of all those members who have taken part in it. I will try to pick up on a number of the points that were made, but first I want to stress the important point that, as the cabinet secretary made clear in her opening speech, we want to listen to ideas and views from across the board and, as far as possible, to build a consensual and collaborative approach to the devolution of employment support services.

We intend to engage with a broad range of stakeholders and service providers through the public consultation that we will launch this year. I thank the SCVO, Inclusion Scotland and the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland for taking the time to provide briefings for today's debate. Those briefings reflect the third sector's enthusiasm to make a contribution to the debate and to ensure that its suggestions are duly considered. In our consultation, we will focus particularly on the position of users of employment support services, because we need to understand their needs to ensure that they are empowered to make progress into the world of work by being closely involved in the development and design of those services.

We take that approach because we believe that those who use services can make a critical contribution to how they can best be delivered; because we believe in participative democracy,

empowering communities, building community capacity and enabling more people to participate in decision making about issues that affect them; and because we believe that the devolution of employment support services provides Scotland with significant opportunities that we intend to seize and maximise.

I turn to some of the points that were made. I welcome Siobhan McMahon's approach, because she came along to the debate with some suggestions. That is what the debate is all about. The point that she made about the employability in Scotland website was important and I will certainly take it back to officials. The point of communication is to communicate; if there are people whom that website is not serving, we need to find a way of communicating with those people.

I was aware of the project search model, but I will look into it closely. I am quite sure that the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability will wish to be closely involved in the roll-out of our devolved employment support services, particularly those for disabled people, and I am sure that it will play a key role in that process.

Gavin Brown raised a number of points, one of which I dealt with in my intervention. On the alignment of employability, on which Gordon MacDonald and Chic Brodie made good points, at the moment we are a bit hamstrung because the jigsaw is fragmented—some of the powers are here and some of them are at Westminster. That has been recognised by many of the third sector organisations that have been mentioned.

Gavin Brown: Will the minister give way?

Annabelle Ewing: I have already dealt with one of the member's points in my intervention. I have little time and I am trying to get round as many members who spoke as possible.

That fragmentation is, indeed, holding us back, and I think that we could do an awful lot better if we had the devolved powers that were suggested in the heads of agreement of the Smith commission. I hope that the member will support the devolution of those powers and not the more restrictive powers that came up in the draft clauses.

An important issue that was raised by a number of members, including Gavin Brown and Michael McMahon, was access to employment for people with disabilities. It is fair to say that the modern apprenticeship scheme is only one scheme and that the reporting on other areas in terms of numbers is perhaps not being picked up on. However, it is also fair to say that a lot of work still needs to be done, which is why as part of the national programme under the developing Scotland's young workforce project we have allocated some additional funding that is part of a

wider £3 million allocation in 2014-15 to develop a range of equality activities. One of those activities is research by various stakeholders, which I think is about to be completed. Once we have that research, we will be in a position to proceed on an action plan.

Michael McMahon *rose—*

Annabelle Ewing: I will take a very brief intervention from Michael McMahon, because we have already heard from him.

Michael McMahon: I will be very brief in order to try to be helpful. I take the point that the minister is making, and it would be useful if we could get the figures on people in training who have disabilities in the round, so that we can have that proper contrast.

Annabelle Ewing: I accept that point. I was going on to say to Dr Simpson that what he suggested about a breakdown of the kinds of disability is important, but it has been pointed out to me in my work alongside Michael McMahon and Siobhan McMahon on the cross-party group on disability and, indeed, in other areas that some people with a disability do not self-identify as such. That issue must be borne in mind, but nonetheless I think that, to the extent that we can, we should try to gather more information to better equip ourselves to work out a better way forward.

Margaret McCulloch made the good point, with which I entirely agree, that employability schemes do not work in isolation. Stewart Maxwell spoke about McKean Developments Ltd in Barrhead in his constituency being the 100th accredited living wage employer. I had the pleasure of meeting representatives of the firm at a reception in a bar in Dennistoun on the day when the firm received the accreditation, and they were very proud to have achieved it.

Mark McDonald mentioned the excellent approach to employability by Station House Media Unit; I had a very successful visit to SHMU and I was very impressed with the excellent work that it does. Colin Beattie mentioned the invest in young people accolade; I encourage all members to engage with local businesses and encourage them to consider becoming accredited in terms of the invest in young people accolade. Elaine Murray looked at various local issues in Dumfries and Galloway; if there is good practice to learn about, I hope that Dr Murray will make that known to me.

Nigel Don made a key point about the need to secure further economic growth in order to secure the better opportunities for young people that we all wish to see. Lewis Macdonald highlighted the important work of the energy jobs task force; in that regard, the Scottish Government has been working closely with unions and will continue to do so. Richard Lyle—well, what can I say? He made

a passionate speech and he was very passionate indeed about the need for fair work, with which I think that we can all agree.

Stewart Stevenson spoke about the overriding need to put first the interests of people who are in need of a bit of help to get into the world of work. That is the overriding approach that we have taken to today's debate. He also made a powerful plea about the need to treat people as individuals and not as categories, and I entirely agree with that point. Margaret McDougall stressed the important role of the third sector in employment support provision, which was a point well made from her experience in the cross-party group on volunteering.

James Dornan talked about local examples from his constituency of Glasgow Cathcart of young people getting the skills that they need to make their way into the world of work with help from programmes such as the only way is up programme—I feel a wee visit to Cathcart coming on, probably. Mike Russell stepped into the breach to make a brief contribution to the debate, and a very interesting one it was, too. He focused on the need to tackle inequality in society, and in that regard highlighted the important role that jobs fairs can play. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. Let us hear the minister closing.

Annabelle Ewing: That example from Mike Russell illustrates the wide-ranging nature of the debate.

I have only a little bit of time left, so I will not read out the very long, detailed, technical speech that I have with me—I am just going through all the pages.

A number of important points have emerged from the debate. The suggestions that have been made will be duly considered by the Government. That is the point of the exercise—we want a broad discussion about how we can do this better, because that is how we will better serve the people who rely on us to act in a way that serves their interests, rather than being diverted down other routes.

The Government has established a strong track record in supporting people into work, and we have heard evidence of that today. I am determined that we will seize the opportunity brought by the planned devolution of employment support services to build on that success and to ensure that more people secure better work. We must secure the benefits that that will bring to Scotland, her people and her communities.

Decision Time

17:01

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is decision time. I ask members who are in the chamber and who hope to vote to check that their cards are properly inserted in their consoles.

There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S4M-13023.1, in the name of Siobhan McMahon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-13023, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on Scotland's future employability services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 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)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (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)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)

Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 54, Against 13, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S4M-13023, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on Scottish's future employability services, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 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)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (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)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)

Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 57, Against 9, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of effective and targeted employment support for individuals, their families and communities, while helping deliver sustainable economic growth; agrees that collaboration and engagement is needed to focus on the requirements of service users, to align service delivery and develop employability services that help deliver a socially-just, equal and prosperous Scotland; further notes the report from the Human Rights Commission on the low levels of disabled people on modern apprenticeships, recognising the work being done by the Scottish Government with third sector organisations to help prepare disabled people for work; calls for an early review in the context of Scotland taking over disability benefits, with the expected implementation of the Smith Commission proposals; believes that wider reforms of employment policy are required to deliver a more socially-just Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to use International Workers Memorial Day to both remember the dead and fight for the living by

committing to use its powers of procurement to extend the living wage, to back Scottish Labour's initiative to promote Make Work Pay contracts, bring an end to insecure employment with a ban on exploitative zero-hours contracts and invest in the next generation of workers by setting up a future fund for all young people not in education to give all young people in Scotland the best possible employment support.

Prestwick Airport Spaceport Bid

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-12526, in the name of John Scott, on Prestwick airport spaceport bid. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the inclusion of Glasgow Prestwick Airport in the shortlist of sites being considered to host the UK's first spaceport; believes that the location of a spaceport at Glasgow Prestwick Airport would represent an opportunity to increase the airport's revenue, enhance the reputation of the Prestwick aerospace campus as a centre of excellence and provide a boost for the Ayrshire economy, and notes the view that the airport should be promoted as Scotland's preferred bidder to be the UK's first commercial spaceport.

17:04

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I thank colleagues from all parties for their support for my motion and for taking part in the debate.

Since 1913, when Monkton meadows was first used for manned flight, Prestwick has been at the forefront of pioneering flight. In 1935, Hamilton and McIntyre created Scottish Aviation at Prestwick, which is still the blueprint for the airport and aerospace hub that surrounds Prestwick today. The 1950s and 1960s saw Prestwick pioneer transatlantic flight from the United Kingdom. Now, just over 100 years after the first flight from Monkton meadows, another Scottish and UK pioneering opportunity exists at Prestwick airport.

So what opportunity does a UK spaceport represent? No longer is space the "final frontier", to borrow a phrase. In our modern world, it is the next frontier. We must urgently grasp with both hands the opportunity to develop the space industry.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Scott, could I stop you for a moment? Could the back door be closed, please? I am afraid that noise is drifting into the chamber.

John Scott: The UK space sector has a turnover of £11.3 billion and employs 34,000 people. The target is to grow our UK space industry to £40 billion turnover in the next 15 years and to create 100,000 jobs in the process. The major barrier to that growth is the lack of a UK spaceport. While America and Russia lead the way in this industry, we in the United Kingdom must create our own spaceport, and we must do so soon in order to capture our share of the growing satellite launch and deployment market,

and to position ourselves for space travel and space tourism in due course.

If we accept that we must develop a spaceport, the next question is where is best suited to our doing so. I suggest that the location of choice in Scotland and the United Kingdom is Prestwick airport. First, Prestwick airport is already home to a diversified manufacturing aerospace industry and a maintenance, repair and overhaul hub. There are more than 3,000 jobs in our world-class aerospace hub and its supply chain at Prestwick. Creating, building and maintaining pioneering and existing aircraft is part of our DNA at Prestwick and throughout Ayrshire. The Twin Pioneer and the Jetstream 31 and 41 aircraft are perhaps the most iconic examples of that.

Our local community has always welcomed innovation at our airport and in our aerospace industry. It takes particular pride in Prestwick's history and a keen and supportive interest in its future. More than 800 acres of land is available to and used by this already diversified airport, and significant land is available for future growth. First-class road and rail links now exist; motorway connections from Glasgow and central Scotland are available to the front door of Prestwick airport and there are now, in addition, direct rail links to the airport from Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Prestwick already handles civil passengers, freight, United Kingdom and NATO military aircraft, as well as search and rescue from HMS Gannet. NATS Ltd has one of its two UK centres less than a kilometre from the airport, where it employs more than 700 dedicated professionals in the air traffic control industry. With clear and uncluttered airspace all the way to the north pole, Prestwick is also ideally placed within the United Kingdom for high inclination polar launches.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):

On his last comment about airspace, does John Scott accept that Prestwick is not unique and that Machrihanish would fit that criterion, too?

John Scott: Yes—of course I accept that point.

I turn to other aspects that make Prestwick the location of choice in Scotland and, indeed, the United Kingdom. One is the weather conditions at Prestwick, which are due to its location in the rain shadow of Arran. The launch delays at Cape Canaveral over the past 40 years because of cloud cover will have crept into the consciousness of colleagues. Prestwick airport was located where it is because of the lack of cloud cover—a fact that saved the lives of many American and British fliers during the second world war. That fortunate and deliberately selected geographical location is now also important to commercial space operations, with Prestwick having the lowest prevalence of cloud cover when compared with competitor

English and Welsh airports, according to available Met Office statistics.

Prestwick's concrete runway is also of sufficient length to accommodate space flight launches, unlike the runways at Newquay and Llanbedr, both of which would require extension to bring them up to a minimum standard. In the time that is available, those are some of the key reasons why Prestwick is the location of choice not just in Scotland, but in the UK as a whole.

What is needed now is for the Scottish Government to come to an early decision on which airport will be the preferred Scottish option and then to throw its weight behind that choice.

Make no mistake—the bids for Newquay in Cornwall or Llanbedr in Wales to be the locations for the spaceport are already being lobbied for extensively within the corridors of power at Westminster and in America, while our own bid team at Prestwick is only modestly resourced by South Ayrshire Council and Prestwick Airport Ltd.

Prestwick could be described as a late entrant to that very competitive field, but with support its obvious attributes should make it a clear winner in the Scotland and UK bidding processes. The strength and depth of the Prestwick bid team should also be noted, with widespread support coming from the aerospace sector, which is keen to develop and build on its internationally recognised skill set.

Support has also been forthcoming from South Ayrshire Council, the University of the West of Scotland, the University of Strathclyde, Ayrshire College and Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce, but perhaps most important of all is the support of the local people of Prestwick, Ayr and Troon for this pioneering project.

Minister, the choice is yours: I urge you and the Scottish Government to select Prestwick airport as Scotland's choice for the spaceport and then to support Prestwick airport as the location of choice for a spaceport in the UK. Thank you.

17:12

Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I congratulate John Scott on securing the debate, which is on a subject that both of us are happy to work together to promote. For the benefit of members, although the airport falls within John Scott's constituency, the aerospace part lies within mine.

In any case, the whole of Ayrshire is united in its desire to see the aerospace industry and the airport thrive and prosper after some difficult trading years post the 2008 crash. Forecasts for the sector as a whole over the next 15 years are

extremely good, with several aerospace markets set to double in size.

Currently the UK aerospace sector accounts for 17 per cent of global market share—second only to the USA. Prestwick is the largest cluster in Scotland: it accounts for more than 50 per cent of the Scottish aerospace workforce, contributes some £400 million to the local economy and supports 3,200 jobs.

The question is how to secure the future of Prestwick and take advantage of that growth. For me, winning the bid to become the UK's first operational spaceport will go a long way towards achieving that objective.

The UK Government is seeking to establish such a facility by 2018. It will become a launch station for next-generation satellites and space instruments using the modern generation of horizontal take-off space launch vehicles and, in due course, will become an operating base for manned flights using reusable spacecraft.

Prestwick has to be the preferred bidder from a Scottish perspective. There is an experienced high-tech aerospace workforce in the substantial aviation and engineering companies on site, and the Scottish Government has awarded the aerospace park enterprise area status.

Our universities in the west of Scotland are at the forefront of space and engineering research and technology. If that is coupled with the airport's established physical infrastructure, which includes a 3km runway, safe over-water flight paths, clear airspace, an enviable weather record and well-developed transport connections to the rest of Scotland, the case becomes incontrovertible.

Surely it is a no-brainer that Prestwick should maximise the value that can come to Scotland from space sector growth. That does not mean that other potential Scottish locations should be left out in the cold. Prestwick could operate Machrihanish as a diversionary location and for special tests operations. Highlands and Islands locations should be developed for ground station networks.

A bid that incorporates those features would have every chance of success. Scotland would clearly be best placed for UK satellite launch and polar orbit deployments and for ground stations for satellite data capture. I urge the minister to throw the Scottish Government's weight behind such a bid.

17:16

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): I, too, congratulate John Scott on securing this debate on Prestwick airport's spaceport bid. I must apologise to members in advance: I will have to

leave before the end of the debate, because I have another engagement.

On 26 February, Prestwick airport was accepted as one of the preferred bidders for the UK spaceport. The other airports that made the shortlist were those of Campbeltown, Stornoway, Newquay in Cornwall and Llanbedr in Wales. I am pleased to say that, since then, the Prestwick team has been very busy in its endeavours to secure the bid for the only UK spaceport.

Prestwick airport is delighted to have commissioned Reynolds, Smith & Hills, which is the premier US designer in the spaceport industry, to prepare a logically and technically strong bid that meets the US licensing framework. The airport feels that that consultant will be a great advantage and of great assistance to it.

The Prestwick team is the only UK contender to have attended the US Space Foundation event recently. That was hugely beneficial, informative and useful in making contacts within the spaceport industry and helpful in the team's preparation of the bid.

Prestwick airport is critical to not only the North Ayrshire economy; it is critical to East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire as well. If it were chosen to be the UK spaceport, that would be a huge game changer for not only Ayrshire, but all of Scotland. If it were accepted, it could be used as the take-off point for space tourism under proposals from Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic and XCOR Aerospace for space expeditions. However, turning Prestwick into the UK's first spaceport would not mean just space tourism for the super-rich; it would allow Ayrshire to capitalise on and play a key role in satellite launching and manufacturing, as well as in the space science sector, which is currently earning around £11.3 billion in revenues. That figure grew by 7.2 per cent between 2011 and 2013, despite the recession.

At this stage, the UK has no satellite launch facilities of its own, so the facility would be the first of its kind and would open up Prestwick to an untapped wealth of future potential. That would have a huge impact on the Scottish economy through the promotion of skilled jobs, training facilities, opportunities for high-tech suppliers and services, and the boost for tourism.

Prestwick airport is, hands down, the best site in the UK. It is well connected by both road and rail. Furthermore, if Glasgow crossrail were pursued, the airport would be connected by rail to the whole of Scotland, which no other Scottish airport would be. As we have heard already, it also has excellent weather reliability, and it is the main diversion site if other airports have to be closed due to bad weather.

Finally, the site offers an attractive long main runway and a varied and established business environment and engineering sector through the international aerospace park and enterprise zone. That would be easy to expand and build on if the spaceport bid was accepted.

Now that Prestwick is among the final five, it is in a strong position to become the site of the UK spaceport. Prestwick not only meets the criteria but surpasses them. It has the skills, the space, the transport links and, bizarrely for Ayrshire, the good weather. The best way forward is to have one bid from Scotland, so that Scottish bids are not competing against one another. I hope that the airports can come to an agreement on a joint Scottish bid that would be mutually beneficial for all involved and could present a combined offer with a range of strengths and benefits. I am eager to see that approach as a solution and I hope that it can be developed into a winning bid.

I will campaign vigorously from now until the announcement is made later this year to ensure that the first spaceport, which is due by 2018, is Scottish and is based at Prestwick, because it has all the attributes that are required. I hope that the Scottish Government will back the bid.

17:20

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I am delighted that John Scott has brought this debate to the Parliament. I have had a love affair with Prestwick since I was a European business manager with Digital in Ayr. We regularly flew to sister companies by Bandeirante to Shannon and by Lear to Geneva. I was therefore surprised by the airport's decline when I returned to Scotland and to Ayrshire after 25 years. Any suggestion that the airport might close was anathema to me and to many others.

I do not diminish the notion and passion that accompany the desire of other Scottish airports to become the UK's permanent spaceport but, leaving parochialism aside, the questions in the Department for Transport consultation on supporting commercial spaceplane operations in the UK lead to only one outcome. On that basis, at the time of the DFT announcement, I said in a press release that Prestwick, which was one of the sites in the shortlist, would benefit from ultimate selection, and that the UK Space Agency in general would benefit from that, too.

I believe that Prestwick would secure at least the expected 10 per cent of the global space economy, which would boost not just Ayrshire and Scotland but the wider UK, through industry, economic growth and research and development. As John Scott said, the space economy already contributes £11.3 billion to the UK economy and

supports nearly 35,000 jobs. By 2018, we can see immense growth in the deployment of, for example, variable-size satellites via new launcher technology and, of course, trans-global suborbital flights. It would not be the first time that Prestwick has been the base that is associated with man going where no man has gone before. The airport was founded by the Marquis of Clydesdale and D F McIntyre, who were the first to fly over Everest, in 1933.

We can and we will wax lyrical about Prestwick. There are two major concrete soft runways, of 3,000m and 2,000m in length. It has a weather record that is second to none. The föhn effect creates a warm and largely fog-free microclimate with little rain, and that is not available elsewhere in Scotland. There is extensive maintenance and repair operation capability and an aerospace campus at the University of West Scotland that also involves the colleges. There are aerospace skills and passion, with the largest community of space industry employees outside London. There are also space programmes at the University of Glasgow, the University of Strathclyde and the University of Dundee. There is more, such as the national air traffic control centre at Prestwick. However, above all, it is a resilience airport with high skills and military experience and it is the UK's primary strategic diversion airfield.

I referred to the DFT consultation on the feasibility of locations for the spaceport. I will mention just two of the 11 questions. Question 2 asked whether the location should

"still be active but at a low level of aircraft movements"

and whether it

"should have existing and appropriate ground infrastructure/facilities and service provision".

A view was expressed that

"The combination of several sub-orbital operations a day with moderate aircraft traffic, commercial service, military service and general aviation could be co-ordinated."

Question 8 received a Government response that

"the safety of the uninvolved general public"

is "paramount" and that the Civil Aviation Authority's

"strong recommendation on a coastal location for spaceplane operations is valid".

Those are just two questions on which Prestwick fulfils the criteria.

For those and many other reasons, without in any way denigrating other propositions, I support the view that Prestwick is it. Those who are driving the bid—Stuart McIntyre and his team—are doing a great job. For me, the love affair continues as do

the belief and dream that Prestwick's positive future is not only in the stars but in getting there.

17:25

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I congratulate John Scott on securing the debate and I agree that Scotland should be the location of choice for the spaceport.

I am not here to rain on Prestwick's parade—or not completely. I supported the Scottish Government's purchase of Prestwick when I was a member of the Cabinet. Indeed, when I was growing up in Troon in Ayrshire in the 1960s, I used to go plane spotting at Prestwick airport. I remember seeing the Dan-Air Dakotas going to the Isle of Man, a regular service that operated at that time. I watched the passengers troop on and then realised that one of them must be the stewardess because she changed her hat just before she got into the plane.

However, the debate would not be complete without seriously considering the merits of Machrihanish. I will say why I believe that Machrihanish and Campbeltown are the places that should be boldly going into the race and ready to serve the final frontier.

The criteria for the choice are interesting indeed. There should be a runway with a minimum length of 3,000m. Machrihanish, of course, has a runway of just over 3,000m; unfortunately, Prestwick does not. Indeed, the parallel taxiway at Machrihanish is almost the same length as Prestwick's runway.

There should be a coastal area. It is interesting to note that Campbeltown has coast on three sides, not just on one. That would be an important criterion.

On population density, Kintyre's population density is 0.13 persons per hectare compared with the Scottish average of 0.65.

Campbeltown is also served by a deep-water port with three piers, one of which is a NATO pier. Indeed, in those modern port facilities there is a roll-on, roll-off facility that is used to taking large cargoes.

On the point that Mr Brodie just raised that there should be a limited amount of aviation traffic, I have to say, regrettably, that aviation traffic at Campbeltown is even more limited than the present aviation traffic at Prestwick, as it consists of two aircraft services a day.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does Michael Russell also agree that Machrihanish is the only UK airport that has twice been approved for space flight?

Michael Russell: How prescient of Mr McGrigor. I was just coming to that point, which

features in the Campbeltown airport briefing. The airport has been approved twice for space flight—once by NASA and once by Virgin Galactic—so it has an advantage over all the other contenders.

Campbeltown is also a community-owned facility—that is an important point for the Scottish Government with its enthusiasm for community ownership. It has 1,000 acres of opportunity. There are 50 companies already operating on the site, but there is no shortage of space. It also has three jet fuel storage facilities and is capable of taking a substantial amount of fuel. If the fuel for the space flights were to be hydrogen, it could be produced from the existing renewable energy plants on the Kintyre peninsula.

On every criterion, there is an argument to be made for Campbeltown that is every bit as good as the argument for Prestwick. I do not want to see the matter as one place against the other, although that is what we have come down to. Mr Ingram's view that there might be a possibility of collaboration is a good one, and I would like that to happen.

The people of Campbeltown ask—indeed, demand—that there should be a level playing field when the Scottish location is considered. It is fairly obvious that Campbeltown has the longest and most level playing field of any of the Scottish contenders. I hope that the Government will continue to take it seriously.

John Scott: Notwithstanding his reasonable comments about Machrihanish, does Mr Russell agree that Prestwick's particularly distinguishing attributes are the 3,000 people in the maintenance, repair and overhaul hub around the airport, as well as the motorway, rail and port accessibility, which could trump Machrihanish?

Michael Russell: I think that those are good points to make, but I think that Campbeltown is accessible and could be even more so.

On the issue of jobs, the potential for creating new jobs in a spaceport is fairly great. This is not simply about sustaining jobs—indeed, we do not know how many of those jobs could be sustained, as there are many different attributes that are required for the space industries that do not exist in the aviation industries. However, the potential for creating new jobs on a community-owned site is substantial.

I hope that the minister will look kindly at what is a friendly rivalry that might contain the potential for co-operation. However, Campbeltown deserves to be considered. The time is coming for Cape Campbeltown.

17:30

The Minister for Transport and Islands (Derek Mackay): A challenge has been set out for me today to choose between the two remaining bids in Scotland. However, I will resist it, because that taste of the debate between Michael Russell and John Scott shows the strengths of the two sites.

Of course, the choice will not be for the Scottish Government, because the matter is reserved to the Westminster Government. All extraterrestrial matters are reserved to it and, no matter how good a result the Scottish National Party might get on 7 May, I am not sure that the decision will transfer to the Scottish Government. We will back both bids and support both locations.

I note that, between Michael Russell and John Scott, there was the middle way of Adam Ingram and Chic Brodie. Margaret McDougall touched on the Prestwick bid's strengths, and John Finnie intervened to point out the strength of the Campbeltown-Machrihanish location.

One reason why I will resist the temptation to back one bid over another is that I am not sure that it would add any extra value. The Scottish Government is clear that we want the spaceport to be located in Scotland, and we will do what we can to secure that, while recognising the strengths and the opportunities of the bids.

In a sense, the debate seems somewhat futuristic. However, as John Scott and others pointed out, the economic benefits are real and are in many ways already here, given Scotland's contribution to this growing sector and the industry. Latest figures show that Scotland accounts for just under 5 per cent of the total turnover in the UK's space sector and for 16 per cent of the jobs. There is an ambitious target for Scotland to seize 1 per cent of the global space sector market by 2030. That percentage might not sound like much but, in economic value, it represents £4 billion a year to the Scottish economy, so it is a prize that is absolutely worth pursuing. A spaceport could generate a step change in the industry by stimulating further growth in manufacturing, research and development, design and tourism, and it would contribute to the sense of location, wherever is selected.

We have supported the bids, but we will be even more supportive when the timescales are made clear by the UK Government and the final criteria are established. That is another reason not to rule out either bid. We do not want to end up rejecting a substantial and legitimate bid.

With regard to the economic benefits, the economic opportunity and the sense of location, both bids are strong. That said, Prestwick airport

has made considerable progress, as it has key local and national partners involved in its bid. Scottish Enterprise will continue to support both bids.

Previously, members have asked about the other bids. It has been for other agencies to pursue those bids. Highlands and Islands Airports has made its position clear, and the Ministry of Defence, by its silence or its reluctance to comment, has made clear its position on its preferred locations.

Clear technical requirements will need to be fulfilled for any bid to be successful. However, there is a strong case around the added value that any location brings in terms of the space industry.

This will be significant for Scotland and in a UK and European context, for the reasons that John Scott gave. I congratulate him again on securing the debate. The focus will be on the launch of satellites, tourism, destinations and the other benefits that the spaceport would bring.

This members' business debate is about Prestwick. John Scott has covered the infrastructure at the location, the history and the potential that is presented. Even the weather is used—uniquely—as an asset and a positive in a Scottish context. Scotland is the only country in the world where we can have four seasons in one day, but at the location in Prestwick, that is a clear advantage, for the reasons that have been given.

We will back both bids as they progress. As all becomes clearer through the UK Government, we will support them through individual support and, I hope, collaboration, as a number of members said. The choice for a spaceport in the UK should be in Scotland, so that we can maximise the benefits and take advantage of the immense potential that our people and destinations can offer. In that sense, we whole-heartedly support both bids and look forward to working enthusiastically with the partners to secure the spaceport for Scotland.

Meeting closed at 17:36.

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e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-78568-448-7

Revised e-format available
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