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Official Report

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Wednesday 20 May 2015

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 20 May 2015

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

Point of Order

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Good afternoon, everyone.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I wish to raise a point of order under sections 4.1 and 6 of our rules on the submission of motions, insofar as they apply to motion S4M-13203, on the future of Scotland's economy, in the name of Jackie Baillie. Let me say at the outset that I welcome any debate at any time on the economy and education, and I hope that I will be called to speak in the debate later.

The motion references a document, apparently from the University of Edinburgh, that cannot be found publicly available. I invite you to consider whether it thus may be in breach of Parliament's rules on motions, at section 4.1, which states:

"The text of motions ... should not disclose any information that is ... confidential".

I invite you, as Presiding Officer, under section 6, to consider what guidance you might give us on the matter. For the avoidance of doubt, for yourself and for colleagues, I am raising the matter as an individual and not as a committee convener.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank the member for the advance notice of that point of order. He referred to the admissibility criteria that are set out in the "Guidance on Motions". In particular, he refers to the point that

"The text of motions ... should not disclose ... information that is confidential".

He asserts that the information referred to is confidential, as it is not publicly available.

In this particular case, the information is in the public domain, as it was raised during First Minister's questions last week and has also been covered in the media. The motion therefore meets the criteria for admissibility. However, in general terms, debates are better informed where information referred to in motions is easily available to all. That is our position.

Portfolio Question Time

Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights

14:02

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio questions.

Benefit Reductions

1. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what representations it will make to the United Kingdom Government to oppose the reported additional £12 billion in benefit reductions. (S4O-04334)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil): As the First Minister made clear last week, the UK Government has not set out the details of how it will achieve the £12 billion of benefit reductions proposed in the Conservative manifesto. We know that, if Scotland takes a proportionate share of the proposed £12 billion, benefit expenditure in Scotland could be reduced by about £1 billion.

We are very clear that we oppose further measures that will have an impact on the vulnerable in communities across Scotland, and the member can rest assured that we will make that case strongly to the UK Government. The situation is causing anxiety and distress to many people. It is incumbent on all of us in this Parliament to build alliances to argue for the protection of the vulnerable against deeper social security cuts.

Bob Doris: David Cameron suggested as long ago as 2012 that under-25s might have their housing benefit withdrawn by a future UK Conservative Government. Estimates show that there are more than 4,500 under-25s on housing benefit in Glasgow region alone, and more than 28,000 across Scotland. Such cuts would inflict untold misery on young Scots and would exacerbate homelessness. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, in the first instance, the UK Government should abandon any plans to erode the basic human rights of young Scots to a home, and that ultimately this place, Scotland's Parliament, should make all future decisions on welfare provisions for our nation?

Alex Neil: I agree with Mr Doris on both points. We know from the Tory manifesto that the proposal is to remove housing benefit from 18 to 21-year-olds, which would affect around 7,000 young people in Scotland. We believe that there is

a better alternative to that austerity and those cruel measures, and that it would be far better if this Parliament had full control over all social security matters, because we would take a much fairer and more humane approach to all aspects of social security than that being taken by the UK Government at Westminster.

City of Edinburgh Council (Local Development Plan)

2. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary agree to allow—

I apologise; I was reading my supplementary question.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Start again.

Sarah Boyack: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the City of Edinburgh Council regarding its proposed local development plan. (S4O-04335)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil): I would have been happy to answer the first question.

The council published a proposed local development plan in 2013 and a second in 2014. My officials have discussed both proposed plans with council officials on a number of occasions, as part of their general liaison with the planning authority and in specific discussions regarding the plan.

Sarah Boyack: I am aware that there have been lots of meetings, but will the cabinet secretary agree to take a fresh look at the plan to allow the council to prioritise brownfield developments and empower it to stop land banking, which has resulted in crucial sites not being brought forward for development? Does he understand the anger that many communities have about the fact that land in their areas will be brought forward for development under the plan, but without the council having the funding to invest in vital schools, social care and decent transport infrastructure?

Alex Neil: I am very sympathetic to the points that Sarah Boyack makes. There is a great deal of brownfield land in Edinburgh. Much of it has received planning permission for development, but no development has taken place. In a city the size of Edinburgh, which is Scotland's capital, we need to get a better balance between development on brownfield sites and development on greenfield sites.

The points that are raised by Sarah Boyack are relevant to the discussion on the local development plan in Edinburgh. When, eventually,

the LDP comes to us for comment and decisions, we will be conscious of the need to establish and then maintain that balance.

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): Has the cabinet secretary any idea of how we can incentivise development on brownfield sites? That is part of the problem—there is no incentive to build on them.

Alex Neil: I recognise that, by definition, it can be difficult to build on some brownfield sites, although many brownfield sites are actually almost as easy to develop as greenfield sites. However, I take the member's point that, in some cases, there might be a need to incentivise developers to build on such sites. I am entirely open to any suggestions as long as they are proportionate, provided that public money is put to good use and that these sites would not be developed without additional public money in the form of incentives.

I have no objection to the point that the member makes and have every sympathy with it. There is a need for much closer partnership between the private and public sectors in order to encourage the development of certain brownfield sites, not just the granting of planning permission to develop.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Brief questions and answers will help us to get through the questions.

Housing Benefit (Young People)

3. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the impact will be on young people in Scotland of the United Kingdom Government's proposal to end housing benefit for people under 21. (S4O-04336)

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): The Conservative Party election manifesto proposed that 18 to 21-year-olds on jobseekers allowance should no longer have an automatic entitlement to housing benefit. If housing benefit were to end for all people under 21 in Scotland, it would affect around 7,000 young people and take away more than £30 million a year in housing benefit payments from those in the 18 to 20 age group.

Nigel Don: I thank the minister for that answer, and note that I listened intently to the cabinet secretary's answer to Bob Doris's question earlier.

We are undoubtedly agreed that it would be an extremely good idea for this area to be within our control, but it is not yet. Given that that is the case, what discussions has the minister had with local authorities about the implications of the proposal for their budgets?

Margaret Burgess: The issue is part of our discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local

Authorities and the welfare reform group. As the cabinet secretary said, we and much of civic Scotland made the case for the full devolution of social security, to ensure that we can have a more joined-up system that can help the most vulnerable. That is what we are working towards, along with our stakeholders in local government and the third sector.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Further to that answer, what representations has the minister made with regard to protecting particularly vulnerable groups such as looked-after children—those who have been subject to abuse in their family home—where separate housing is absolutely vital no matter what age they are?

Margaret Burgess: I completely agree with the member that separate housing is vital in a number of circumstances; we have always made that case and we will continue to make that case. We are opposed to any measure to cut housing benefit for young people. We will continue to oppose such measures and I hope that we will get support from others across the chamber to do that. We are certainly actively looking at the matter in our discussions with our third sector and local authority partners and we recognise the issues that Richard Simpson raises.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 4, in the name of Christian Allard, has not been lodged and a less than satisfactory explanation has been provided.

Local Communities (Devolution of Powers)

5. Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to devolve powers to local communities. (S4O-04338)

The Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment (Marco Biagi): The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill will deliver significant new rights and powers for communities across Scotland. We want to empower communities through the ownership of land and buildings and strengthen their voices in the decisions that matter to them.

However, we are always open to discussing new approaches, such as the groundbreaking discussions of the island areas ministerial working group, which culminated in our prospectus for the islands. There is no single solution or magic bullet for empowerment and I welcome the interest and thoughts of members across the chamber.

Jackson Carlaw: I thank the minister for that interesting reply. Many believe that communities should have in law a Scottish community right to challenge, which would give community and voluntary bodies the right to express an interest in

taking over a particular council-run service. A local authority would be required to respond and, unless there were reasonable grounds for refusal, to run a procurement process.

A community right to challenge could devolve real power to those who live and breathe such services in their communities. Will the Scottish Government consider material and substantive devolution such as that to communities?

Marco Biagi: I can extend warm words to Jackson Carlaw and the good news that the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill will introduce participation requests, which are a great deal more flexible than the community right to challenge and will allow communities to choose the degree of involvement that they want to have in improving a public service. Unlike the right to challenge, participation requests will not open up local services to privatisation, which would force communities to bid against huge outsourcing companies.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): One of the powers that are devolved to local authorities is the power to charge for social care. The Scotland against the care tax campaign would like the Government to use its power to abolish care charges altogether, but the Government has responded that it would prefer to work with local authorities. What progress has been made? As far as I can understand, no progress at all has been made to introduce equity or move towards abolition. Will the minister update us on the progress that has been made on abolishing care charges?

Marco Biagi: Discussions are on-going and are being led by my colleague Shona Robison, who I am sure would be happy to write to the member to update him on work in progress.

Human Rights Act 1998

6. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what representations it has made to the United Kingdom Government concerning the Human Rights Act 1998. (S4O-04339)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil): On Friday, I wrote to Michael Gove, the new Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, to reiterate the Scottish Government's opposition to the repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998. The First Minister also raised the matter directly with the Prime Minister when they met last Friday. I have sought an early meeting with Mr Gove to further underline our concerns. I know that those concerns are shared by the overwhelming majority of members in the Parliament, as was shown by the vote last November.

Last week, I undertook to keep the Parliament informed of the progress of the discussions, and I am happy to reiterate that undertaking today. The UK Government's programme for the first session of the new UK Parliament will be set out in the Queen's speech on 27 May. My colleague the Minister for Parliamentary Business will update the Scottish Parliament on the legislative consent implications of the Queen's speech in due course.

Malcolm Chisholm: I am grateful that the cabinet secretary has expressed this Parliament's abhorrence for what is proposed. In his letter, did he raise the necessity of a legislative consent motion, which clearly will not be approved by this Parliament? Is it not the case that what is proposed drives a coach and horses through the Scotland Act 1998 as well as potentially putting the UK outside the family of nations that are committed to universal human rights?

Alex Neil: The repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998 and withdrawal from the European convention on human rights have potentially huge implications, not just for the Scotland Act 1998 but for the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland. We have made it absolutely clear that there will be no co-operation from this Government on the repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998. Such a measure is regressive and reactionary and is entirely the wrong thing to do. If the opportunity arises for us to frustrate the passage of such legislation in any way whatsoever, I am sure that most members in the Scottish Parliament will be united in exploiting that opportunity to the full.

Access to Work Scheme

7. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact on disabled people in Scotland of the Department for Work and Pensions proposal to cap the access to work scheme. (S40-04340)

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham): The Scottish Government has sought urgent assurances from the Department for Work and Pensions on how its intention to cap the support that is available through the access to work scheme will impact on disabled people in Scotland. The DWP estimates, based on current delivery, that the number of individuals who are likely to be affected in Scotland is small. Nonetheless, we are continuing to work with the DWP to better understand the future impact of those changes in Scotland and to press for assurance that those who are affected will receive the support that they require.

Jackie Baillie: I am pleased that the matter is being considered further, because the access to work scheme is a success at providing support to

disabled people to enable them to access and sustain employment. What action is the Scottish Government taking to support disabled people in accessing employment?

Roseanna Cunningham: We are taking a number of actions. They include the delivery of "Developing the Young Workforce—Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy", which has been debated in the chamber; developing outcomes with community jobs Scotland specifically for vulnerable groups; and improving the uptake of modern apprenticeships by disabled people, which we also discussed last week. In that regard, we have committed £500,000 to delivering an equalities action plan that will be published in autumn 2015 and will contain specific improvement targets for—among others—those who are disabled.

We are promoting and supporting the supported employment framework and are working closely with partners, including local authorities, to support them to develop and deliver the model locally. We see supported businesses as one small but important part of the overall support that is available to disabled people.

Child Poverty (West Scotland)

8. Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce child poverty in West Scotland. (S40-04341)

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): We take a national approach to tackling the long-term drivers of poverty, through early intervention and prevention. Our commitment to building a fairer Scotland and tackling inequality is one of three key themes of the programme for Government.

As part of that programme, we are further promoting the living wage across all sectors; delivering on our commitment to 600 hours of free childcare for three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds; and providing approximately £296 million from 2013-14 to 2015-16 to help those who are affected by the United Kingdom Government's welfare reforms. Over the current session of Parliament, we are investing more than £1.7 billion in affordable housing.

Mary Fee: Has the minister read Renfrewshire Council's report "Tackling Poverty in Renfrewshire"? What specific actions will the Scottish Government take in response to the recommendation that calls on it to

"Allocate school resources to reflect levels of deprivation, and specifically link these resources to closing the attainment gap and ensuring more pupils from low income families reach positive destinations"?

Margaret Burgess: The Scottish Government is committed to raising attainment in education and has recently announced that it has put funding into that very purpose, to encourage those from disadvantaged areas to gain access to education.

We put tackling poverty and inequality at the heart of Government through policies such as the council tax freeze and free prescriptions and by working with local authorities, the national health service and others to tackle child poverty. Our “Annual Report for the Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland” highlights the work that has been undertaken by local government, the third sector and business and introduces a full measurement framework that will provide an overview of the current position on key outcomes against which progress will be measured in future annual reports.

In addition, the Government is committed to appointing an independent adviser on poverty and inequality who will report directly to the First Minister.

Fair Work, Skills and Training

Apprenticeships (Woodwork)

1. Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to increase the number of apprenticeships in woodwork. (S4O-04344)

The Minister for Youth and Women’s Employment (Annabelle Ewing): The modern apprenticeship programme is driven by the demand of employers, rather than by the Government. However, we are committed to expanding the number of MA opportunities each year to 30,000 by 2020. Additional MAs, including more higher-level and STEM—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—opportunities, will help to create a competitive and dynamic business environment to support sustainable economic growth and higher-quality jobs.

Specifically on woodwork, a number of MA frameworks already include woodwork, including ones in construction, wood and timber and furniture, furnishings and interiors. The number of starts on those frameworks has risen significantly, from 61 in 2012-13 to more than 1,300 in 2014-15.

Cameron Buchanan: What is the Scottish Government doing to encourage the combination of business acumen and skills training in modern apprenticeships?

Annabelle Ewing: In our modern apprenticeship programme, we work closely with a number of sectors. As I said in my initial response, the programme is driven by the demand of

employers, so of course we work closely with business to ensure that the programme meets its needs as well as the needs of the young people who learn the vital skills that they need to make their way in life while, crucially, earning a wage.

Skills Shortages (Key Industries)

2. Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to address skills shortages in key industries of economic growth. (S4O-04345)

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham): Through the development of sectoral skills investment plans and regional skills assessments, we are committed to delivering demand-led skills provision to meet the skills needs of key industries and the wider Scottish economy. The plans, which are developed by Skills Development Scotland in conjunction with industry bodies, provide a framework for businesses and employers to articulate the skills that are needed to support the development of Scotland’s growth sectors. The SIPs have been developed to identify and respond to the skills priorities that are required to support the industrial sectors in achieving their growth potential.

During 2013-14, there were 25,284 modern apprenticeship starts, with more than 70 occupational frameworks available. In delivering that programme, the Scottish Government directs Skills Development Scotland to prioritise places on frameworks that relate to Government economic strategy growth sectors.

Alex Fergusson: The cabinet secretary will be aware that a number of industries, including the construction industry and the science, technology, engineering and mathematics sector, have recently warned of a looming skills shortage that threatens their economic growth. She mentioned modern apprenticeships, which offer a great opportunity for people to earn as they learn and to train Scotland’s young people and give them the skills that they need for sustainable employment. What steps can the Scottish Government take to more effectively match apprenticeship opportunities with industries that are identified as being most in need of additional skilled employees?

Roseanna Cunningham: People need to keep it in their minds that, as the member will have heard from my colleague Annabelle Ewing, the apprenticeship programme is in effect employer led. We do not create the jobs; it is the employers who do that and then we provide the means by which they can become modern apprenticeships. However, the member mentions a number of sectors with which—I hope that he will be glad to know—I have already had close conversation.

They include the construction sector. I visited the national construction college during the Easter recess and I discussed road haulage issues with the newly formed group in that area. We are all aware of the challenge in the digital skills area. We continue to have dialogue with employers in those areas, but we rely enormously on the trade bodies to flag up potential shortages so that, instead of having to work reactively, we can begin to work more proactively.

Skills and Training (Fife Economy)

3. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking under the fair work, skills and training portfolio to support the Fife economy. (S4O-04346)

The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing): The Scottish Government is committed to the economic development of Fife and is using all the levers at our disposal to maximise investment, support economic growth and create jobs. The fair work, skills and training portfolio provides significant support to, for example, young people in Fife through the employability fund, opportunities for all, the modern apprenticeship programme and the developing the young workforce initiative and other such initiatives. In addition, the Government has demonstrated its commitment to economic development in Fife through its support for Fife Council's delivery of the business gateway service and of course for Scottish Enterprise. As the member will be well aware, we also have the ongoing work of the recently established joint task force, to which we have committed an initial £6 million.

Claire Baker: In her reply, the minister acknowledged the situation at Tullis Russell, where many workers are facing redundancy. I also welcome the task force report that was published last week by the Scottish Government and Fife Council. Part of the plan is £100,000 for immediate training needs, which will be followed by £500,000 for further skills development and training. The minister talked about what we are providing for young people, but most of the workforce at Tullis Russell is aged over 40. What will she do in her role to ensure that there are appropriate training and skills opportunities for the more mature and experienced workforce?

Annabelle Ewing: I know that, in representing Fife, the member takes a keen interest in the work of the joint task force, and we wish it all success.

With regard to the spending that was announced recently—the initial sum of £100,000 to respond to immediate training needs and a further £500,000 for skills development and training in the short term—I will be working closely

with the enterprise minister and with Fife Council to ensure that that money is spent where it is needed most. I give that assurance to the member that that is how we intend to proceed.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):

In relation to the Fife task force, is the minister happy that the money that has been allocated for immediate training needs will be adequate? Can it be reviewed if it proves to be inadequate?

Annabelle Ewing: The decisions that were taken at the task force meeting last Thursday were stated to be initial responses. It is the work of the task force that will direct the progress based on how we are dealing with the challenges on the ground. I am sure that the enterprise minister will keep the member and others fully informed of the important work of the task force. I know that all members of all parties in the chamber wish the task force all success.

Employment Opportunities for Young People (East Lothian Council)

4. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what support it will provide for East Lothian Council to increase employment opportunities for young people. (S4O-04347)

The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing): East Lothian Council will benefit from the wide range of programmes and services that are funded by the Scottish Government. Young people in East Lothian will continue to have access to our expanding modern apprenticeship programme, the educational maintenance allowance, activity agreements, the youth employment Scotland fund and community jobs Scotland, to name but some.

In March, we notified local authorities of their share of the £6.5 million funding in 2014-15 to support the implementation of the developing the young workforce programme. In partnership with educational institutions and other agencies, East Lothian Council is preparing an implementation plan to continue to reduce youth unemployment in the area.

Iain Gray: The minister is absolutely right that the local council has prepared an implementation plan for its element of the Government's developing the young workforce strategy. The council has a good track record in these areas, not least with projects such as the East Lothian hospitality and tourism academy, which has become well known for providing opportunities for young people. However, I want to ask specifically what financial support the council will receive to carry out its share of this Government plan. After all, the Government has required it to find £11 million-worth of cuts in the next three years.

Annabelle Ewing: The allocation for 2014-15 under the developing the young workforce programme—if that is what the member is getting at—is £125,349. I understand that issues relating to the allocations for 2015-16 are currently under discussion. In allocating local authority funding, we have to work within the confines of the Scottish budget, which is of course set forth of this institution.

Access to Work Scheme

5. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the Department for Work and Pensions report, “Equality analysis for the future of Access to Work”. (S4O-04348)

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham): I believe that Graeme Dey was in the chamber when I answered a similar question from Jackie Baillie in the previous portfolio questions. I reassure him that we continue to work with the DWP to understand better the future impact of the changes in Scotland, and to press for assurance that those who are affected receive the support that they require.

Graeme Dey: The report outlines that 89.5 per cent of those who would be affected by the proposed capping of awards at £40,800 are deaf or suffer from some degree of hearing loss. Does the cabinet secretary agree, in the light of that acknowledged consequence, that not only does the planned approach not square with the Conservative Party’s manifesto commitment to bring hundreds of thousands of disabled people into work, but means also that the Westminster Government will knowingly exclude a specific disability group from gaining meaningful employment?

Roseanna Cunningham: We are concerned about the impact that the cap may have on people who are deaf or who have hearing loss. We are committed to supporting the deaf community in Scotland and I fully recognise the importance of British Sign Language as a vital means of communication to help people find and stay in work.

In general terms, the Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives can offer advice to employers on how to make reasonable workplace adjustments to accommodate employees with disabilities, and can signpost people to organisations that can give more specific advice on particular disabilities and conditions. Of course, that requires assistance of the kind that has hitherto been available through the access to work scheme, so it is cause for concern if that is now to be cut, and especially if there is a differential impact on one specific group of disabled people.

Future Workforce (Skills)

6. Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to identify the skills that will be needed by the future workforce. (S4O-04349)

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham): Through the development of sectoral skills investment plans and regional skills assessments, we committed to delivering demand-led skills provision to meet the needs of local labour markets and the wider Scottish economy. Developed by Skills Development Scotland in conjunction with industry bodies, the plans provide a framework for businesses and employers to articulate what are the right skills that are needed to support the development of Scotland’s growth sectors. The skills investment plans have been developed to identify and respond to the skills priorities that are required to support the industrial sectors in achieving their growth potential.

Jayne Baxter: I note that earlier this year the Minister for Youth and Women’s Employment visited Fife College’s Stenton campus to learn about Fife’s engineering pathfinder project. Does the cabinet secretary agree that such partnership working, involving schools and employers, is an excellent way of meeting the needs of young people and local businesses? What steps will the Government take to encourage that approach across Scotland?

Roseanna Cunningham: That was a pilot project on foundation apprenticeships and we will be rolling it out. A considerable financial announcement was made earlier this week of £3.8 million to provide a further 500 modern apprenticeship places. That will focus on foundation apprenticeships as well as high-level apprenticeships.

I heard from my colleague in detail about the visit to which Jayne Baxter referred. I often repeat one of the anecdotes that she came back with, because the event seems to have been extraordinarily successful. There were perhaps not as many young girls involved as we might have wished to see, but there was a lesson to be learned from the school that did turn up with a number of young women. That is something that we want to keep an eye on.

Training (Former Members of Armed Services)

7. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it can assist former members of the armed services in training for a new career. (S4O-04350)

The Minister for Youth and Women’s Employment (Annabelle Ewing): The Scottish Government is determined to provide the highest

possible support and opportunities for our veterans. We recognise that many veterans require additional support to enter work after leaving the armed forces. Early entry to Scottish Government funded projects is available to veterans, who are also able to take advantage of initiatives such as community jobs Scotland and the youth employment Scotland fund.

The recent "Transition in Scotland" report from Eric Fraser, the Scottish veterans commissioner, commented that opportunities for veterans should be promoted to demonstrate the skills, experience and resilience that veterans bring to our communities and the workplace. We will work with the commissioner to identify what further action might be taken to support that group.

Roderick Campbell: A recent survey by Poppyscotland found that 37 per cent of veterans said that the problems that they have encountered when seeking civilian employment were due to a lack of relevant training or skills, so what more can be done to maximise relevant training opportunities?

Annabelle Ewing: Roderick Campbell will likely be aware that the ministerial lead for armed forces and veterans issues is Keith Brown, who is the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities. I know that he continues to engage with the Ministry of Defence to ensure that the transitional support that is offered to service personnel is consistent with the approach that we seek to develop in Scotland.

The veterans commissioner identified in his report a number of areas where further work could be done to enhance support for service leavers in helping to prepare them for the civilian jobs market; in particular, the report identified the need for a comprehensive look at policies and the support that is available in Scotland for opening access to further and higher education for service leavers of all ages. The report also highlighted opportunities for further development, using examples such as the learning partnership that has been piloted by Glasgow Caledonian University with the armed forces, the three city colleges and Glasgow's helping heroes project. The veterans commissioner is now looking at how the further and higher education sectors in Scotland can provide more support for service leavers and veterans.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the minister's comments—in particular, in relation to support for veterans moving towards employment. Will the minister agree to have discussions with the veterans minister, Keith Brown, and Shona Robison about screening of veterans on coming out of the armed forces, in particular after they have been engaged in conflict? Many of them have unrecognised

health problems that are a barrier to their achieving effective employment?

Annabelle Ewing: As a former active member of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on armed forces veterans, I am aware of the issue to which Dr Simpson refers and would be happy to raise it with Keith Brown and the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport, Shona Robison, and to seek a meeting. For the member's information, I have already put in motion—the process of Government does not always work quickly, however—a request to meet the veterans commissioner about his report, in respect of its impacts on my portfolio.

Skills Needs (West Scotland)

8. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to meet skills needs in West Scotland. (S4O-04351)

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham): There are a number of programmes in place to develop the skills and employability of people in West Scotland, including our expanding modern apprenticeships programme, the employability fund and community jobs Scotland. That is alongside the provision that is available through regional colleges and, of course, university education. Through the development of sectoral skills investment plans and regional skills assessments, which for West Scotland included specific reports on Glasgow, Glasgow and Clyde Valley, and Ayrshire, we committed to delivering demand-led skills provision to meet the needs of local labour markets and the wider Scottish economy.

Neil Bibby: The cabinet secretary will be aware that many people need flexibility in order to balance training or retraining with employment and childcare requirements. Why did the recent Audit Scotland report find that there had since 2008-09 been a 48 per cent reduction in the number of part-time students going to college? Over the same period there has also been a 41 per cent drop in the number of over-25s going to college. Why is the Government happy to slam the college door on so many people who want to train or retrain?

Roseanna Cunningham: Is not it interesting that we are just hearing the same old, same old from Labour? I think that that is rather unfortunate. We have said frequently in the chamber that in 2013-14 there was an increase of 3 per cent over the year in Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council funded full-time equivalents. There are a number of different things that can be said on the issue, not least of which is that work is being done with colleges to ensure that the studies that are undertaken direct people towards work.

The courses that are no longer funded were not leading to employment. I would have expected that Labour would have wanted to support anything that directs people into courses that lead to employment when they come out of college. Instead, there is this constant refrain, which is achieving absolutely nothing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 9, in the name of Jim Eadie, has been withdrawn and a satisfactory explanation has been provided.

Renewable Energy (Women in Engineering Roles)

10. Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is encouraging more women to take up engineering roles in the renewable energy sector. (S4O-04353)

The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing): We recognise that women are underrepresented in the renewables sector, including in engineering roles. We are taking action across a number of fronts to improve the situation, such as the recently announced £500,000 to develop and deliver a modern apprenticeships equalities action plan, which will include improvement targets for addressing gender imbalance. We also commissioned a full equalities impact assessment on the renewables route map, which will be published shortly as part of the route map update.

Rob Gibson: I thank the minister for that detailed answer. I hope that she welcomes the conclusions of a piece of work by a recent intern of mine, Lucy Moore, called "Women in Scottish renewables: breaking down the barriers to success". Also, I wonder whether the minister will come to my constituency at some point to see the work of SSE, which is one of the leading firms in the renewables industry that could employ more women.

Annabelle Ewing: I was pleased to receive a copy of the research project report by Rob Gibson's former intern Lucy Moore. I have raised with officials a number of points that are made in the report, and the points are currently being considered.

There is, of course, more work to be done to encourage more women to go into the renewables sector, and in that regard Rob Gibson might be interested to note that I am to meet in a few weeks representatives of Women in Renewable Energy Scotland, or WIRES. I wish to discuss with them how we can make further progress in encouraging women both to get jobs in the renewables sector and, crucially, to secure career progression in it.

I would be delighted to visit Rob Gibson's constituency to see the good work that SSE is doing in this regard.

Scotland's Economy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-13203, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the future of Scotland's economy.

14:41

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Today, Scotland remains a deeply unequal country, and that has a direct impact on our economy. Our objective to boost the economy at the same time as tackling inequality is, I believe, an ambition that is shared throughout the chamber, including by the Scottish Government.

There is no doubt that recent times have been tough for businesses throughout the country. Whether they are large or small, in manufacturing or retail, and in urban or rural Scotland, the economic downturn has had an impact. Markets were tighter, turnover declined and the workforce contracted. In short, the economy struggled, businesses suffered and working people experienced the worst cost-of-living crisis in decades.

Things are beginning to improve. The economy is showing signs of growth. Employment is increasing and confidence is starting to improve, too. However, the figures for the most recent quarter show a marked slowdown in that growth. Although I want to recognise the achievements of our businesses in growing our economy, we equally need to recognise that we have nothing to be complacent about. Despite the growth, the recovery is not shared by everyone who is in work. Too many people are caught in one of the worst cost-of-living crises in decades. There is continuing uncertainty, with zero-hours contracts, low wages and underemployment.

That matters if we are to address inequality, because it is not just a matter of fairness. It is also an economic issue. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Monetary Fund and others point out that countries that have relatively high degrees of wealth and income inequality have lower levels of economic growth.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: In a moment.

It is therefore in everyone's interests to address the issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mark McDonald.

Jackie Baillie: Our economy—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I beg your pardon, Ms Baillie.

Jackie Baillie: I am happy to give way at this point if that helps.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Forgive me, Ms Baillie. I call Mark McDonald.

Mark McDonald: I was perfectly happy to wait, but I thank the member for giving way. Has she had an opportunity to consider the call from the Scottish Trades Union Congress for us to look again at whether powers over employment, for example on the minimum wage and terms and conditions, should be included in the package of powers that are to be devolved to this Parliament, given the circumstances that arose in the recent general election?

Jackie Baillie: I thank the member for his intervention. We will have an opportunity tomorrow to debate the full devolution package. I will also be speaking then, and I look forward to engaging with him on the substance of that issue.

Our economy needs to be rebalanced so that, when we talk about the number of jobs that have been created in our country, we are not simply counting temporary, low-paid, zero-hours contract jobs. We know that much of the vaunted recent rise in the employment figures is almost entirely down to an increase in part-time, low-paid, temporary jobs.

Just this week, we saw the BBC reveal that only 10 of Scotland's 50 largest employers pay the living wage. Last week, a major employer, which is perhaps renowned for offering low-paid jobs and low-security work, saw the value of its shares rocket when the Tories secured their majority.

This Parliament is not a place to sit on our hands and moan about the United Kingdom Tory Government, although I confess that there will be lots of scope for that because there will be areas where we fundamentally disagree with it. The SNP promise in the general election was about securing a stronger voice for Scotland at Westminster. Our mantra here is surely about securing a stronger voice for fairness and social justice for the people of Scotland in this Parliament.

Scotland could have led the way in promoting better pay and banning exploitative zero-hours contracts through the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill, which was passed just last year. Unfortunately, as we all know, the SNP members joined with the Conservatives to vote against Scottish Labour plans for better pay and security of hours for workers, cleaners, carers and retail staff. They voted against those plans not just once but five times. The Scottish Government should use the power that it already has.

I have heard the Scottish Government demand the devolution of job-creating powers to this Parliament. I support our having a powerhouse Parliament that is able to tackle inequality and pursue social justice, but many of the powers that we need for economic development are already with this Parliament.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: I urge the SNP to use those powers now to tackle the inequality that hampers our economy and the life chances of too many people. OECD research has shown that inequality has cost Scotland an estimated 8.5 per cent of gross domestic product over the past 25 years, and we know that a fairer economy is a better economy and that we all have a better chance of success if we all have the same opportunities to succeed. Inequality stifles economic growth, so we all want a strong and prosperous economy in which all share in that prosperity.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way now?

Jackie Baillie: On the basis that the member has a loud voice, I will give way.

Kevin Stewart: There was I thinking that I was meek and mild.

Jackie Baillie: Never!

Kevin Stewart: On equality, does Ms Baillie agree that this Parliament should have welfare powers rather than see the constant cuts that are coming from Westminster, which are having a major effect and are creating a more unequal society in Scotland?

Jackie Baillie: The record continues in the same groove. I would have more respect for the member's position if we worked together to use the powers that we have now to make a real difference for people instead of putting that off until some point in the future.

We need to create the opportunities to recalibrate our economy in the long term by making the best investment that any Government can make—investment in our people. Members do not need to take my word for it. A very famous economist, Professor Joseph Stiglitz, proposed three solutions to inequality in his book "The Great Divide: Unequal Societies and What We Can Do About Them". Surprise, surprise, the third solution is education.

Education is much more than a social policy; it should be part of any Government's strategy for long-term economic development. However, despite the SNP having had full control over education for nearly a decade, its track record on it, especially in attainment, is a national scandal.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's tone and comments in her lecture last night, in which she admitted that the Scottish Government should be doing much better in education. We will work with her to improve education in Scotland. However, it was the First Minister herself who said that

"a party that is ... in its second term of office cannot avoid taking responsibility for its own failings."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 2001; c 4711.]

In educational attainment, the failings are severe, and we are failing our young people as a consequence. The number of young people in Scotland who are gaining national 3 to 5 qualifications dropped by 20 per cent in a year. That is more than 100,000 fewer young people getting the grades that they need to get on in life. Under the SNP, we have seen literacy levels in primary and secondary schools fall at every stage surveyed. The ministers are shaking their heads, but I did not make that up. Those are facts from surveys that have been undertaken—they are the Government's own figures. Under the SNP, the proportion of pupils who are performing well or very well in reading fell between 2012 and 2014.

Those declines in performance can be seen at every stage surveyed—primary 4, primary 7 and the second year of high school. However, at every stage, pupils from the most well-off backgrounds are performing to a higher level than pupils in the middle and from the most deprived backgrounds. That should be a concern to us all.

To put that into context, the proportion of second year high school pupils from the poorest backgrounds performing well or very well in numeracy is a mere 25 per cent. That should shame us all.

Let me be clear about what that means. Under this SNP Government, Scotland's children, especially those from the most deprived backgrounds, are not getting even the most basic skills. Our children's ability to read, to write and to count has all gone backwards under the SNP. It is, without question, a national scandal. We cannot simply pay lip service and just say how bad the situation is and that the Scottish Government must take action, because this matters not just to those individuals but to the future state of our economy.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning said that she planned to take stock after six months on the job. Although I welcome that, let me say as gently as I can that her Government has been in power for eight years, so taking stock after six months is not enough. All those failures, all that regression and all that denied opportunity has been taking place on the SNP's watch.

A general pattern emerges when this Government is held to account on its record. It is

our responsibility in this chamber to hold it to account, but I recall that opponents are often accused of talking down Scotland. Indeed, those who work in a service under scrutiny are used as a human shield. Let me be clear: when I point out the problems in education that we have in this country I am not blaming teachers or students; I am not even blaming parents. I lay the blame squarely at the door of this SNP Government.

Today, teacher numbers are at a 10-year low, with more than 4,000 fewer teachers in Scotland's classrooms since the SNP came to power. Its 2007 manifesto promise to cut class sizes has been completely abandoned. Therefore, it is little wonder that we have gone backwards.

Closing the attainment gap in education will have a long-term benefit to our economy. Low attainers are more likely to be unemployed, working part-time and earning less. Those earnings are substantially less—they are more than £20 a week less for men and £40 a week less for women. Scottish Labour considers that closing the attainment gap should be Scotland's number 1 priority, because that would be good for individuals and for our economy, too.

We want to see overall attainment rise. That should be the Government's ambition, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy where we have so far failed so badly. Our proposal is to close the attainment gap with £25 million a year of extra investment in our education system, which is £125 million over the parliamentary session. We would use that extra investment to double the number of teaching assistants and to employ 200 literacy teachers, and to focus their work in the communities with the 20 secondary schools and their associated primary schools where working-class kids have been most left behind by the SNP Government.

We are committed to raising the performance of the 20 per cent lowest-achieving pupils where they study. We will support the parents of those children to ensure that they have the reading and writing skills that they need to support their children. Those are the choices that we would make.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Will the member, to inform my speech, give me the cost of employing a literacy teacher and the cost of employing a classroom assistant?

Jackie Baillie: I am happy to tell the member that I am being advised that a classroom assistant costs £20,000 and, we think, £30,000 for a literacy teacher. I am happy to confirm that in writing to the member after the debate.

I also indicate to the member that, as a result of his point of order at the start of business today, we

have placed at the back of the chamber a table that gives—I do not think that the member is listening; he is clearly not interested in the debate. Presiding Officer, for your benefit, I will say that we have placed at the back of the chamber the table to which the member referred in his earlier point of order.

I do not need to remind anyone in this chamber that the language of priorities is the religion of socialism. We would make the changes we propose by using the new powers coming to the Scottish Parliament to introduce a new top tax rate of 50p in the pound.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: I need to make progress.

The investment is not just in our most disadvantaged pupils, so that they get a better start in life, but in the future strength of our economy. It is right that those with the broadest shoulders should pay a little more to deliver the investment that Scotland needs to be a fairer nation. After all, that is what progressive politics is all about.

Before the general election, the SNP wrapped itself in the red flag and adopted swathes of Labour policies: the mansion tax, the bankers' bonus clawback and the 50p rate of income tax, which, through the Smith agreement, it will have the power to deliver soon enough.

I note that the Government's amendment removes the mention that we make in our motion of using the proceeds of a 50p rate to invest in our education system and improve attainment. Why is that? Is the SNP about to backtrack on fair taxes? Only a few months ago, SNP MSPs voted against using a higher rate of tax to invest in our education system, yet within weeks the SNP backed the move in its manifesto. Which of those is its position?

Scottish Labour is clear: we will use fair taxes to close the attainment gap in this country, because we believe in progressive politics, and we will build a fairer Scotland and a stronger economy in doing so.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that tackling Scotland's attainment gap is crucial to future economic performance, in recognition of OECD research demonstrating that inequality has caused a cumulated loss in GDP of 8.5% over 25 years; notes with concern new analysis by Dr Jim Scott of the University of Edinburgh showing that the number of candidates gaining levels 3 to 5 qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), the replacement for standard grades, dropped by 20% between 2012-13 and 2013-14; notes that standards in literacy and numeracy in Scottish schools have fallen since 2012, with 75% of S2 pupils from the most disadvantaged

backgrounds not having the numeracy skills that they should; further notes with concern that spending on education and training fell in Scotland between 2009-10 and 2013-14 whereas it rose across the rest of the UK; notes with concern the subsequent fall in both funding and students in Scotland's colleges; believes that a renewed focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects is required from the Scottish Government; recognises the recent establishment of the Scottish Attainment Challenge; welcomes clarification from the First Minister that attainment advisers will indeed be placed in every local authority; further recognises that more must be done to address the attainment gap; welcomes proposals by Scottish Labour to tackle this with a further £25 million per year programme of investment, totalling £125 million over a five-year parliamentary session, including doubling the number of teaching assistants and 10 new literacy teachers in each of the associated primary schools of the 20 high schools facing the greatest challenges, in addition to the Scottish Government's plans and paid for through a 50p top rate of tax; calls on the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser in the Scottish Government to undertake a distributional impact assessment of the attainment gap in Scotland's schools, and believes that education is both key to addressing the scandal of inequality in Scottish society and a crucial investment in the future of Scotland's economy.

14:56

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): I very much welcome the opportunity to debate in tandem education, our economy and how we are to tackle inequality, because they are all inextricably linked. This Government has done more than any previous Administration in the United Kingdom to promote the living wage. It is clear to me that all of us share a commitment to tackling inequality and the at times devastating impact that it can have on our society and our economy. It is important to remember that, rather than an abstract concept, we are talking about real lives and our children's future. I hope that, if we put our children's interests and needs at the heart of our debate, we can find some agreement and more ways of generating light rather than heat on such a vital issue.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angela Constance: Not just yet.

I will address the errors in Labour's assertion about young people's achievements in examinations in recent years. At First Minister's question time last Thursday, Ms Dugdale claimed that recent research showed

"102,000 fewer candidates getting the grades that they need to get on in life."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 2015; c 10.]

That is simply not the case, given that there are only ever around 150,000 candidates presenting for qualifications in any year. Labour appears to have confused the number of candidates with the

number of entries for examination, yet everyone knows that most candidates are presented for several qualifications.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angela Constance: In a moment.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority's data shows that, as expected, the total number of entries and passes at levels 3 to 5 dropped last year, not because of failure but because of success. Our young people, supported by teachers and education authorities, have successfully transferred to the new system in line with changed curriculum models, whereby they take fewer qualifications in secondary 4. That is well known and it does not reflect the performance in exams of our young people or the performance of the system.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I think that the cabinet secretary is correct in her assessment of the number of presentations. Is that in itself one of the key issues, in that there are fewer presentations because of the change to the exam system, which has knock-on effects on higher and advanced higher? Parents are concerned that their children will end up with fewer qualifications, even though the existing ones might be quite well taken.

Angela Constance: Ms Smith fails to understand that the overall purpose of the curricular reforms is to maximise the performance of children by the time they leave school. The reasons for the changes are indeed related to the curriculum.

I wonder at times whether Conservative and Labour members remain absolute in their commitment to supporting curriculum for excellence. I thought that we all understood that, in the new arrangements, pupils do an extra year of what we call a broad general education. In curriculum for excellence, children maintain a full range of subjects through S3. Only then do they begin to drop subjects, and they typically focus on a smaller number of formal qualifications in the course of S4. They then go into S5 able to focus in-depth on the subjects that they have continued to study.

Iain Gray: I do not accept some of the cabinet secretary's analysis, and I will address some of that in my closing speech. However, on that particular point, I note that pupils will be able to proceed to a higher level in the fewer subjects that they have studied only if they pass in them. The same SQA statistics as the cabinet secretary quoted show that the pass rate for levels 3 to 5 dropped from 92 to 83 per cent and that at level 5—or what was credit level—it dropped to below

80 per cent and was 79 per cent. Attainment levels have fallen.

Angela Constance: Of course, more people took highers, but Mr Gray has failed to realise that the new qualifications mark a shift to deeper learning and more analysis, engagement and understanding. As I have said, pupils generally study a wider range of subjects at S3 and focus on a smaller number of qualifications at S4 on their way to studying highers.

Jackie Baillie: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angela Constance: No, thanks.

We know that there is still a small percentage of young people who leave school at the end of S4. Under curriculum for excellence, they will do so with a firm foundation. The percentage of young people who leave school with no qualifications has reduced drastically in recent years—further and faster than under Labour—and the figure now stands at 1.5 per cent. It is really sad that the Labour Party has chosen to misrepresent Dr Scott's painstaking collection of data. As people read the *Official Report*, they will be able to see that the facts stand for themselves.

We have a record to be proud of—I will say more about that in my closing speech—but we absolutely do not demur from the fact that much more needs to be done. Nevertheless, it is a pity that those in other parties do not recognise the useful comparisons that can be made between the level 6 qualifications—that mainly means highers—taken in 2012-13 and those taken in 2013-14. The total number of entries for those qualifications has increased from more than 182,000 to more than 191,000 and—vitality—the number of qualifications that have been gained has increased from more than 144,000 to more than 148,000. That is a record number.

I am totally committed to curriculum for excellence, its principles and its approach to learning. It will deliver the skills, knowledge and experience that we want for all our children and young people.

Neil Findlay: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angela Constance: No, thanks.

Curriculum for excellence is a success story that is still being written. The OECD's review of our education system in 2007 praised our vision in that respect, and its next review, which begins next month, will focus on implementation and the broad general education and will provide us with valuable independent evidence that draws on other countries' experience.

As Ms Baillie mentioned, last night I set out my priorities, my values and my aspirations for Scotland's education system. I want Scotland to have a fair education system that provides excellence to all children, irrespective of their background or circumstances. I want an education system that does not settle for good enough but which aims high and gives children the skills that they need to thrive rather than simply to survive.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angela Constance: No, thanks.

I want Scotland to have an education system that is focused on attainment and achievement and which is built around delivering equity and excellence and—crucially—aspiration and ambition.

There are promising signs that we are on track to deliver excellence. Programme for international student assessment—PISA—data for 2012 shows that Scotland performed at above the OECD average for reading and science and outperformed a greater number of competitor countries than in 2009. The PISA data also showed that we narrowed the gap between the most and least disadvantaged pupils. We were the only UK country to do so.

However, I make it clear that the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy results on numeracy in 2014 and this year's results on literacy certainly show that we need to step up the pace of change. That is why the Government has made closing the attainment gap so that every child in every community gets every chance to succeed at school and in life a key focus of our programme for government. We are investing £100 million through a national attainment fund over four years, targeting support at local authorities with the most deprived communities and providing schools with greater access to expertise and resources through the Scottish attainment challenge. Attainment advisers for every local authority area are being recruited, and the raising attainment for all programme now has 23 local authorities and 180 schools committed to improving literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing.

New duties under the Education (Scotland) Bill to ensure that councils and ministers attach priority to the on-going challenge of inequalities of outcome will underpin that work. I trust that we can rely on Labour members for their support at all stages of that bill.

I will finish by offering members reassurance. They should not doubt my and the Government's passion and sense of urgency for addressing the issue. We know that we have more to do and that we have to do it now. Every school and every education authority needs to take action. We will

not rest until we see clear evidence that educational outcomes are improving for every child in Scotland.

The spirit of consensus that has underpinned curriculum for excellence needs to be maintained and applied to the wider effort. We need to keep clear in our minds our key priorities to ensure that every child in Scotland is on a personal journey to excellence.

I move amendment S4M-13203.3, to leave out from first “believes” to end and insert:

“agrees that reducing inequality, including the attainment gap, is not only important in itself, but is vital to create the conditions to deliver sustainable economic growth over the long term; welcomes the successful implementation of the curriculum for excellence (CfE); notes that, under CfE, pupils generally study a wider range of subjects in S3 than previously, before focussing on a smaller number of subjects for formal qualifications in S4; recognises that this approach is designed to ensure that pupils maximise their achievement by the time they leave school and commands the support of teachers, educationalists and the Parliament; condemns attempts to portray this change in the pattern of exams taken as a reduction in attainment; welcomes the reduction in the attainment gap noted by the OECD’s Pisa study; agrees that more needs to be done to raise attainment and close the attainment gap; supports the recent launch of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, backed by the £100 million Attainment Scotland Fund, the ongoing work with the Raising Attainment for All programme and the Access to Education Fund and specific work on literacy and numeracy, and calls on all parties to reaffirm their support for CfE.”

15:07

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

We, too, welcome this Labour Party debate on Scotland’s economy, specifically on the essential skills, training, qualifications and basic education that are required to ensure that people from all backgrounds and of all ages in Scotland benefit from the opportunities to work and start a business.

I am pleased to note that the Scottish Government now admits, after eight years in office, the drop in performance in both reading and writing. That is a good starting point for the debate. I am also pleased to hear that, after eight years, that has now become an urgent issue.

I would like to quote from emails that I have received from parents and teachers on the reduction in subjects and their concern about limiting choices in highers and putting pupils in Scotland at a disadvantage.

First, I will quote from an email from a parent in Edinburgh, who said:

“We were told that the new curriculum for excellence would result in all schools going from 8 standard grade equivalents to 6. Advised that this was the new way for all and that children would be given more time to devote to subjects and this should improve grades”.

She then discovered that that diktat was referred to as a consultation. When she spoke to other parents in Edinburgh, she discovered that pupils at Boroughmuir high school, the Royal high school, James Gillespie’s high school and others were still doing eight standard grade equivalents, not six.

A teacher in Edinburgh had bright students who wanted to do chemistry and physics in S4, but they could not because of their other choices from the very restricted menu that was on offer. They could do only one science along with physical education or retail. There is nothing wrong with PE and retail—I have spoken out on retail opportunities many times in the Parliament—but try getting into medical school with highers in PE and retail rather than science. That is very difficult to do.

One pupil responded by saying:

“You make us do subjects we don’t want to do for an extra year, and then you don’t let us choose the subjects we do want to do”.

Next year, the same school and the same teacher will run a composite national 4, national 5 and higher class bringing together physics, biology and craft, design and technology into one course. How often has the importance of science-based subjects and understanding been stated in the Parliament?

I now come to the painstaking data from Dr Jim Scott. Another area of concern is the drastic reduction in attainment totals for Scottish credit and qualifications framework levels 3 to 5. The fall in attainment at level 3 is 58 per cent between the year before last and last year. In level 4, there is a 23 per cent fall in attainment and, in level 5, there is a 10 per cent fall. That leads to an overall average of a 20 per cent reduction in attainment last year in comparison with 2012-13. That is based on Dr Jim Scott’s research and I am happy to hand it over to the cabinet secretary.

As if that was not bad enough, we must ask why, given the Scottish Government’s opportunities for all guarantee of a place in education or training—I read the 2011 manifesto before I came to the chamber—29,000 16 to 19-year-olds are not in education, employment or training.

When it looks at schools, the Government must ask what happens between P7, when 66 per cent of pupils perform well or very well in numeracy, and S2, when only 42 per cent of pupils perform well or very well. What happens in two years at secondary school that leads to a drop in numeracy standards of 24 percentage points?

We also learn from Audit Scotland that there is no consistent approach to tracking and monitoring pupils’ progress from P1 to S3. Although some councils test at P1, P3, P5, P7 and S2, others do

not. Last night, the cabinet secretary said that assessment tools and systems were already in place at school, local and national level. If so, why are they not being used and why do they need to be simplified before they are implemented?

Yesterday, the Education and Culture Committee heard evidence from East Renfrewshire Council. It holds comprehensive data on the attainment of all children through the analysis of baseline, standardised tests at P3, P5, P7 and S2, as well as SQA results. If East Renfrewshire schools can collect that information through testing to inform them about a child's development and support needs, why can it not be done in the rest of Scotland? Unfortunately, East Renfrewshire Council cannot compare its data with those of any other schools because the tests are that council's and its alone.

We have welcomed the attainment advisers and the £100 million investment over four years, but I was a bit surprised to read in *Scotland on Sunday* that those posts are secondments for 12 months or 23 months, not four years. Perhaps I will pass the job advertisement to Stewart Stevenson, because there is no salary on it so we do not even know how much they will be paid. I presume that it will be what they are already paid.

Unless we know who needs support to assist their attainment, unless we have accurate data and unless there is an evaluation, we will not know where the £100 million will go.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I regret that you must draw to a close.

Mary Scanlon: I can see that my time is almost up.

A 150,000 cut in part-time college places does not help attainment one bit, nor do the cuts to provision for over-25s, whose lives can be transformed by college. I know that. I was a part-time student when I was over 25 and a single parent with two children. I had all those opportunities before I went to university but that door is well and truly closed for the future. That is much to be regretted and I lay the blame entirely at the door of the Government.

I move amendment S4M-13203.1, to leave out from "welcomes clarification" to end and insert:

" , and is concerned about the high percentage of secondary schools that have reduced the number of certificate subjects available in S4, which, in turn, has reduced the total number of presentations, including in English and Maths, and which, by definition, means that there are fewer pupils who are properly schooled in the literacy and numeracy skills required in the world of work."

15:13

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Throughout the United Kingdom, unemployment has fallen and hundreds of thousands of jobs have been created. Wages are outstripping inflation and growth rates in the United Kingdom are vying with those in the United States of America. That is combined with big tax cuts for people on low and middle incomes.

Let us contrast that with what the recent set of statistics shows is happening in Scotland, where the unemployment level has risen. In particular, 5,000 women have left employment. That contrasts badly with the rest of the United Kingdom and, in that context, the debate is timely.

We need the Scottish Government to examine every aspect of its policy to get Scotland back on the path of falling unemployment to ensure a prosperous economy and futures that allow individuals to fulfil their potential.

I was quite disappointed with the minister's amendment and with her tone today. The Government must begin to acknowledge its weaknesses and its failings in order for us to make real progress. In the interventions from her own back benchers, the only answer that they had to the problem was more powers for this Parliament. They have no other ideas about education at all—only more powers. It is a stuck record, and they need to reflect on their eight years in power and eight years of failure.

I welcome the Scottish attainment challenge and the funding through the attainment Scotland fund, but the Government has had eight years in which to tackle inequality of attainment and has failed to do so. The minister cannot now, with a great flourish of rhetoric, claim a new start. Children who started school in 2007 are now well established at secondary school. They do not get a second chance. The class of 2007 has witnessed this Government's failure to deliver its promises to reduce class sizes in primary 1 to 3, its failure to improve teacher pupil ratios and its failure to improve standards in maths, science and literacy.

Let us look at some of the details. The number of teachers has fallen by 4,275 since 2007. The average P1 to P3 class now stands at 23 pupils—far from the 18 that we were promised back in 2007. The PISA maths scores fell in 2009 and 2012. The results of the 2014 Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy, which was published recently, show that performance in reading dropped in primary schools between 2012 and 2014, as well as in the second year of secondary school.

The minister must reflect seriously on that record. Rather than claiming that it is a new start, she needs to take responsibility for the full eight

years during which her Government has been in charge.

It is perhaps no surprise that the Liberal Democrat amendment has focused on the early years and on the importance of that crucial period for an individual's life chances. There is an ever-growing body of evidence about how the quality of early years provision can support a child's brain development and make a positive difference to their life chances and their future participation in our society. Effective early years education offers the foundations for healthy, all-round development. Studies such as "The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report" provide strong evidence for the impact of high-quality childcare and highly qualified staff on children's outcomes.

We know from that work that better-qualified staff teams offered higher-quality support for children developing their communication, language and literacy skills and their reasoning, thinking and maths skills. That is why we want more of Scotland's children to benefit from free nursery education. With provision in England outstripping that in Scotland, we cannot say that we are giving Scotland's children the start that they deserve. That is a concern not only for the individuals but for our future economy. We are asking our young people to play catch-up from the age of two in what is already a hugely competitive global economy.

Let me be clear. I am not doubting—and there is no doubting—the talents and potential of young people across Scotland, but we must do more and we need to do more to unlock that talent to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. That process of unlocking potential starts from a very early age.

The Government must also look at its record of helping disadvantaged pupils and at the continued attainment gap. There is evidence that the pupil premium that was introduced by the previous UK Government has had a positive impact in meeting its aims. An Office for Standards in Education report highlighted how the funding was used by one school to support a pupil who became temporarily looked after in year 11, following a family trauma, as her work began to suffer. The school bought in counselling and other emotional support, as well as an individualised programme of additional teaching, including daily maths tuition, extra English lessons and support in PE. It is that kind of individualised help and support that the pupil premium has allowed and which can truly turn around a young person's life. I hope that serious consideration will be given to a similar funding approach in Scotland.

Angela Constance: Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: I am sorry, but I am in my last minute.

Nearly two centuries ago, an American politician, Horace Mann, said:

"Education, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equaliser of the conditions of men—the balance-wheel of the social machinery."

Education is an enduring legacy of opportunity, and the Government needs to step up to the mark.

I move amendment S4M-13203.2, to leave out from "welcomes proposals" to end and insert:

"recognises research that shows that investment in the first three years of a child's life is the most influential in changing an individual's life chances; believes that quality early years education is crucial to closing the attainment gap; further believes that targeted funding for school-aged pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds should be explored in Scotland as a means to give disadvantaged pupils a better chance of reaching their potential; considers that education is the best means to create a strong economy with sustainable jobs, and is concerned that the unemployment level in Scotland is bucking the trend seen across the UK by increasing in the last quarter."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate. We are extremely tight for time today.

15:20

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): First, I would like to consider the motion that has been lodged by the Labour Party. It talks about concerns about a new analysis that has been published by Dr Jim Scott. In trying to get that analysis from the Scottish Parliament information centre, I managed to obtain a sheet with one black-and-white table. That is not analysis in my book. Today, it was replaced by a sheet placed by the Labour Party on the table at the back of the chamber with the same table on it—the only difference being that it is now in colour. If we are going to debate Dr Scott's analysis, it would be wise to ensure that we could all catch sight of that analysis. We have been told that the analysis was conducted for the Labour Party. None of us has seen it—it is not easy to come by.

Iain Gray: I want to correct a couple of factual errors by the member. First, the analysis was not undertaken for the Labour Party; it was undertaken by Dr Scott in his capacity as a research fellow. The data—

Kevin Stewart: I have heard enough, Mr Gray.

Iain Gray: The data—

Kevin Stewart: Enough!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart, sit down and let Mr Gray finish.

Iain Gray: The data is Scottish Qualifications Authority data that has been publicly available since last December.

Kevin Stewart: What I would say, then, is—

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Kevin Stewart: —why is that analysis available to some and not others?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart, sit down.

Hugh Henry: Presiding Officer, can you clarify that the rules of this Parliament are that, when you call a member to speak, it is you who determines when that person finishes, and that they should not be shouted down by another speaker?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank the member for his point of order. The point that he raises is correct. However, we will now proceed with the debate.

Kevin Stewart: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

That analysis is not publicly available. We have not been able to catch sight of it, which I would argue makes it difficult to debate.

I will move on. Other parts of the motion talk about introducing a 50p tax rate to pay for a number of things. I stand to be corrected but, at this moment in time, this Parliament does not have the power to raise the top rate of tax to 50p. I wish that it did, but that is one of the many powers that we still do not have.

Beyond that, in answer to a question from my colleague Stewart Stevenson, Jackie Baillie said that she reckons that it would cost £20,000 a year to employ a teaching assistant and that she thinks—“think” is the word that she used—that it would cost £30,000 a year for a literacy teacher. I am quite sure that that does not include the whole cost of employing the folk who are mentioned in the motion.

Iain Gray: Will the member give way?

Kevin Stewart: No. I have heard enough from Mr Gray.

Once again, we have a flaw in a Labour Party motion. It is little wonder that the last Labour Government got itself into financial difficulties, given that the party cannot calculate these things properly but there we go—no surprise there.

I was shouted down earlier for mentioning welfare reform and its effect on people throughout this country. On numerous occasions when I have been out and about, I have talked to teachers and others who say that we have a massive gap in attainment that must be bridged. However, we will not be able to do so while kids are still going to

school with empty bellies, because kids with empty bellies cannot learn. One of our major problems is the fact that welfare reform is having a major impact on people right across this country. Of course, the Labour Party could have helped to deal with some of the empty belly problems by voting for free school meals when that issue was raised in this Parliament, but it voted against them. How progressive is that?

Among the key things that we need to do to tackle inequality, bridge that attainment gap and create a fairer society is create a much better social security system and ensure that folks who are in work are being paid properly so that they can afford the things that they need in their daily lives.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last 30 seconds.

Kevin Stewart: Unfortunately, that is one of the things that the Labour Party and others in this place will not talk about. They will not talk about it because they do not want this Parliament to have those powers. I am quite sure that we would do a much better job than the current Tory Government and previous Westminster Governments, which have failed on this issue.

15:26

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Two central economic facts underline Labour’s motion. First, education—especially quality education—is crucial for economic growth; and, secondly, inequality undermines economic growth. That is an orthodoxy now, as it is accepted by the OECD and the IMF as well as by notable individual economists.

Those two facts explain why the attainment gap is not just important—and, indeed, catastrophic for the lives of many people in Scotland today—but harming our economy twice over: first, by reducing the number of people who have the level of education and skills needed to advance in the employment market; and, secondly, by exacerbating the inequality that hinders growth.

Jackie Baillie quoted Joseph Stiglitz on the subject of the relationship between education and inequality. Anyone who doubts that analysis should look at a very short OECD video that I watched this morning. It is less than five minutes long, but it absolutely brilliantly encapsulates that central insight about inequality undermining economic growth.

The video also advocates something else that is quite interesting. I think that we all accept that the

OECD is not some kind of Marxist front, but it argues in the video and in other writings that tax increases for the wealthiest are necessary to strengthen the economy, which is contrary to the neo-liberal orthodoxy that we often hear about. Also, of course, those increases are crucial for providing the educational and other opportunities for those who are most disadvantaged in our society. That is exactly what we propose in our motion.

Kevin Stewart is right to say that we have not quite got the ability to do that in terms of tax powers, but there is no doubt that we will have it soon. That is why a central proposal in Labour's recent election manifesto was that we should use the money from the top rate of tax to employ teaching assistants and literacy teachers, focusing on the most disadvantaged schools. There was also the commitment, which Jackie Baillie reiterated, to support the lowest performing 20 per cent of pupils in literacy and numeracy wherever they happen to live.

Kevin Stewart: Mr Chisholm may have more knowledge than I do. Does he have any idea when this Parliament is likely to get those tax-raising powers? At this moment in time, I have no clue about when we are likely to get them—if we get them.

Malcolm Chisholm: I am very confident that those powers will be coming soon.

As members know, I am not one to bash the Scottish Government at every opportunity, but it and SNP back benchers must face some uncomfortable facts in this debate. I do not think that they can argue with the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy, which has been much referred to. I think that in the speech that she gave last night, the cabinet secretary accepted that there are alarming declines in the levels of numeracy and literacy in Scotland, and those have to be addressed collectively by us all.

Mary Scanlon made the interesting point that there is a particular decline between primary 7 and secondary 2, and we should perhaps focus on that. I support the curriculum for excellence, but there may have been a loss of focus on literacy and numeracy in the first two years of secondary school.

The cabinet secretary expressed surprise last night at some of the approaches to literacy and numeracy in S1 and S2. I was surprised as well: when I started teaching in the 1970s, language across the curriculum was a central mantra, as well as being the title of a very important textbook. There may be lessons to be learned in that regard, but the points that Jackie Baillie made about the wider issues of teacher numbers and class sizes are equally important.

We have heard a lot about Dr Scott, whose table is interesting. Kevin Stewart spent the first half of his speech saying that there is not enough information in it. I am sure that we would all like more information, but there is some pretty important information in the table, which is in two parts.

On the number of exams that students take in S4, I hear what the cabinet secretary says, but I still have concerns about that, particularly with regard to STEM—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—subjects, which we all accept are so important for the economy. The issue may well be difficult to address, but the same point came up in the science in schools debate earlier this year. If the number of science subjects that are being taken is declining because people cannot do physics and chemistry or whatever, we must at least ask questions about that.

There is also the uncomfortable fact of attainment levels. Iain Gray quoted the most striking part of the table in that regard: of those enrolled, 92 per cent passed in 2012-13 and 79 per cent passed in 2013-14. I acknowledge that that is just two years, but we have to take those figures seriously and express a degree of concern about them.

We also need to focus on STEM subjects in colleges. We keep bandying about the figures on colleges, and the Labour Party's concerns about them are well known, but I highlight the figures with regard to STEM subjects and the effect on the economy. There were 86,000 places in STEM subjects in colleges eight years ago, while in the last year for which we have figures, there were 56,000. Again, that gives us some cause for concern.

I heard what the cabinet secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, said at question time about more colleges courses leading to employment, but that does not seem to sit comfortably with the decline in STEM subjects. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Order, please. The member is finishing, so no one will intervene.

Malcolm Chisholm: I am exactly on six minutes, so I do not have time to say what I wanted to say about early years. I will just note that I agree that, in spite of all our talk about schools and colleges, the most important investment for all sorts of things, including economic growth, is probably investment in the early years.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Clare Adamson, to be followed by Graeme Pearson. We are tight for time.

15:32

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): At the start of the debate—indeed, for possibly the first four minutes of Jackie Baillie’s speech—I thought that we were going to get some consensus on the devastating effect of inequality and the challenges ahead, and come together on how we could address the situation. I am a bit sorry that the debate has taken a different direction.

The first issue that I want to raise concerns the research by Dr Scott to which members have referred. I have in front of me an email that I received from SPICe yesterday. It says:

“The research was carried out for the Labour Party and the full document is not publicly available or published online. The party have today”

—that is, yesterday—

“provided the below table to SPICe which summarises the findings of Dr ... Scott and which can be shared by SPICe with enquirers.”

I am unclear about who produced the summary: that is, whether it is Dr Scott’s analysis or the Labour Party’s.

Iain Gray: I can answer that question: the table is from Dr Scott’s research. I can also say to Clare Adamson in all sincerity that SPICe is wrong: we did not tell it that the research was done for us. I can only assume that SPICe has made a mistake.

Clare Adamson: I hope that Iain Gray will appreciate that that is what has led to some confusion among members on the SNP side of the chamber with regard to the report.

In looking at the table in front of me, I am concerned that there does not seem to be any weighting for falling school rolls between the two years in question. I agree with the cabinet secretary that, when the raw data is taken out of the context that was provided in evidence to the Education and Culture Committee—that the number of subjects being studied by pupils this year was going to fall because that was the intention of curriculum for excellence—there is some confusion.

Jackie Baillie: Although we might accept that the overall number of people taking the exams has fallen—I do not necessarily accept that, but let us put that to one side—how can the member explain the percentage drop in attainment? That is not about the respective numbers; it is about an overall fall in attainment, no matter who is sitting the exams.

Clare Adamson: We have to look at the issue in context. We are talking about the second year of the new fifth year exams, and we do not have all the information in front of us or the full details of the research, which is why it is difficult for us to

comment on it. However, I do not think that the Government or anyone else will say that a fall in attainment is likely. As the cabinet secretary has set out, higher levels are showing a continued increase and, year on year, we are doing better in the area. As we are having this debate, I just had to raise those issues.

Johann Lamont: Will the member take an intervention?

Clare Adamson: No—I have taken enough interventions. Sorry.

In today’s press, Jamie Livingstone, the head of Oxfam Scotland, talked about research that Oxfam carried out that showed that

“in the UK, just five families had roughly the same wealth as the least well off 12 million people in Britain put together.”

Mr Livingstone says that, although Oxfam is non-political, it takes

“a clear and unequivocal stand against such glaring inequality—an issue we believe is inextricably linked to poverty.”

Oxfam says that tackling poverty and inequality must include

“action to ensure that we have a just tax system in which everyone pays their fair share—each according to their means.”

There is a degree of consensus that the tax system needs to change to achieve that. It is just unfortunate that we do not have the power to do that in the Scottish Parliament at this time.

The article also states:

“Latest figures suggest 820,000 people live in poverty in Scotland. More than half of working age adults in poverty live in households where at least one person is working; the old adage that work is the clearest route out of poverty rings hollow.”

That is no longer relevant to the situation that we find with in-work poverty today.

The Welfare Reform Committee has frequently taken evidence on increased food bank use and the effects of the sanctions system on families who rely on social security. We have seen that poverty is increasing as a result of the Westminster Government’s austerity agenda. Mary Scanlon spoke passionately about the numbers, but she forgets that in those figures are children who are suffering under her Government’s austerity regime.

With regard to the further cuts that are coming our way, Westminster’s Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has stated:

“We would have to have done the work on it.”

He continued:

“as soon as we’ve done the work and had it modelled we’ll let everybody know what that is.”

We have £12 billion of cuts coming, but there is no cognisance of what the welfare budget needs to be and no reason for the cuts other than the austerity ideology. No regard is paid to the devastating impact on families who rely on social security or to equality impact assessments. There is no sense of fairness or need in the UK Government’s agenda.

The science and engineering education advisory group report on STEM subjects highlighted that

“even relatively small improvements in educational standards can have large impacts on the economic, social and cultural well-being of nations that may offset and perhaps exceed the cost of effective educational reform.”

I believe that the Government, working with partners such as SEEAG, is moving towards that position. I know that that is happening because, on 26 and 27 March, I attended the learning festival in North Lanarkshire, which was opened by Dr Alasdair Allan. The festival looked at creative learning and giving teachers opportunities to learn more about what exists to help them to meet the challenges that they face in tackling the attainment gap.

15:39

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I rise to support Jackie Baillie’s motion and to contribute to the debate. One can understand why the Government wants to focus on all the plus points in our education system, and there is no doubt that we are gifted with the professionalism of our teachers, and those who support them in education day and daily, in dealing with the pupils and students in our schools. However, as Willie Rennie touched on, we need to look at the reality of what happens in our schools and what has happened every day during the eight years of the SNP Government. It is about pupils. It is about one chance in life—a chance that is given to them by education to move out of deprivation and poverty.

The cabinet secretary was right to acknowledge last night her concerns about literacy. I add to that concerns about numeracy. She made comments alluding to some teachers’ impacts and their understanding of the challenge. Those observations have been picked up by some people as a criticism of the profession. Therein lies the heat at the centre of our debate. Too often we are diverted from the key issues that we are trying to understand.

Education is particularly important not only to our economy and for what it adds to our ability to participate and compete in this world. It is also of particular significance to people who come from poor areas—those who face deprivation of

opportunity. For those who live in such areas, education provides one of the only chances to escape poverty.

This week in the *Daily Record*, Joanne Martin from Possilpark reported that she had succeeded in achieving grades that should have allowed her to pursue a career in medicine, only to find that she was being frustrated in taking her chosen career path, in her belief, because of the social stratum that she comes from and the family support that she received—great support from her mum, who is a part-time cleaner. Her view was supported by Vonnie Sandlan, the president-elect of the National Union of Students Scotland. When we look at the position, we discover the fact that in the most deprived 10 per cent of areas in Scotland fewer than one person in three leaves school with at least one higher, while four out of every five pupils in the most affluent parts of Scotland leave with at least one higher. With a Government that seems to be committed to social justice and equality, those statistics are difficult to face.

Dr Jim Scott of the University of Edinburgh has shown that the number of candidates who are gaining level 3 to 5 Scottish credit and qualifications framework qualifications—the replacement for standard grades—has dropped by 20 per cent. That is a challenge to any Government that seeks to deliver equality of opportunity.

Standards of literacy and numeracy in Scotland’s schools have fallen.

Angela Constance: I want to be clear that the number of people who are achieving qualifications at levels 3 to 5 did not fall by 20 per cent. It fell by about 6 per cent. The mistake that Labour keeps making is that its members talk about people—as in candidates—as opposed to the number of qualifications. You cannot compare apples with pears. Typically, there were two entries for standard grades at general and credit level, whereas with level 3—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, we have to hurry along.

Graeme Pearson: I hear what the cabinet secretary says. It is one thing to bemuse us with statistics, but the reality is out there to be faced, and it is reported every day in our schools.

College admissions have fallen by 37 per cent, or some 140,000 places, since the SNP came to power. That pathway for leaving deprivation and poverty is becoming choked off by the decisions that are being taken by this Government, in this country, under the powers that are available to it now. At the same time it is spending £7.599 billion from the budget to deliver for our children. If the SNP Government is truly committed to delivering in this respect, it should pay attention to Dr Jim

Scott's opinions on the matter. He is a respected academic who reported to committee earlier this year, and—

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Graeme Pearson: I will finish the sentence. When I spoke to Dr Scott at a committee meeting, he informed me that his report was submitted to Government officials earlier this year and that he supported the contents of that report. It was interesting to me particularly because of the meeting that I attended. On that occasion the cabinet secretary—not the present one—reported on the successes that had been achieved in modern language teaching in Scottish schools. Dr Scott reported exactly the opposite from a statistic that he had gathered for his report.

I beg the cabinet secretary to connect with reality to give us the opportunity to see improvements in the access to education that is offered to people in deprived areas and those who live in poor circumstances.

15:45

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I am happy to welcome this debate on education, as it appears in the motion, although I have to say that the title, "The Future of Scotland's Economy" is somewhat misleading. The link between education and the economy is very strong, but it would have been helpful if the Labour Party had said that in the title of the motion. However, I accept that Labour has been in something of a muddle recently.

One of the SNP's flagship policies has been free university education. It is fascinating that universities are not mentioned in Labour's motion. Does Labour look down on academic achievement and the universities? Does Labour want to move resources from universities to schools and colleges? Labour is perfectly entitled to call for that if it wants, but to call for more emphasis on one area without stating that there should be less emphasis on another strikes me as being less than transparent.

We would all like more money to be available for colleges, as for other areas. However, I would not want to return to the previous arrangements, which became purely a numbers game, with students, including some with learning disabilities, being parked on courses that were of no use to them.

As well as how much money colleges get, there is also a question about how they are run. The situation in Glasgow has been of concern to me for some time, with the apparent turmoil both at Glasgow Clyde College—with the change of

principal—and at the overall Glasgow Colleges Regional Board. One of the key ways to reduce inequality in Scottish society is to have strong and effective colleges. The six community-based colleges in Glasgow, which have now been merged into two—Glasgow Kelvin College and Glasgow Clyde College—have had a fair degree of success in that respect. Can the cabinet secretary give us any reassurance in relation to both Glasgow Clyde College and the Glasgow Colleges Regional Board that that money will not be wasted on expensive bureaucracy and duplication, but will be channelled into front-line education and that the regional board will be able to handle that?

Neil Findlay: Does John Mason believe that more people are moving into further education and that there are now more staff in further education than there were prior to his Government's reforms?

John Mason: I believe—because the Scottish Parliament's budget has been cut—that virtually all spending, apart from on the national health service, has had to be reduced. That is the reality.

This week is Scottish apprenticeships week. I was out in Baillieston with some Glasgow Housing Association modern apprentices on Monday, which reminded me again that we need to find the right role and employment for each and every individual.

In the past there has been too much emphasis on academic results in schools. We have seen some improvement, in that we have been moving away from that, in recent years. There is still, however, overemphasis on exam results—which are relatively easy to measure—compared to the emphasis on the value that is added by a school, which is much harder to measure.

I agree with the Labour motion when it mentions the STEM—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—subjects. That focus is needed especially for girls and women, as we found at the Equal Opportunities Committee when we carried out our inquiry into women and work. There is still a tendency for men and women to take traditional career paths. It is not just money that is needed to change that. However, there is very little detail from Labour about what can or should be done to get more people into STEM.

There is a strong emphasis on STEM in the Government and Parliament, but we are not seeing that being worked out in practice at the grass roots. When I had a school visit from one of my local secondaries recently, none of the pupils—boys or girls—was considering engineering. Why was that? Are schools pressing too much for arts and academic subjects, rather than for more practical and technical subjects? Do

we need schools to emphasise more to pupils where future jobs are likely to be? How do we change attitudes in society so that engineering is valued more highly? How do we help young people who lack self-confidence and vision, perhaps because no one in their family has been at college or university before? Although I accept that school resources are a key element, those kinds of questions are not just about money.

While we are on attitudes, the attitude to self-employment is another challenge. Many of us did not, when we were at school, seriously consider setting up our own business but assumed that academic achievement and being employed was the way ahead. However, some of our most successful business people do not have fabulous academic records. Some gained qualifications later in life, but some did not. The link between the economy and education that has been made in today's debate is important, but it is not the be all and end all. I am reminded again that we need to find the best outcome for each individual young person and not to take the too-simplistic approach of counting what is easily measured.

With my finance hat on, I believe that we have to live within our means. At the moment that means, largely, the block grant. Cuts from Westminster, as I have said, have led to cuts in most areas of the Scottish budget, which is hardly a shock to anyone here. I am very open to the idea of a 50p higher rate of income tax, and ideally we should combine that with national insurance. However, even with a 50p income tax rate, the 2p national insurance rate makes the combined rate of 52p less progressive. I would like us to look at a combined rate of perhaps 60p.

However, as my colleague Kevin Stewart asked, when is the 50p rate to be available? Will it be when this Parliament gets powers on income tax or will it be when Labour gets into power at Westminster? Either way, it seems that we will wait for quite a long time. We have estimated that we would get from a 50p rate of tax an extra £13 million; I am not sure that that would quite achieve what Labour's motion hopes for.

The economy and education are two very important topics, and the challenges that face us in both areas are slightly more complex than Labour seems to suggest.

15:51

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Jackie Baillie spent a large part of the first section of her speech talking about areas of economic policy that do not appear in the Labour Party's motion, then got into the substance of what the Labour Party wants to debate. Mr Mason is quite right that the information that SPICe provided

suggests that £13 million is what would be achieved by a 50p top rate of income tax in Scotland, which is not the £25 million that Labour says it would use from a 50p top rate. Beyond that, there is also a question whether, with regard to the numbers of employed staff to which the motion refers, the numbers would add up—either in respect of the £13 million or of the £25 million—if on-costs are included.

The central point of the debate is inequality and how best to tackle it. I do not dispute the notion that education is a means by which people can escape the trapping effect of inequality. That is well understood. However, that is about individuals doing something in spite of their circumstances, rather than about the circumstances being materially changed in order to improve the individual's outcomes. If Labour is saying that we need to focus our efforts on particular areas in order to work against the external factors that affect children's educational outcomes, I agree that we should do that. Based on current evidence, the cabinet secretary has also said that she wishes to do that. However, we have also to look at how we can address the external factors that impact on particular children, families and communities. We want such children to have the best possible educational outcomes, but we also want to ensure that the lifestyles around them are materially improved.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Mark McDonald: Perhaps I will, a little bit later. I want to develop my point further.

It cannot simply be the case that working to help children to escape the situations in which they find themselves as a result of the inequalities that exist in society will resolve those inequalities, because adults, family networks and communities are affected by deep inequalities that will not be resolved by working through the education system alone. The issue goes wider than that.

Mark Griffin: I take Mark McDonald's point on the wider issues about poverty, but does he not agree that by focusing resources on education we will start to break people out of the vicious cycle of poverty and that education is in itself a way to tackle poverty, not overnight but on a generational basis?

Mark McDonald: There is no disagreement from me on that. I think that I made that point earlier in my speech.

I represent a constituency that has poverty amidst plenty. My constituency office is based in one of the most deprived communities in the city of Aberdeen, but in my constituency I also have communities that have child poverty rates of less than 5 per cent, so I recognise the need to ensure

that resources are focused on the areas that need intervention.

That brings me to the other aspect of the inequality agenda, which is about the economy, employment and creating circumstances in which individuals in deprived communities can access well-paid and sustainable employment. That is what led me to my intervention on Jackie Baillie. I am not one of the folk who see more powers as being the answer to everything, but we must look at where the powers rest that can best tackle the societal inequalities that deprived communities face.

I absolutely agree—and I have already said—that we need to focus on education, and the cabinet secretary made that point very clearly, but beyond that we have to look at how we affect individuals' material circumstances. How do we make people's incomes and employment better? One way in which we do that is through wages policy and employment policy. It is through being able to take measures to tackle things such as exploitative zero-hours contracts, and being able to take steps to address the minimum wage policy in a wider context than simply looking at the living wage, which is narrowly confined to the public sector because that is the only place where we can implement it, at present. Until we are able to take that basket of measures forward as well, we will be hamstrung in some of our efforts.

Teachers are doing a fantastic job in our communities, especially in our deprived communities, but when a child arrives at the school gate with an empty belly because their family has to rely on food banks, or when they are affected by circumstances outside the classroom, the school will only ever be working in a situation where it is battling against external factors and it will be unable to develop the child's full potential. I absolutely agree that we should focus on education, but we must have a wider focus than simply on education. Otherwise, schools will continue to battle against external factors and will not be able to work to achieve the best possible outcomes for children.

15:57

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): We all know that the future of our economy is crucial to the future of our people and the cohesiveness of our society. In many ways, Scotland's economy is successful, especially when we compare it with other less-prosperous nations around the world, but it has a massive and glaring fault line running through it—the unequal distribution of the gains of our economic success and the poverty that many members have mentioned.

Low pay and job insecurity are at the heart of our country's problems. On Monday night, an excellent “BBC Scotland Investigates” documentary exposed the crushing, debilitating and grinding impact of low pay on people and their families, showing how it saps morale and impacts on every aspect of family life. People are unable to pay energy bills and are left staring into an empty fridge, and children go without the very basics. That is the harsh reality not just for a few people but for one Scot in five. I am ashamed to say that that is happening in my street, in my village, in my region and just yards from this building.

People are crying out for action. They need our help now and we have a moral responsibility to do something about it. We need action not next month, next year or at some time in the future when we gain additional powers and the Government of the day may or may not use them, but now. We cannot continue to blame someone else or hide behind someone else's actions or inactions, appalling as they may be. That will not feed a single child. Let us take our jobs seriously and think about how we can effect change. We should do it quickly and do it now.

The Government did not embrace radical change last year when the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill went through Parliament. I hope that it recognises that that was a mistake and that we can and should revisit it now.

Stewart Stevenson: I wonder whether Neil Findlay has read section H1 in schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998, which reserves the Employment Rights Act 1996 to Westminster and therefore deprives this Parliament of the power to legislate on what people are paid. I absolutely agree that we should do it—we could make common cause in doing that thing—but does Neil Findlay take the legal point?

Neil Findlay: As a matter of fact, I was just reading that five minutes ago. I cannot help but recognise the glee with which Mr Stevenson tells us that we cannot do anything. That is the problem—we should be doing what we can to help people now, not gleefully talking about what we cannot do.

We should go back to the European Union and ask a different question on procurement and the living wage. I suggest that we ask how we can use public procurement to extend coverage of the living wage. We should look at how the Government pays out grants through regional selective assistance and other subsidies. Money that goes to charities, agencies and all the rest should have criteria and conditions relating to pay and conditions attached as part of the grant-awarding process. We should ensure that inward investors such as Amazon, which we paid £10 million to locate in Fife, pay fair wages and

offer decent conditions, as part of the grant award. We should look at the small business bonus scheme and have a different rates for businesses that pay the living wage and meet other fair employment criteria. We should urge organisations in the charitable and social enterprise sector to lead the way as exemplars in their employment practices. I know that many do that, but not all of them do.

With the will, we can bring all the parties together to tackle the matter head on, cooperatively alongside trade unions and civic society—or we can sit back, point the finger and say that it is not our fault. I hope that the Government will set aside its previous approach and move on, thereby showing that this Parliament can put aside political differences to act quickly. I am up for that; I wonder whether the Government is.

The Labour motion focuses on the important issue of education. The Government's record on educational attainment and college policy could be described as poor at best, and offensive at worst. As has been mentioned, we have witnessed a drop in the number of young people who are gaining national 3 to 5 qualifications. The cabinet secretary jumped up to tell us that the reduction has been not 20 per cent but 6 per cent; she must forgive me for not offering her congratulations and a round of applause on her performance. Two and a half thousand college jobs have gone and 130,000 college places have been lost. Once again, the poorest communities that are suffering the most are being failed because of the lack of focus on those who have not enjoyed their share of this country's wealth.

Although new policies including the attainment challenge and the like are welcome, they are a drop in the ocean against the backdrop of the savage cuts to local government. West Lothian Council, which covers the cabinet secretary's constituency, has had a cut of £88 million to its budget. In order to meet the Government's demand on teacher numbers, the council needs 42 more teachers, but how many will funding from the Scottish Government deliver? It will deliver nine more teachers. Budgets for other services that have already been cut will have to be cut again and again. That picture is repeated across budgets and local authorities throughout the country, but the cabinet secretary seeks to blame the teachers. It is everybody and anybody's fault but hers or that of the Government that she has been part of for the past eight years.

We cannot go on like this. Cohesiveness in our society will be achieved by driving up incomes; education is a key ingredient in that. We can either work together to do that or point the finger and blame someone else—anybody else.

16:04

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I am somewhat bemused by the debate. The final paragraph of the motion states that

“education is both key to addressing the scandal of inequality in Scottish society and a crucial investment in the future of Scotland's economy.”

As Mark McDonald lucidly pointed out, it is but one key—albeit a very important one—to addressing both those issues.

My bemusement is also caused by the motion's call for an impact assessment of the attainment gap in Scotland's schools. The Education and Culture Committee is doing that very thing with, I have to say, significant input from its two Labour members and Mrs Scanlon. We believe that the route to closing the attainment gap—our committee will consider this—is by improving skills and achievement and thus the economy. Apart from money, we will consider all the other things that contribute to investment. We will also consider the assessment of the roles of parents, teachers, associated organisations, local authorities and so on.

At the heart of that is fairness. Tackling inequality is part of that and supporting equality of access to education is a priority. Inequality in education is a hurdle to overcome as we plan for ever-greater sustainable economic and environmental growth. However, as I say, other issues have an impact on that.

In that one context, the motion rightly speaks of education as one key element in Scotland's future economy, but the motion goes astray elsewhere. It references the OECD report. I have a copy here. The report makes no mention of Scotland. It does, however, highlight that, as the motion should have recognised, the ever-increasing disparity in inequality is one of the UK's making over the past 30 years. If you doubt me, read the full OECD report or, more important, read Joseph Stiglitz's informative book, “The Price of Inequality”.

Education attainment, and our economy, has been at the mercy of that lemming-like philosophy of financial greed as pursued by UK Governments over that period of time. There was rising income inequality amid two recessions; in the latter one, that curbed Scotland's ability—despite what Mr Findlay says, I do not know where we will print all the money—and curbed Scottish budgets from the UK.

Income equality rising by only three Gini points has dragged down economic growth by 0.35 per cent a year for not just the past seven years, but in the past 25 years and, given the economic drag, for some time before that. Between 1990 and 2010, economic growth would have been—could have been—nine percentage points higher had

income levels been held steady at the 1985 level. From that growth would have flown more revenue and the ability to spend more if the Government so willed on areas such as education and reducing the inequality gap.

To help you again, 1985 is 23 years before this Government came to power. Successive UK Governments have not only run finances into the ground, but put consumption before investment in our skills, our productivity and our children. There is no evidence anywhere of tackling inequality, unfairness or injustice, which now sees the UK with the fourth-highest level of income inequality in the OECD countries. I repeat that Scotland's budget has suffered as a consequence.

I welcome Neil Findlay's comment about talking and working together. However, there is no point in Labour coming here weeping crocodile tears having hitched its wagon to that lot in last year's referendum campaign. If we are to address—

Mary Scanlon: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Brodie, could you—

Chic Brodie: If we are to manage—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have a point of order, Mr Brodie. I was also about to speak to you about unparliamentary language.

Mary Scanlon: Presiding Officer, I understand that we are expected to talk to colleagues in a courteous manner. I do not think that referring to the Conservatives as "that lot" is courteous in any way.

May I ask through you, Presiding Officer, that the member apologises and retracts that statement?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Under the standing orders, members should be courteous to each other. They should also address their remarks through the chair, and they should not speak while the Presiding Officer is speaking.

Mr Brodie, please resume.

Chic Brodie: I accept that and I will apologise, Presiding Officer. The point is now made.

If we manage not just to address poverty, which is critical, but to address lower incomes and the redistribution of wealth through a unified tax and benefits system, we can further expand attainment, personal development and the skills that are allied to vocational and academic aspirations.

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Chic Brodie: No—I have already had one.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that Mr Brodie is closing.

Chic Brodie: That can come only with full financial responsibility. We must acknowledge our elevated place in the global education galaxy, but we must still recognise the importance of core education skills.

We can swap conflicting numbers, as some members appear to want to do, but we need to get behind our excellent teachers, our college lecturers, parents and the pupils themselves to focus on supporting the changes and tackling the challenges that we face. We need to provide funds such as the attainment challenge fund and to promote school improvement partnerships. We need to work together to make the necessary changes and diminish the challenges that we face, so let us do that.

16:10

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Jackie Baillie's motion highlights the OECD research that was published in December last year, which found that income inequality has a negative and statistically significant effect on medium-term economic growth. That same analysis tells us that the Gini coefficient for the OECD increased from 0.29 in the 1980s to 0.32 in 2012, so inequality is a growing problem right across western developed societies.

Inequality is a particular problem in the UK—the union that Jackie Baillie and her Conservative partners in Better Together campaigned so vigorously for Scotland to retain. They said that we were better together. Indeed, as part of the Smith commission, Labour continued to repeat that mistake and dug in its heels to prevent a transfer to Scotland of powers that would allow us to reduce inequality in our society, most notably through the minimum wage and welfare measures. Perhaps Labour members will now consider the folly of that position in the light of the general election result, when the people of Scotland told them exactly what they thought of Scottish Labour and its position.

Jackie Baillie: I understand the member's argument; it is a cyclical one that she makes constantly. I point her to Joseph Stiglitz's view that, of the three determinants of inequality, education is the one that provides a solution. Responsibility for education is wholly devolved. What has Joan McAlpine's party's Government done to tackle inequality in the past eight years?

Joan McAlpine: I am very glad that Jackie Baillie mentioned Professor Stiglitz. If she is a real admirer of him, she might have heard him on Radio 4's "Start the Week" this week, on which he praised the Scottish Government's record on using

education as a means of reducing inequality. He spoke at some length about how the Scottish Government was pursuing social democratic policies that were absent in the rest of the UK. He was unstinting in his praise of the Scottish Government with regard to education.

Only this week, European Union research told us that the UK is the most unequal country in Europe. Professor Stiglitz—who, as we have heard, is the world's foremost authority on economic inequality—has made clear his view of the UK and, in particular, its following of the American model of higher education, which has entrenched and driven inequality, not just in the US but in other societies that have followed that model. It would be interesting to know what Professor Stiglitz thought of the UK Labour Party going into the general election arguing that students in England and Wales should pay £6,000 a year in tuition fees for university. He certainly would not have approved of that. That proposed arrangement compares very poorly with our record in Scotland, which is second to none in Europe.

Johann Lamont: Does Joan McAlpine think that Professor Stiglitz would approve of cuts in bursaries for the poorest students in Scotland compared with those for students in the rest of the UK? We have the poorest support and the highest drop-out rates. I would have thought that anyone who was committed to equality in education would at least want to look at those statistics and think about what we could do now to make a difference to the lives of the students concerned.

Joan McAlpine: The NUS has praised the Scottish Government's package for students as the best in the UK. Research by the NUS shows that participation in higher education decreases by 4.4 per cent for every £1,000 increase in fees, so we can add up the cost of Labour's proposal to charge students £6,000 a year in university fees.

Given that we are debating a Labour motion, it is worth noting that Labour voted against the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013, which put into law for the first time a requirement for universities to widen access for students from poorer backgrounds. At that time, Labour refused to listen to people such as NUS Scotland; John Henderson, chief executive of Scotland's Colleges; and Professor Sir Timothy O'Shea, then principal of Edinburgh university, all of whom praised a bill that Labour inexplicably voted against.

Johann Lamont: Will the member give way?

Joan McAlpine: No. I have already taken two interventions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is also approaching her last minute.

Joan McAlpine: The effects of welfare reform and social inequality that my colleague Kevin Stewart talked passionately about have been self-evident for some weeks now. In fact, the Welfare Reform Committee has been taking evidence on the effect of austerity on families, and when we took evidence from social work chiefs a few weeks ago, they talked about the effects on families and how the number of children at risk or being taken into care was rising as a result of welfare cuts. We also know from Sheffield Hallam University research that those cuts impact most directly on couples with children and single parents.

If that is what is happening at the sharp end, it follows that attainment will be affected by a rise in austerity—I have to say, the Labour Party did very little to counter that in the last general election campaign with its support for £30 billion of cuts over the next few years that can only make the situation worse.

I will finish off by quoting the name of the day—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. The member is closing.

Joan McAlpine: In "The Price of Inequality", Professor Joe Stiglitz says:

"The facts shouldn't get in the way of a pleasant fantasy."

That is a lesson for the Labour Party. It should note the facts of its own record in supporting Tory austerity—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Joan McAlpine: —and get away from the pleasant fantasy that the SNP is responsible for everything.

16:16

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Addressing the attainment gap in our society is our top priority, because breaking down the barriers that are faced by those in the poorest communities is not just the right thing to do but something that makes economic sense. As a result, we welcome the Scottish Government's recently announced plan to try to tackle the matter after eight years in office.

Given that educational inequality is a symptom of the deeper problem of poverty that we need to address, the focused nature of any programme is vital. I have used this example before but in Cumbernauld, where I live, the variation in educational attainment is massive. In the Cumbernauld North ward, child poverty is 8 per cent, which is already far too high, but when we take the two-minute walk across the footbridge over the M80 into Cumbernauld South, the figure

almost trebles to a staggering 23 per cent. As I have said, that difference in child poverty impacts on the educational attainment of young people, which can stop them breaking out of poverty's vicious cycle. As a result, any measures that we agree to tackle attainment must be focused on our most deprived communities.

With that in mind, Scottish Labour would use the additional revenues from a new 50p tax rate, redistributing resources from those who can afford it to those who need it most, to invest an additional £25 million per year over and above the Government's proposals to tackle educational disadvantage. We would double the number of teaching assistants in every primary school associated with the 20 secondary schools facing the greatest challenges of deprivation. We would introduce a new literacy programme for schools and recruit and train literacy specialists to support pupils in the associated primary schools and first and second-year pupils in each of those 20 secondary schools. We would also offer support to parents so that they could learn with their children, and we would introduce a special literacy support programme for looked-after children.

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

Other issues that are related to poverty and inequality are impacting on educational attainment, such as the increase in the use of private tutors and the use of placing requests. There has been a 300 per cent increase in the use of private tutors in the past year alone. Wealthier families have the ability to give their children an extra boost. They should be compared with children in families who cannot afford private tuition. That extra boost can be used when a child is struggling in a particular area or to help in the run-up to exams. In itself, that is not a bad thing, but where is the support for the pupil from the poorer background when they are struggling or when they need that support during exam time?

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

Supported study sessions are often run in the evenings in schools at exam times to support pupils, but they are offered by committed and motivated teachers who offer up their own time to support their pupils. That is an excellent way of supporting pupils at exam time, but provision is patchy across the country and across subjects. There is a transport cost issue for pupils who would normally get the school bus home. Again, that impacts disproportionately on families with lower incomes.

The placing request system is also creating a two-tier system of education and is causing problems for education authorities in managing school staff and the school estate. As soon as a particular school starts to get a reputation, or there is a perception among parents of its slipping or failing, or another school starts to get an excellent reputation, parents with the means to pay for transport will use the placing request system to move their children out of their catchment area to another school. As a result, only children from the poorest families in the area attend some schools. The impact that that has on attainment levels is clear to see.

I am glad that the Government is making educational attainment a priority after eight years in government. I hope that it will look at some of the areas that we have spoken about. It can start by improving its plans, redistributing wealth, and increasing the resources that are available to families in our poorest communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final open debate speaker is Stewart Stevenson. You have no more than six minutes, please.

16:22

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I will posit an approach to how we might deal with the issue that is before us. We should describe the problem, obtain information about it, extract meaningful data and normalise the data across the timeline over which it is spread. From that, we should identify solutions, compare the identified solutions with one another, select solutions to take forward, find the finance and undertake implementation. We should then start again, because it is unlikely that one time round the loop will solve the problem.

One thing that has come out of the debate is that, in our describing of the solutions, there is comparatively little difference between us across the chamber. We accept that there is before us a challenge that will endure over the long term, but we must make progress on it.

We are not doing quite so well at obtaining information. We have a table from Dr Jim Scott's research, but there is no context.

Johann Lamont: How many times in the past eight years have finding data, interrogating it and finding solutions already been done? The point is not to diss the evidence that somebody has presented but to accept that there is a problem and ask whether we are spending the money on the right things.

I am concerned that SNP back benchers, rather than the cabinet secretary, seem to want to close down the debate and argue about the evidence rather than agree that there is a problem and come to an agreement on what the solutions might be.

Stewart Stevenson: It would be helpful if the member listened to what I said. I acknowledged the challenge that is before us, and I do so again for the hard of heeding, if any thus described are present now.

To return to Dr Scott's data, such extract from it as there is tells me almost nothing of itself. It tells me nothing because it fails a number of the tests that I described. I accept that it is data. It has a timeline, but I have no knowledge of what normalisation has been done between the different parts of the timeline so that it is proper to compare one year with another.

Neil Findlay: Will Stewart Stevenson take an intervention?

Stewart Stevenson: I will make a little progress, but I might come back to Mr Findlay.

I also have no information about the sources of each element of data that is on the single sheet of paper that has been provided.

Neil Findlay: Will Stewart Stevenson give way?

Stewart Stevenson: One moment, please.

An academic paper would normally have the information that I mentioned. I expect that the whole paper has it, but I say gently to my Labour colleagues that it would have been helpful to their cause and to good debate if we had had the whole paper.

Neil Findlay: It is abundantly clear that neither Dr Scott nor anyone in the chamber is on the same intellectual wavelength as Mr Stevenson, but that comes as no surprise to any of us. Perhaps, in his wisdom, he could tell us what the problems are in Scottish education. We will all sit here rapt at his intelligence.

Stewart Stevenson: I am conscious that I have six minutes but, although I accept the plaudits that are due more to the genetic inheritance from my parents than my own efforts, I make the point that the real issue on which we all have to engage is that we must make common cause to get the whole picture in front of us so that we can pick out

and start to agree on the bits that we want to prioritise.

The Labour Party's motion moves to solutions. For example, it talks about

"doubling the number of teaching assistants and 10 new literacy teachers in each of the associated primary schools of the 20 high schools facing the greatest challenges".

I cannot possibly rebut that proposal, because I do not have any of the workings for how we have arrived at it as the magic bullet. By the way, it might be the correct answer. I do not reject it because it has come from the Labour Party, but neither can I accept it, because I have no workings, so I do not know on what axioms it was based, what the in-built assumptions were or even what the policy objectives were in any detail.

I turn to the underlying numbers behind the Labour Party's proposal. Earlier, I asked how much it would cost to employ a teaching assistant and a literacy teacher. I got a fairly definite £20,000 for the former and a less certain response on the latter.

Iain Gray: Perhaps Mr Stevenson will excuse the memory of an older man. The correct figures are £36,705 for a literacy specialist and £14,880 for a teaching assistant. That includes national insurance and pension payments.

Stewart Stevenson: That is excellent. I will certainly go away and look at that information and I am sure that colleagues will equally do so. However, I say gently that it would be helpful to have such information before a debate rather than when the last back-bench member speaks, and I asked for it earlier in the debate.

In my last 45 seconds, I will illustrate how numbers can mislead. An article in today's *Financial Times* says that productivity in the UK is falling and that that is a good thing. The reason is that some of the relatively low-skilled jobs that have been difficult to fill in places such as London are being filled. That is helping the overall economy, even though productivity is going down because those jobs are being filled. That is an example of how numbers can confuse without explanation and discussion. Let us have explanation and discussion.

16:29

Willie Rennie: I was intrigued by Stewart Stevenson's remarks. He talked about finding common cause across the chamber to get the whole picture. The Government has had eight years to get the whole picture, and one page produced by an academic has created more debate than any information that the Government has provided in those eight years. Perhaps it is a

bit too late for the SNP to look for the whole picture.

I will praise an SNP member: John Mason made an interesting and thoughtful speech, as he often does in finance debates. He addressed real questions about the performance of Glasgow colleges, about the balance between employment and self-employment and the value of self-employment, and about the strict analysis of exams and numbers versus a more rounded approach to the analysis of the wider goals of education.

John Mason's focus on education, employment, work and the economy was a lesson for other SNP back benchers, who should perhaps ask more questions of their Government rather than point fingers at every other Government and at everybody else who might have some responsibility for the issues. After all, we are in the chamber to hold the Government to account, whether we are Liberal Democrat, Labour, Conservative or SNP back benchers. We all have a responsibility to hold the Government to account, so I advise SNP back benchers to follow John Mason's great example today. He asked serious and thoughtful questions about the Government's performance, as well as wider questions.

Joan McAlpine's speech was quite interesting. She decided to lecture everybody else about student finance, but she forgot that, since 2007, students here have been taking out double the amount of loans, while bursaries—Johann Lamont referred to them—have fallen to £600. Far from dumping the debt, the SNP has doubled the debt for students.

We have seen fewer students from deprived backgrounds in Scotland entering higher education. That trend has not been followed in England, where we managed to change that. We bucked the trend in England, and perhaps the SNP should look south of the border for another lesson.

Joan McAlpine: Does that mean that Willie Rennie does not regret his former party leader's backtracking on making universities free? Does he support the £9,000 in tuition fees that are imposed on students in England and Wales?

Willie Rennie: It is pretty well known that my views on that are on the record. It is disappointing that, when faced with a serious question about people from deprived backgrounds, Joan McAlpine chooses to point the finger at somebody else rather than reflect on the SNP's record. That is the Scottish Government all over.

We have made a serious contribution to the debate by proposing two serious, liberal, person-centred and focused approaches to tackling

inequality. I take Mark McDonald's point that this is not just about education but about standards in employment and the living wage aspects of the debate. I do not disagree with him on that, but I aspire to more for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. I do not want them to aspire to be just above the living wage; I want them to aspire to be even greater than that minimum, living-wage level. That is why I believe that the route out of poverty is at its heart about quality education from the early years. We need the pupil premium that we implemented down south, but we also need to create more jobs to give people opportunities.

Mark McDonald: I know that the member does not seek to be disingenuous, but I, too, aspire to that same level of attainment. However, he must accept that dealing with the here and now is just as important as dealing with the future for such young people, because it is only through dealing with the here and now that we improve their future, and that includes the external factors as well as the educational ones.

Willie Rennie: I do not disagree. However, what so often happens in education and economy debates in this Parliament is that we look to something else that is a bit beyond our reach as the solution, rather than tackle the problem at the heart of the matter. The Parliament and the Government need to rise to the challenge of providing more nursery education. Malcolm Chisholm talked about that. We must ensure that those from two years old upwards get a good-quality education, because creating that foundation is the best way of changing their life chances.

The other thing that we must do is target support. A sum of £2.5 billion in support was channelled into the pupil premium south of the border to provide direct support for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Rather than say that a whole area is deprived, it focuses on the support that individuals need, which ensures that they get the chance to get up and get on. I do not deny what Mark McDonald said about the other factors in society, but I want us to focus on the debate at hand, rather than look for reasons why we cannot possibly act in the areas that SNP back benchers have suggested.

I will conclude on the point that John Mason made about asking pupils how many of them wanted to go into engineering. I am a scientist, and I want more people to study STEM subjects. I am also keen that we get a better gender balance in STEM subjects. Far too often, women who study science in higher education institutions leave the profession to go off and do something else. We need to stem that flow and ensure that they stay in the science and engineering sector. That is

fundamental to improving skills and opportunities for everyone across society.

16:35

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): This has been an interesting debate. In particular, I would highlight the thoughtful speeches from Willie Rennie, Graeme Pearson, Malcolm Chisholm and John Mason, which show that there is agreement across the chamber that this issue is the most important one in education. That is because the greatest gift that we give to any child is the ability to read, write and count. It is therefore of considerable concern when, yet again, we see laid bare the true facts about the issue that we have with literacy in our schools—I do not think that it matters which data we are using, because they all point to the same thing. Obviously, the issue has a detrimental effect on the skills that many pupils will take into workplaces, which are increasingly diverse and competitive.

For us, there is particular concern on two fronts. First, in the past, and over a long period of time, Scotland had a proud record when it came to school education for all pupils, irrespective of their background, especially with regard to the acquirement of the three Rs, so we must ask why we are not now making the progress that we ought to be. I do not accept that pupils are less bright than before, so something else must be wrong.

Secondly, despite all the initiatives—the Scottish Government’s literacy commission, the work of the Scottish Book Trust, the play, talk, read initiative or, indeed, the curriculum for excellence itself—we do not seem to be making the necessary progress.

I know that the Scottish Government will come back and say that it is too soon to judge the curriculum for excellence, and I have a little sympathy with that point of view, but what I will not accept is that there is something new about all teachers being involved in teaching literacy. As Malcolm Chisholm rightly said, one of the reasons why Scottish education was admired around the world was precisely because all teachers were conscious of their role in teaching literacy, irrespective of their subject, and they were trained to do that. A point that was made in last week’s *Times Educational Supplement*—I think that it was also made by the literacy commission—is that we perhaps need to revisit the teacher training programme with regard to literacy skills.

In her speech last night, the cabinet secretary said that the Government’s education policy would be driven by evidence and not by dogma or ideology. I am pleased to hear that. However, let us remind ourselves of the evidence that has been produced by speakers in this debate. The proportion of pupils performing well or very well in

reading has fallen across all groups. In primary 4, it dropped from 83 per cent in 2012 to 78 per cent in 2014. In writing, 72 per cent of primary 7 pupils were doing well or very well in writing, but that fell to 68 per cent in 2014. In basic numeracy skills, 69 per cent of primary 4s are doing well or very well, but that falls to only 42 per cent by secondary 2.

The cabinet secretary has rightly said that those statistics are not acceptable. They are not, particularly after her party has been in government for eight years. However, let us continue to take an evidence-based approach about what is wrong.

For a long time, most primary school teachers and heads have been saying that there needs to be a more structured approach to literacy teaching and more rigour when it comes to testing reading, writing and arithmetic. They will tell you that an approach in which there is a tacit understanding that teachers will use the tests only when they feel that the pupil has reached the right level to pass does not work. They will tell you that there have been too many escape routes and that it has been far too easy for there to be different approaches to testing in different parts of Scotland, a point that my colleague Mary Scanlon raised.

Sometimes that has happened because heads or local authorities wanted to ensure that the timing of the tests coincided with the publication of schools’ performance results; and sometimes there was a reluctance to apply the tests on a uniform basis because there was a perception that they would be too stressful an experience for many of the children. The critics sometimes tell us that formal testing makes pupils and their parents overanxious. However, I suspect that those parents will be a lot more anxious if their son or daughter becomes one of the 9,000 pupils who leave school still unable to read or write properly. Teachers are highly professional people and are perfectly capable of administering the tests properly and allaying the anxieties of pupils and parents, so I am afraid that I do not accept those excuses.

That brings me to our amendment on the change to the number of exams that are being sat. There is a division of secondary education into the phase of broad general education and the senior phase, which is very important when it comes to making subject choices. The new exams mean that there has been a decrease in the number of subjects that are available in S4. In most schools, the number of subjects has come down from eight to either seven or six.

Ironically, that change was made in the interests of promoting a broader educational experience in S1 to S3. However, unsurprisingly, it has led to a decrease in the total number of presentations in S4. That is not to say that there are falling standards across the board. However, it means—

and will continue to mean, particularly in relation to its impact on highers and advanced highers—that pupils will have fewer qualifications when they leave school.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the member is drawing to a close.

Liz Smith: That issue is a concern. It is impacting on colleges and universities and parents and pupils find that the Government has not yet been able to explain it. It is a very serious issue. That is why we have lodged our amendment. On top of that, the overall standard of literacy is very much a concern. As the cabinet secretary has said herself, it is simply not good enough.

16:41

Angela Constance: I was very much looking forward to the debate, given my previous background in the youth employment brief. Much of my work over a number of years now has been on supporting connectivity between the world of work and the world of education. The work that I led on developing the young workforce is indeed an agenda that I remain deeply committed to. Youth unemployment is at its lowest level for seven years but—make no mistake about it—we still have a lot to do in our economy and in education to address systemic and structural youth unemployment.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Is the minister happy about the fact that, out of 3,767 looked-after children, only 20 per cent were in employment, education or training after leaving care?

Angela Constance: No, I am most certainly not happy about that. One of the themes in all our work—and in education in particular—is the need to focus firmly on looked-after children. I hope that we will come back to that in the Government debate next week.

Depending on your perspective, this debate has been either spirited or ill tempered. We have heard the more considered tones of the likes of Malcolm Chisholm and Clare Adamson, which I think was appreciated by all.

Many members have spoken about Labour's table of Dr Scott's data. I will reiterate very quickly—because I want to respond to other substantive issues—that the number of people achieving qualifications at levels 3 to 5 did not fall by 20 per cent in 2013-14; it fell by around 6 per cent due to there being fewer pupils in S4 and fewer presentations at S3 and due to curriculum for excellence's focus on doing fewer subjects in more depth.

I say to Liz Smith that fewer qualifications in S4 will not lead to fewer qualifications at S5 or S6. That is a point that the university sector has also reiterated and supported.

Liz Smith: Will the minister give way on that point?

Angela Constance: Maybe later. Just for clarity, I will put the full details of the Government's analysis of the issues in and around Dr Scott's data in SPICe. No doubt it is an issue that we may well return to. However, I want to focus on the substantive issues that were raised by many members.

Willie Rennie spoke about the pupil premium. I have looked at that very carefully and I will continue to look at interventions that provide a more targeted approach, get resources and services to the children who are most in need of them and support those on the front line. In essence, that is the philosophy underpinning the Scottish attainment challenge: flexible funds that can be used to support the kids most in need and those on the front line.

Some of the evidence around the pupil premium has been less than clear. For example, the social mobility and child poverty commission said that the money was often used to alleviate cuts from elsewhere and did not always get to the children who were most in need. I assure Mr Rennie that I share his high aspirations for all our children, and that we will continue to look at how to target resources better, building on a strong platform of universal support.

Liz Smith is right to focus on the central place of literacy and numeracy in our curriculum; we will come back to that in more detail in the debate next week. Although most children are performing well or very well—for reading, the figure is eight out of 10 children—there is no doubt that the survey results for 2012 to 2014 show a decrease. We cannot have that, so we need to redouble our efforts. In various debates and in response to parliamentary questions I have spoken at length about the work that we have undertaken in the past year and what we are doing to redouble our efforts now.

Mary Scanlon eloquently raised some of the concerns of parents, none of which was new to me. I remind her—not to apportion blame but simply to state a fact—that local authorities have a statutory responsibility for delivering education, and they therefore have operational responsibility for many of the matters that she raised.

We need comparable data that allows us to track and monitor individual children so that we know what is and is not working, and what we need to do to make a difference in the here and now. In my speech last night, I echoed the words

of Sue Ellis, another academic, who said that we need to have a national debate about the sensible use of information and data. It is very important that we have the right information—not pointless information that we do not need; we do not want to increase the bureaucratic burden—about individual children at a local authority level and at a national level. Some of the work in and around the national improvement framework is about bringing all that together.

I make no apologies for investing £51 million to protect teacher numbers. I am very proud of the fact that we have a graduate workforce of professional first-class teachers, and I do not want the number of teachers in our system to fall any further. The important point is that teacher numbers have stabilised since 2011 at around 50,000 to 51,000.

Neil Findlay: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angela Constance: No, not quite yet.

If, following the action that we took earlier this year to reach a new agreement with our partners in local government, we find that structures and funding methodologies are standing in the way of doing what is right to ensure that our children get the best education, nothing will be off the table.

It is very important that we shine a light on the successes of Scottish education as well as giving an honest evaluation of what we are not getting right. Our biggest priority is the attainment challenge: the gap between children from the least deprived and most deprived communities. We also need to do more on literacy and numeracy.

However, we have had considerable success in our school system. For example, we have reduced further and faster the proportion of young people leaving school with low or no qualifications. However, we want young people to leave with the highest level of qualifications. We have increased the proportion of young people who leave school with the minimum qualifications at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 5, but we need to aim high for all our children.

Unlike Labour, we halted the decline in our international standing; the PISA results show that we perform well in maths and are above average in reading and science.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, you must draw to a close, please.

Angela Constance: The reality, however, is that we are still middle ranking, and that is what we have to change.

I say briefly to Jackie Baillie and Willie Rennie, who said that we should focus on the powers that

we have, picking up on the point that Mark McDonald made—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that it must be brief, cabinet secretary.

Angela Constance: I say that I agree, but we will always argue for more powers. Nonetheless, while we will do everything in our power to eradicate poverty, it will never be an excuse for failure.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Iain Gray to wind up the debate.

16:50

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Attainment in our schools is not the only link between education and the economy and economic growth. In a country such as ours, where our whole history is built on skills, knowledge and inventiveness and where we still have many world-class education institutions, one would expect that a Government that had been in power for eight years would have a worked-out economic strategy. One would expect that at the core of the strategy would be the idea of leveraging the excellent research that is done here to provide new knowledge-based jobs and to push our industries ever further up the skills chain in order to compete in a globalising world.

The truth is, however, that the Government's economic strategy amounts simply to the imaginary benefits of hypothetical powers. It is an economic strategy that posits the idea that constitutional change would, in and of itself, automatically lead to growth rates that would be unprecedented in our history and, indeed, the history of the western world. However, not only does the Government not have the kind of strategy that we need, it does not even provide support for such a strategy. In recent times, we have seen cuts to the global excellence fund, which supports exactly the kind of research that we need in our universities to create jobs through commercialisation. We have also seen the abolition of the intermediary technology institutes, which have been replaced with innovation centres. The centres have been tasked with creating 5,000 jobs in five years, but they are now two years in and, as far as I can see, the only jobs that they have created are the 65 within the centres themselves.

Much of the debate—all of it, really—has focused on schools and attainment. That is because, across the chamber, we agree about the economic importance of unleashing the potential of our people. If we fail to equip our young people for their futures, our greatest shame is that we blight their lives, but perhaps the greatest price that we pay will be the price of economic failure.

That is outlined most tellingly in the OECD report that is referred to in the motion. I say to Mr Brodie—I think that he mentioned the issue—that, although the report does not refer to Scotland particularly, the numbers are so dramatic that I think that we can draw our own conclusions from it. It says that, if all youngsters in the UK could reach a basic skills level by 2030, that would add £2.3 trillion to the nation's economy. We know that, in Scotland, we have the attainment gap and that our youngsters do not all reach the basic skills level, so we must know that the impact on our economy is also dramatic. Although the greatest failure in our problems with literacy and numeracy is the moral failure of letting down those children, particularly those from poorer backgrounds, it also matters for our economy.

We see from the Government's own literacy survey that we are making no progress on reducing the attainment gap and that there is a fall in literacy at all levels and for all economic deciles. Last year, exactly the same situation prevailed in numeracy. I realise that the Government and the cabinet secretary acknowledge that—she has done so today. However, she cannot somehow declare that this is year zero, as if the Government was starting all over. Last night, the cabinet secretary told local authorities that they must own their attainment gap; I say to her that she must own her Government's record for the past eight years.

I am not saying that the SNP Government has done nothing in schools for the past eight years. It introduced curriculum for excellence. For the avoidance of doubt, I point out that we support the principles of curriculum for excellence—we began their development. However, the implementation of curriculum for excellence has been entirely the work of the SNP, and for years teachers, headteachers, educationists and parents have been warning that there are problems.

Jim Scott's figures are only the latest alarm bell that has been sounded about the impact of CFE itself and of the new national exams and the way that they have been introduced.

I regret what I think is the cabinet secretary's rather patronising and foolish attempt today to debunk both those statistics and Dr Scott's credibility as a researcher. The statistics that we have discussed today were made available last week. They clearly show a 12 per cent drop in the number of exams that were sat and a 20 per cent drop in those that were passed.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Iain Gray: No. I will come to Mr Stevenson in a second.

I say to the cabinet secretary that Dr Scott was a teacher for pretty well all his working life. He was the headteacher of four different schools, he is an education research fellow and he knows the difference between the number of pupils and the number of candidates. We have been very careful to say that this shows 102,000 fewer candidates—that means individuals sitting in individual exams. We know that some of that is explained by the fact that candidates are doing fewer exams. However, as I think Mary Scanlon said, many parents were told that their young people could still do eight subjects, and many were told that they had to do only five subjects. That has been left to individual schools.

There is a problem in the reduction in the number of enrolments and in the reduction in attainment. I say to Kevin Stewart and to Stewart Stevenson—the statisticians in our company who would like to examine the statistics—that the statistics are summarised from the SQA post-review statistics that were published in December. If they have not got around to counting them up and normalising them, I am sorry, but Jim Scott has, and we are not entitled to ignore them.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Iain Gray: No. I am sorry.

The cabinet secretary has answered those statistics by giving outcomes relating to pupils who have not sat the new national exams. In my view, she would be well advised to try to sort out the problems instead of trying to fix the figures.

The cabinet secretary has to understand that there are two problems. First, the education system that she is privileged to lead has traditionally been highly regarded for being both broad and high quality. The statistics show that it is narrowing and declining. That is a problem to which she must turn her mind.

Secondly, on attainment, I acknowledge that the cabinet secretary has acted and has introduced the attainment fund. We welcomed that investment—I continue to welcome it—but I reserve the right to scrutinise how that investment is being made.

The cabinet secretary talked about the attainment advisers—the core of the attainment challenge. We have had exchanges about them before in which it became clear that she did not know how many attainment advisers there were going to be. She thought that there were going to be 12, the First Minister thought that there were going to be 32, and now we think that there is going to be one for every local authority. Again Mary Scanlon is right. I have the advert here: we do not know whether we will have them for two years or 12 years, whether they will be part time or

full time or how many there will be, but the worst thing about it is that they will all be secondments. We are going to take the best teachers out of schools and put them in local authority offices.

That is not the way to address the attainment gap. The truth is that the way to address the attainment gap is to have more teachers, more teaching assistants so that teachers can teach, and more literacy and numeracy specialists working with families and with the youngest children.

That is why we have suggested additional action of exactly that kind, over and above the Government's programme. Yes, that was based on the introduction of a 50p tax rate, which will not happen quickly now—

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): You need to wind up, Mr Gray.

Iain Gray: —but perhaps we could agree that, given the opportunity, we would tax the better off and use that to start to close the attainment gap that we have debated all afternoon.

The truth is this: how much we care about this issue will be demonstrated by how much we are willing to invest. That is why the education record of a Scottish Government that cut education spending, when even the Tories in England were increasing it, falls short and lets down our young people and Scotland itself.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-13227, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the timetabling of stage 1 of the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees, for the purposes of its consideration of the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill, under Rule 9.6.3A of the Standing Orders, that the Parliament shall consider the general principles of the Bill on the fourth sitting day after publication of the lead committee report.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*].

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-13212, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 26 May 2015

2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Topical Questions (if selected)
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Debate: Equity and Excellence in Education
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

Wednesday 27 May 2015

2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Portfolio Question Time Finance, Constitution and Economy
<i>followed by</i>	Stage 1 Debate: Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

Thursday 28 May 2015

11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Scottish Elections
 (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill

followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 2 June 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 3 June 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Portfolio Question Time
 Rural Affairs, Food and Environment;
 Justice and the Law Officers

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 4 June 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body
 Questions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of four business motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move en bloc motions S4M-13213 to S4M-13216, setting out stage 1 and stage 2 timetables for various bills.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Community Justice (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 20 November 2015.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 5 June 2015.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 9 October 2015.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 26 June 2015—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-13216, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick): I move motion S4M-13218,

That the Parliament agrees that the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Cash Searches: Constables in Scotland: Code of Practice) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: My apologies—that was well spotted. The Minister for Parliamentary Business has moved motion S4M-13218, on approval of an SSI. The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Angela Constance is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Mary Scanlon and Willie Rennie fall.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-13203.3, in the name of Angela Constance, which seeks to amend motion S4M-13203, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the future of Scotland's economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

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

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

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 54, Abstentions 4.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-13203, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the future of Scotland's economy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

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

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

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 62, Against 53, Abstentions 4.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that reducing inequality, including the attainment gap, is not only important in itself, but is vital to create the conditions to deliver sustainable economic growth over the long term; welcomes the successful implementation of the curriculum for excellence (CfE); notes that, under CfE, pupils generally study a wider range of subjects in S3 than previously, before focussing on a smaller number of subjects for formal qualifications in S4; recognises that this approach is designed to ensure that pupils maximise their achievement by the time they leave school and commands the support of teachers, educationalists and the Parliament; condemns attempts to portray this change in the pattern of exams taken as a reduction in attainment; welcomes the reduction in the attainment gap noted by the OECD's Pisa study; agrees that more needs to be done to raise attainment and close the attainment gap; supports the recent launch of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, backed by the £100 million Attainment Scotland Fund, the ongoing work with the Raising Attainment for All programme and the Access to Education Fund and specific work on literacy and numeracy, and calls on all parties to reaffirm their support for CfE.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-13218, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed,

That the Parliament agrees that the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Cash Searches: Constables in Scotland: Code of Practice) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

Rent-tied Pub Tenants

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-12348, in the name of Paul Martin, on protecting rent-tied pub tenants in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes calls for a statutory code of practice for pub companies to be implemented in Scotland; understands that members of the UK Parliament recently amended the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill to introduce a code of practice designed to govern the relationship between pub companies and their tenants in England and Wales; notes the view that Scotland should have an adjudicator to protect hard-working licensees, including in Glasgow Provan, and that this would allow licensees to offer a wider selection of beers and promote market competition, and recognises that a Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) survey found that 99% of rent-tied pub tenants in Scotland would support such a move.

17:07

Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): I thank all the members who supported the motion in my name. The motion attracted support from all the political parties in the Parliament with the exception of the Conservatives. [*Interruption.*] I note that from a sedentary position Alex Johnstone has made a gesture towards me, but I do not know whether it means that the Conservatives now support the motion. Perhaps he can make that clear during his speech. I hope that, after a constructive debate this evening, we can take forward the issue of rent-tied pub tenants in a cross-party manner.

Many of us have various experiences of pubs—some have more than others—but the thrust of the debate is about the contractual arrangements that tied pubs find themselves in. It is estimated that there are more than 4,600 pubs in Scotland and that more than 20 per cent of them are tied pubs owned by pub companies. I am sure that over the years we have all received representations on the challenging economic climate for those pubs and, for that matter, many pubs across Scotland, particularly because of laws that have been passed in Westminster and in the Scottish Parliament. We owe it to hard-working pub tenants not to put further obstacles in their way in dealing with the challenges that they will face over the coming years. We support many of the legislative changes that have been made, but that makes it all the more important to take forward this debate at the same time.

All the evidence that I have seen has recognised that the tied model is wide open to abuse; many tenants find themselves trapped in bleak financial situations and forced to buy

products at an inflated rate from the pubcos, which allows them to save little and invest little in their business. Last year, CGA Strategy surveyed Scottish tied-pub tenants for the Campaign for Real Ale, and its findings were shocking. I will highlight a number of them. It found that 66 per cent of the respondents earned less than £15,000 per annum, and 10 per cent of them earned less than £10,000 per annum; that 74 per cent of respondents considered themselves worse off as a result of the tied model; and that 3 per cent had a very positive sentiment for the tied-pub arrangement that they have with the pubcos. In taking the issue forward, we should also recognise that 99 per cent of respondents felt that the Scottish Government should take action now to protect pub tenants north of the border.

The tied-pub model has been scrutinised over a number of years, particularly at Westminster, and the United Kingdom Government received a great deal of evidence on the subject in 2013. I will highlight examples of the pubcos' activities, and I am sure that members will highlight others. Practices include pubcos informing tenants about large rent rises without giving them any justification for the increases and pubcos providing tenants with misleading estimates of potential sales.

I met a publican who advised me that, if he invested in his premises, the works would be done by the pubco's contractors at an inflated rate, to ensure that the pubco received its cut from the work. I think that most of us would find such practices unacceptable. They certainly do not support small businesses across Scotland.

For far too long, tied-pub tenants have been squeezed by the pubcos, which behave like payday lenders. That is unacceptable, and I call on the Government to take specific action. Last year, MPs considered what became the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015 for England and Wales to ensure that no tied-pub tenant is worse off than a free-of-tie pub tenant. The act introduces a statutory code of practice and an independent adjudicator to govern the relationship between tenants and pubcos, and it was amended to include a market-rent-only option for pub tenants. The bill provided options to ensure parity in the relationship between pubcos and tenants.

For many years, there has been a constitutional discussion about this grey area. There have been a number of constitutional discussions over the years, and that has been one of them. As a result, Scottish publicans will not benefit from the new laws that have been passed at Westminster. Today, I call on the Scottish Government to introduce an independent adjudicator, a statutory code of conduct and a market-rent-only option,

which will make the position in Scotland similar to that in England and Wales. That would let every tenant choose between a tied and a free-of-tie arrangement, which would allow the market to decide which is best, and it would allow tenants a fair, reasonable and transparent review of the true rental value of their property.

For once, legislation has been passed at Westminster that we agree with. I am surprised that the Scottish Government finds itself in the position that we have to debate the issue, given that we have received cross-party support, including support from Scottish National Party members. I say that in a constructive tone, because I want to take the matter forward and ensure that publicans and small businesses throughout Scotland benefit.

We should recognise the importance of these businesses. I think that members will be surprised to hear that pubs directly employ more than 43,000 people in Scotland. They are an important part of our industry and they provide employment opportunities for people in Scotland.

I call on the Scottish Government to give clarity today on how we can move forward. I ask the minister—I will intervene on him if he does not confirm this—to give us a commitment that there will be a similar consultation exercise to the one that was carried out at Westminster, and that the Scottish Government will look to legislate before the Scottish Parliament elections next year.

I call on the Parliament to support the sentiments of my motion.

17:14

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I congratulate Paul Martin on securing the debate and I thank all the groups, some of which are here tonight, that sent in information—and also a bottle of beer, which was welcome.

I will talk about the legislation that was passed at Westminster, which Paul Martin touched on, and what tied pubs are. In March 2015, the primary legislation at Westminster to establish a statutory code and adjudicator received royal assent. However, although that legislation has been passed, the code will not come into effect until June 2016, and it will be implemented via secondary legislation. Over the next year, there will be further consultation with a range of stakeholders to write the code, and the adjudicator will be established. During that consultation, the adjudicator will look at how disputes will be arbitrated and how investigations will be undertaken into breaches of the code.

From the motion and what we are hearing in the speeches from Paul Martin and others tonight, it

seems that what is being asked for is in line with the legislation that has been passed at Westminster, which is supported by small and large businesses and organisations. It is important to note the timescale of one year for consultation on that legislation. I wonder whether the minister would be minded to set a similar timescale for consultation on adjudication under the similar proposals that the motion calls for.

Tied pubs and tied beer work in two ways. Beer and other products are supplied to the pub tenant on an exclusive basis in return for a fixed below-market rent for the pub and other benefits. The tenant generally agrees to pay above the wholesale market price for the tied products—for example, the beer. It is estimated that there are around 850 tied-lease agreements in Scotland, 530 of which are with companies that are covered by the legislation that has been passed in England and Wales—that is an important point.

I have a brewery—the Drygate brewery—in my constituency. Paul Martin's constituency contains the Tennent's Wellpark brewery, and there is also the West brewery. Tennent's has been established for many years and I have met the brewers, but the Drygate brewery and the West brewery are smaller breweries that are coming on board, which is great. In my eyes, that is not about competition; it is about fairness and equity for everyone to enjoy. Not only big breweries should have equity; everyone should be able to get fairness and equity.

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Sandra White: I am sorry, Dennis, but I have only four minutes and I am in my last minute. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry—it was Mike Russell.

I will talk briefly about my part of Glasgow—Kelvin—which is in the city centre. I have 319 pubs in my constituency as well as one brewery. They provide more than 2,000 jobs for 16 to 24-year-olds and more than 5,000 direct jobs. The total number of jobs provided is 6,684, so a lot of people rely on the sector, which contributes to the economy of not only Glasgow but Scotland.

I would like the minister to look at the proposal that is in the motion and let us know whether he is prepared to look at it in the same vein as Paul Martin mentioned.

17:18

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I join Sandra White in welcoming the debate and congratulate Paul Martin on securing this debate on an important issue.

Pub company reform is crucial to the wellbeing of Scotland's beer and pubs industry. The fact that

two pubs close every week in Scotland is a stark reminder of the need for action. Like many members, in advance of the debate I was contacted by constituents and pub tenants about the specific difficulties that are faced by rent-tied pubs. I have previously written to the minister on the issue and hope that he will address some of my constituents' concerns this evening.

The CAMRA briefing that was circulated ahead of the debate provided some eye-opening statistics. Forcing licensees to buy beer from their landlords has resulted in their paying at least 50 per cent more than they would on the open market, and CAMRA's survey of tied-pub tenants last year showed that almost two thirds of respondents had an income of less than £15,000 a year. It is such financial pressure that results in rent-tied pubs being 62 per cent more likely to go out of business than pubs that are free of rent ties.

We must remember the human cost of closures because, as Sandra White says, thousands of people are reliant on employment in pubs, including rent-tied pubs. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that there is demand for a Scottish pubs code to ensure that tenants who are tied to large pub companies are no worse off than if they were tie free.

As Paul Martin said, we have recently seen action to increase protection for those tenants in England and Wales through the Westminster Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015. The act introduces a statutory code and an independent adjudicator to ensure that the relationship between tied licensees and pub companies is subject to fair and lawful trading. As Paul Martin said, it also introduces a market rent-only option, so that tied tenants can buy beer on the open market.

The introduction of such an option in a Scottish pubs code would allow tenants to choose between a tied agreement and a non-tied agreement every five years or in the event of a significant increase in the price of tied products. That would place tenants in Scotland in a fairer and far stronger negotiating position. That is crucial in delivering a fair deal for tenants and keeping prices reasonable for pub-goers. I am sure that there are quite a few pub-goers in the chamber this evening.

I want to highlight the thoughts of a rent-tied pub tenant in my area. The licensee of a Paisley pub told me that, having seen the action that has been taken down south, he thinks that it is a "no-brainer" that the same action should be taken here. He and many others are calling on the minister to listen to their voices. He told me that allowing pubs such as his to buy beer on the open market could be the difference between struggling to make a living and having a thriving business.

Support for action is widespread. As we know, brewers including Tennent Caledonian Breweries, Fyne Ales and Williams Bros have all indicated their support. They say that tied rents place restrictions on both Scottish brands and publicans, and that bringing Scotland into line with England and Wales would mean that those operating in the Scottish market would see positive changes in their businesses.

Ninety-nine per cent of tied licensees agree that the Scottish Government should ensure that the protections to be afforded to tied licensees in England and Wales are also enacted in Scotland. Paul Waterson, chief executive of the Scottish Licensed Trade Association, said:

"Our message remains clear—we need parity with the rest of the UK, and we need it fast."

I join Paul Martin in urging the minister to listen to those voices calling for reform and to outline what actions the Scottish Government will take to provide much-needed protection for rent-tied pub tenants in Scotland.

17:23

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

I offer reassurance to Paul Martin. One or two things have taken up my attention in recent weeks, so I managed to miss his motion; otherwise I would have signed it. However, I am taking tonight's opportunity to express my support for the motion and the principles that lie behind it. I hope that he sees that as a guarantee of my support.

It was some years ago—in fact it was the week of my 18th birthday—that I first presented myself to a senior rugby club. The club captain looked up at me and said:

"Aye, you're a big lad, but you'll hae to put on weight or you'll get hurt."

That night, I did two hours of physical exercise and then we retired to the pub where the real training started. I must say that I have been working on that training ever since. The truth is that I discovered that beer is good for you. I went on to adopt that practice through my career in the young farmers movement, where a similar approach was taken.

The sad thing is that the many pubs that I remember being in at that time no longer exist. The pressure on our licensed trade is quite extraordinary. The effect that various other socioeconomic drivers have had on the licensed trade has, sadly, been negative. Too many of us now buy our wine or our beer at supermarkets, take it home and drink it in front of our children. That is not ideal, yet it is the practice that we now indulge in. The number of pubs has fallen dramatically and, although they have often been

made for the best of motives, other changes continue to drive a fall in demand for the traditional pub. The smoking ban, the need for which we all understand, had an impact on many bars. The more recent change in the blood alcohol level limit for driving has affected footfall in many country pubs. There is therefore serious pressure on the licensed trade.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the member accept that minimum pricing might swing the balance back towards the pubs?

Alex Johnstone: Absolutely, but I must point out that I was not questioning the motives that lay behind the changes that have taken place. Those motives are sound, even though I have occasionally argued against some of the drivers for them.

The number of pubs is falling, and the vast majority of the pubs that we have lost appear to have been rent-tied pubs. That is the sector that is under the greatest pressure. There is also the concern that some members have expressed that the changes in the law south of the border might result in attempts being made to force the tied-pub trade forward in Scotland in an area where the pressure has not been visible in recent years.

I back changes that will free up the pub market in Scotland and prevent those who are in rent-tied situations from having to accept financial decisions and buying pressures that are not of their own making but which will reduce their income and the viability of their pubs, thereby leading to yet more closures.

I believe that beer is good for you and that local pubs are good for their communities. However, unless we take swift action to avoid the continuing decline of the traditional pub, we will lose many more. The rent-tied pubs are the battlefield on which the issue is being fought.

I think that I have given members an insight into my views and what motivates them, and why I believe that it is worth pursuing the proposed change. I hope that Paul Martin will now accept that even the Conservatives accept his point of view. Let us go forward together and make sure that we do not lose any more pubs than is necessary.

17:27

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank my colleague Paul Martin for bringing the issue of rent-tied pubs to the chamber for debate.

On the surface, this evening's debate is about the licensed pub trade, but it is really about Scottish small businesses. The most damning statistic of all is that tenanted pubs in Scotland are 62 times more likely to close than are their free-

trade counterparts. The pubs that we are talking about are not run by huge companies or by big businessmen or businesswomen, but by ordinary people who work tirelessly, day in and day out. For that tireless work, they are not paid a salary that provides security for their families or one that allows them to enjoy a lifestyle that rewards their hard work; in most cases, they are paid less than £15,000 a year.

We all agree that Scotland needs a thriving business sector in order to grow our economy, but it simply cannot be fair that hard-working, honest publicans work day and night without receiving the benefit of a pay cheque that befits their efforts. I believe that enacting legislation similar to the legislation that has been brought in in England and Wales to protect rent-tied tenants will certainly help, although it will not solve the problem completely.

The introduction of a statutory code of practice that encompasses fairness and lawful dealings will provide guidance, support and clarity to the industry in Scotland. A Scottish adjudicator should also be established, which should have the power to arbitrate in disputes between pub companies and tenants. It should provide a fast, low-cost and effective means of redress for tied tenants in the event of code breaches, and it should have the power to impose financial penalties.

For me, the issue is quite simple: too many of our pubs in Scotland are closing down and many that have not closed are only a few steps away from disaster. It is in the interests of everyone in this chamber that our pubs do well. I am not by any manner of means advocating that we should all go out and rectify the situation tonight, but it is imperative that our publicans earn a decent wage, that they reinvest in the economy and that they grow their businesses and create jobs in our communities. If the current policy is continued, many ordinary people will lose not just their jobs, but their livelihoods.

Our friends in England and Wales have already legislated for this issue; I believe that it would be foolish of us not to follow them. Let us use this Parliament's powers to allow the pub sector to thrive. Let us create jobs, energise and empower people, and give communities the pubs that they deserve and can be proud of. With the Tennent's training academy in Glasgow, its recently opened conference facilities at the Wellpark brewery and the Drygate bar that has already been mentioned, we can see the great benefits that the pub trade can bring to the Scottish economy if it is allowed to flourish.

As I have said, bringing our laws into line with the situation in England and Wales will not solve the problem overnight, but it will be a start. Let us make that start, and get out there and speak to

everyday pub owners across the country to find out what support they need and what is and is not working for them. Let us start the process of change. I would—even though I am a teetotaler—most certainly drink to that.

17:31

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am very pleased to have the chance to speak in the debate. I am not sure that, technically, my CAMRA membership is a registrable interest, but nevertheless I declare it in the interests of transparency.

CAMRA exists not just to campaign for real ale but to celebrate something positive about the kind of alcohol culture of which we should be proud. That is not something that this Parliament often does well; in fact, one of my bugbears over the years has been that, very often, we talk about alcohol either in terms of harm—social harm, harm to health and criminal justice consequences—or in terms of economic benefits such as the amount of money people are making from whisky exports, the number of jobs involved and so on.

However, we never talk about the kind of alcohol culture that would be healthier and which our society could be proud of and happy about. We talk about the negative aspects of the culture and the positive aspects of the economic consequences, but there is nothing in between; the motion opens up a space for us to say something about the kind of healthier alcohol culture that we should be aiming for. That is why I congratulate Paul Martin most sincerely on bringing the motion to the chamber for debate.

There are some who will advocate for the change that is set out in the motion on the principle that markets ought to set rents, or that free markets operate more efficiently and contribute more to the economy, but members will understand that that is not my starting point. My starting point is to recognise that we are talking about a sanctioned and legalised recreational drug that we have allowed, over the past few decades, to be handed over overwhelmingly to a tiny number of multinationals. We used to have so much more diversity not only in production and on-sales in Scotland and other countries, but in small businesses that had their roots in communities.

A recreational drug should be sold carefully and responsibly; that is best done by independent businesses that have their roots in their local community, rather than by someone who is not part of that community taking decisions centrally about business operations. Because such independent businesses look after their staff, they have low turnover, and there is someone behind the bar who knows what they are doing if

problems emerge or behaviour gets out of hand. Those are the kinds of businesses that we should be trusting to sell the product responsibly and carefully.

The small independent producers—the kind of producers that are flourishing in Scotland—make their profits from quality, not from volume sales. We should see them having a bigger and growing share of the products that are sold in the country. It is a rare and enjoyable novelty when I agree with something that Alex Johnstone has said, but beer is good for you, if we are talking about quality beer that is sold in a responsible and careful way. The independence of those businesses—both the brewers and the independent pubs—will lead to that outcome.

That is what I have in mind in supporting the motion. Even though an individual pub may decide that it is happy with the reduced rent that the beer tie gives it, part of the consequence is that it will have an increased incentive on the sales end—on volume sales. If we want the incentive instead to be in producing a good-quality environment that people want to be in and which feels safe—and healthier, even, with the smoking ban—we need to recognise that we should not put pressure on pubs to recoup the inflated price that they pay for their beer always and only through volume sales.

Whether people come at the motion from a free market point of view or from the point of view of the responsible selling of something that should not be handed over to the free market and the view that we should invest in quality, not in volume sales and not just in economic output, every part of the political spectrum can unite around the issue. I hope that the minister, in responding to the debate, will say positively that he intends to take the action for which we are all calling.

17:36

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I thank Paul Martin for bringing forward the subject for debate. I, too, have been concerned about it for some time.

My starting point has to be that I like beer. In particular, I like to try beers from Scottish brewers, especially smaller brewers. In my constituency, we have the West brewery in the old Templeton building at Glasgow Green, which Sandra White mentioned—members may be familiar with it. That has been a huge success, with its German-style beers that are made in Scotland. I think that Mr Harvie also frequents it.

From a jobs and business perspective, we want to encourage smaller Scottish businesses to develop new products, grow their business and create more jobs.

Michael Russell: The point that John Mason makes is absolutely crucial in respect of microbreweries and small breweries, particularly in rural areas. There are a number of those in Argyll; Fyne Ales is one that is involved in the debate. Without ending the present system, the opportunities for those breweries will remain more limited than they should be.

John Mason: Yes. I was in Mr Russell's constituency the other week with the Equal Opportunities Committee, and I tried three variations of the Islay brew, which was very acceptable.

It frustrates me when I see folk in Scottish pubs and restaurants drinking imported beers when perfectly good Scottish alternatives are available. Some of those people will complain about a lack of jobs in Scotland, but they drink imported products. Where is the logic in that? Having got that point off my chest, I accept that there are problems apart from consumer choice. Indeed, in many cases, there is no consumer choice. That is what we are discussing with the whole question of tied pubs.

As I understand it, that approach has at least two major impacts: it restricts the choice of beers that are available to customers, and it seriously distorts a market to the disadvantage of smaller pub operators especially. However, I did not realise until I read the briefings that there is also an issue with tenants' deposit bonds, which can involve deposits of between £6,000 and £50,000. That is clearly a serious initial commitment. The briefings have made it clear that there is less of a problem in Scotland, with 850 out of around 4,900 pubs in tied tenancy/lease agreements. That is about 17 per cent, compared with 39 per cent down south. Fergus Ewing has made that point both face to face and in writing. I appreciate his letter to me of 8 January, which very much showed an openness and willingness to listen to any evidence that might be produced.

However, I object to Scotland always being compared with England, whether favourably or unfavourably. We have our own Parliament and we can do things in our own way. If we want to make comparisons, there are lots of other countries that we can compare with.

The briefing from licensees supporting licensees also accepts that the situations in Scotland and England are different, but one of its key arguments is that, whereas beer prices are higher to compensate for lower rent, in recent times both the cost of beer and the rental element have gone up substantially, which has led to problems for tenants.

I read the House of Commons library's comments on the matter. One or two quotes are interesting. For instance:

"The ... Business and Enterprise Select Committee ... found that the notion that tenants were receiving countervailing benefits that compensated for higher tied beer prices was also questionable: 'There is no evidence demonstrating that a tied lessee receives benefits not available to free of tie tenants or freeholders.'"

It also says:

"Last year, for the first time, rent as a percentage of turnover in the tied estate overtook the free-of-tie estate."

There is nothing inherently wrong with the franchise-type model, in which reduced fixed costs are compensated for by higher running costs. However, the argument is that the balance has been lost in recent times, which has trapped some who would benefit from having other options. The idea of break clauses and the option to have a different model after, say, five years strikes me as attractive.

We want to encourage pubs as a positive aspect of our culture. They face other challenges, which other members have mentioned. I hope that the minister is able to indicate some changes, whether or not they are exactly the same as happened in England.

17:40

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I speak in the debate with some trepidation, as I am obviously in the company of experts when it comes to the business of beer and its consumption. I will try the best that I can to play my part.

I thank Paul Martin for the members' business debate that has introduced me to some of the complexities that lie behind the business of public houses throughout Scotland. The briefings from CAMRA, the Scottish Beer and Pub Association and many constituents throughout South Scotland—the region that I represent—have helped to educate me about some of the stresses and strains that should have been apparent to me previously but which I did not consider in my daily study of the issues that attract my constituents' attention.

It is evident that the trade is under pressure. As Neil Bibby said, at least two public houses a week close in Scotland. In South Scotland, that is a serious threat. Unfortunately, we do not have the luxury that Sandra White has of many public houses and thousands of jobs. The hamlets and towns in South Scotland value greatly the presence of a public house in their midst. The public house contributes through not only its business but the community aspect of its presence, which supports communication across communities and maintains relationships with people who live in the area.

As Mr Johnstone indicated, the introduction of the smoking ban and the recent changes to alcohol limits for driving in particular have had an impact on the pubs. It is not all negative because, certainly, since the introduction of the smoking ban, pubs have become more hospitable, the food has become more enjoyable and the culture of pubs has improved accordingly, although I am sure that there are people in Scotland who disagree.

The change in alcohol limits has properly impressed upon drivers the need to be aware of the new limits and, in many cases, they have decided not to drive at all. That has been reflected in the numbers of people who go into our pubs and enable them to make profits. The Parliament has no responsibility for ensuring that people make profits, but it has a responsibility to try to provide a context in which people who conduct proper business are able to do so at profit and to employ people at a rate of pay that is acceptable in our society.

For those reasons, as well as having read the briefings from the various groups and having listened to those who are engaged in the trade, I think that the proposals that Paul Martin outlines and the experience in England and Wales need urgent attention from the minister. In the event that he finds it difficult to action the proposals that Paul Martin made, I expect him at least to begin a consultation with some urgency because businesses are dying as we speak and there is a need for us to take all the steps that are available to us to deliver for the people who provide a trade on our behalf and for our enjoyment.

17:44

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): I thank Paul Martin for allowing us an opportunity to debate an extremely important matter. I also thank him for his constructive tone in opening the debate, which I hope will continue, and I thank all members for their diverse contributions, conducted, if I may say so, in a tone of sober conviviality, if that is not an oxymoron.

We can all agree that pubs play an enormous part in our culture, heritage, communities and society. They contribute in great measure to our economy and to employment, as we have heard from many members. There seems to be a large concentration of them in Sandra White's constituency, which may account for her happy demeanour. They contribute to a large number of employment opportunities, particularly for young people, and I pay tribute to all those who work in pubs, clubs and restaurants and who, although they have to work antisocial hours, serve the public so well.

The trade contributes £1.5 billion to the Scottish economy, with 58 per cent of all tourists and 71 per cent of overseas visitors saying that they have eaten in a bar or pub. As Graeme Pearson said, the smoking ban may have triggered an appetite to diversify and provide other services, such as better food, with pubs reaching out to other clientele, becoming more family friendly and perhaps introducing more females into the equation in some pubs. Not everyone can diversify, but we recognise the entrepreneurialism and imagination of those who run pubs in Scotland and the enormous contribution that they make to the economy and, as Patrick Harvie said, to the pursuit of human happiness.

However, the serious issue is what we can do to address the important question that has been raised. There are many pressures on pubs, and members have alluded to the diverse nature of those pressures. I am pleased that the Scottish Government has kept in place the small business bonus, which I believe results in around two in five pubs paying zero or reduced business rates. That is a real contribution to the small pubs that get that benefit. As someone who ran a small business before being elected to Parliament, I know how important such a benefit is, and we will continue the small business bonus scheme, if we are re-elected, until the end of the next session of Parliament in 2021.

Through Skills Development Scotland, we also provide access to a range of support for people who are looking to develop a career in the pub sector. We have developed the taste our best scheme, which is open to pubs and is raising the standard of food—and, if I may say so, cuisine—in Scotland to a higher level. Our food is now superior to what is available in many other countries that we visit, and we might not have said that 20 or 30 years ago.

The motion calls for a statutory code of practice and for an adjudicator for pub companies to be implemented in Scotland, following the introduction of legislation in England and Wales. I am entirely open to such measures, and I want to comment on some of the arguments that have been made today.

First, it has been acknowledged that the sector in Scotland is rather different from that in England. There are 4,900 pubs in Scotland and most of them—64 per cent—are independent free trades. The figure in England is almost inverted; most pubs in England are tenanted, not freehold. That is a difference.

If I heard him correctly, Mr Martin mentioned that, in Scotland, the number of tenanted pubs is 1,100, but actually only 538 tied pubs fall under the pubco umbrella. In other words, the protections, options and measures that are to be

afforded in England and Wales—if the legislation goes through and the code of practice comes into effect, which I understand is intended to happen in June next year—would apply in Scotland to only 11 per cent of pubs and to rather less than half of the tied pubs.

Paul Martin: Will the minister give way?

Fergus Ewing: I will do so in a minute.

I just want to make the point—it is not a point against the motion; it is a point of fact—that, if we agree to follow suit after England has legislated, we will affect only slightly less than half of the tied pubs. There is therefore an argument that, if action is required, we might want to go further than legislators down south have done, if the evidence gives us a basis for doing so.

Paul Martin: Although I recognise the minister's latter point, which I think is constructive, the fact that the numbers in Scotland are nowhere near the increase that we see in England and Wales has been used as an argument against legislating in Scotland. However, why should the numbers matter to the Scottish Parliament? We should take the issue forward regardless of the numbers.

Fergus Ewing: That is a fair point. I am making the argument that we are talking about 11 per cent of pubs in Scotland. That is an important point to make.

There is a not insubstantial price tag to legislative measures. The best guesstimate is that the policy that has been introduced down south might lead to some further pub closures and bring about an indirect cost to business of £16.7 million a year. It would be imprudent not to consider carefully that cost estimate and what the costs might be in Scotland. None of us has mentioned the imposition of additional burdens as being helpful. We must drill down and consider the matter carefully.

Today, I received a letter from various bodies, urging support for the motion. Among other things, the letter said that the evidence is crystal clear that the tied-pub model has been abused in Scotland as it has been in England. Tenants are forced to buy overpriced products from large multinational pubcos, restricting their offer and putting them at a serious disadvantage. On the other hand, people on the other side of the argument—John Mason alluded to this—have stated that rent levels are below the competitive market rate and that other special commercial or financial advantages and benefits apply, such as financing or granting loans on favourable terms, equipping publicans with a site or premises for business, providing them with equipment or undertaking other investments such as providing wi-fi, Sky Sports and accommodation.

I mention both sides of the argument because there are two sides: there is a claim and there is a counterclaim. Instinctively, as someone who ran a small business and is in a party that supports fairness and equity, I am, I guess, on the side of the small guy—the tenant. That is where we are coming from, and where Mr Martin and many of the members of all parties who have spoken in the debate are coming from.

Patrick Harvie: Will the minister give way?

Fergus Ewing: I have very little time left.

I am sorry that I have not been able to address more points, but I want to say that the Scottish Government recognises that we need to take the matter forward, and we have had meetings with many of the interested parties. That is why, today, I am announcing that the Scottish Government will commission a study to look at the various pub models that operate in Scotland, in order to see whether pubs in the tied sector are being treated more unfairly than those in other sectors. For the study's findings to be robust and informative, it will require the co-operation of the entire sector. Once we have considered the outputs of the study, I shall most certainly come back to the chamber or make a parliamentary statement of some form to outline our intentions.

I very much welcome the fact that this debate has allowed us to focus on some of the issues, and I hope that the announcement of the study will be welcomed by all members.

Meeting closed at 17:53.

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