



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 26 May 2015

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Scottish Parliament

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Neil Urquhart of Fullarton parish church in Irvine.

The Rev Neil Urquhart (Fullarton Parish Church, Irvine): Presiding Officer, members of the Scottish Parliament and friends in the gallery, did you hear the one about Irvine's Protestant minister, Roman Catholic priest and Buddhist journalist? The minister is me, the Roman Catholic priest is Father Willie and the Buddhist journalist is Sandy. Father Willie and I have made numerous humorous anti-sectarian short films, in which some of you have starred and which the Scottish Government has supported. Known as the "Good News 'Shoes Brothers'", many have joined our community, celebrating dance to halt hatred and build bridges. Recently, we were "Blue in Greenock Prison", arrested for bad dad and, in Willie's case, bad Father dancing, but able to unite the prison community against sectarianism.

In Sandy, our local Buddhist journalist, we have a great ally in spreading the barrier-breaking message. Indeed, we have found allies in people of faith and no faith, all of whom are delighted to promote peace in a world in which division, bitterness and hatred sell papers. I differ from Sandy on things such as history, time and death, but we share many values.

I evangelically believe that Christ is the sole soul saviour by which we humans can be saved and through whom we find life in its fullness. However, experience as a sports chaplain in the athletes villages of Delhi 2010, London 2012 and Glasgow 2014 taught me the strength of diversity with a common goal. In Glasgow 2014's religion and belief centre—or RAB C as I preferred to call it—chaplains from the major world religions combined to provide spiritual and pastoral support for athletes and their staff. The ability to eat and laugh together is a great icebreaker. We did not deny serious differences but grew mutual respect and the desire to build people up, rather than undermine them.

You do not need religious faith to bless and encourage people. In Irvine, we have a growing movement and philosophy called giving something back, to unite people of faith and no faith in the

voluntary service of others. It is true, isn't it, that we humans are at our best and most fulfilled when caring for, helping and supporting others in need?

In Irvine, like the rest of Scotland, more and more people are falling through the caring cracks, unable to make ends meet or face the future. I have no political axe to grind; I simply call for all of us, together—whatever our political, religious or philosophical angles—to unite in serving the interests of the most vulnerable in our land and world, and to put aside self-interest and differences to unite in a 1+1=3 synergy. The mnemonic T-E-A-M spells it well: together everyone achieves more.

Topical Question Time

14:03

Beatson Cancer Centre (Patient Safety)

1. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it has taken to ensure that the concerns of 56 doctors at the Beatson cancer centre regarding patient safety are fully addressed. (S4T-01028)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (Shona Robison): Let me first be absolutely clear that patient safety is of paramount concern.

Although this is a very complex issue about a highly specialised unit and its support services, there is no question but that the views of clinicians, including those at the Beatson, are extremely important and need to be fully addressed. I have spoken to the chair of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and have been assured that that will happen. The chief medical officer has had constructive discussions with the chair of the local consultants committee and the health board's medical director about the need for all parties to commit to resolving these concerns. It is vital that the health board addresses the issues that have been raised so that the move can go ahead with the support of clinicians. A meeting is planned for tomorrow to continue to take that forward.

In the meantime, I have been assured by the health board that key support services, such as 24/7 anaesthetic cover, will be maintained until an agreed sustainable solution is in place.

Dr Simpson: I thank the cabinet secretary for that reply, and I particularly welcome the emphasis on patient safety.

The fact that the 56 consultants warned that services for seriously ill patients who required a high dependency unit were not going to be safe is surely worrying, and the fact that they felt the need to go public to fulfil their obligations, based on the General Medical Council guidance after what happened in Mid-Staffordshire, is surely an indictment of the board's approach. How did we reach the point at which doctors—who do not go public lightly—felt the need to do so? Why is it the case that, despite having had four years to consult on the effect on services at hospitals such as the Beatson of the opening of the Southern general hospital, the board does not appear to have properly consulted the doctors in question beforehand?

Shona Robison: There have, of course, been a number of discussions over a long period of time.

The issue is that there was a failure to agree on some of the detailed changes.

Richard Simpson is right. I would have preferred all the issues to have been resolved in a different manner, but what is important is that they are resolved going forward.

The GMC's role is in the regulation of doctors. Healthcare Improvement Scotland is the organisation that is tasked with looking into issues of patient safety. I understand that it is going to look into the concerns that have been raised and make an assessment. It is critical that, at tomorrow's meeting, an interim set of arrangements is agreed, beyond the moves that have already been made on anaesthetic cover, that is to the satisfaction of the clinicians and the board, in order to create the space to agree some of the more difficult issues and ensure that there is a sustainable service in the future.

I am in exactly the same place as Richard Simpson. Those issues have to be resolved and the clinicians must be assured that patient safety is paramount.

Dr Simpson: In the response from Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board, which is in the public domain and which the cabinet secretary has referred to, it has said that it will provide resident—and therefore, I presume, junior—anaesthetists on site overnight and a consultant on call during the 24-hour period. I have reservations about that, but my views are irrelevant. That is a matter for the consultants to agree on—they must assure themselves that the service will be adequately safe.

Speaking of adequacy, is the cabinet secretary comfortable with the reports in today's press of mayhem at the Southern general hospital accident and emergency unit, with eight-hour waits, trolleys lining corridors, sick patients having to sit on the floor, diversion to the Glasgow royal infirmary and ambulances waiting two hours to discharge patients into A and E? What modelling was done for the transition? Even if those are teething problems, they affect real individuals. Will the cabinet secretary agree to look very closely at that, so that we do not end up in the same situation in future with the opening of other hospitals that involve a transfer of services?

The Western general's accident and emergency department is due to close at the end of the month. Given that there is already chaos with the current transfer, I suggest to the cabinet secretary that the officials need to look very closely at postponing that transfer in order not to create more chaos.

Shona Robison: Richard Simpson is in danger of conflating two very serious but different issues.

Let me first finish dealing with the issue of the Beatson. As I said, it is critical that clinicians are satisfied with matters going forward. That is why the proposal to continue 24/7 anaesthetic cover has been agreed with clinicians, but there are other remaining issues that need to be resolved. Tomorrow night's meeting is an important part of that process. I expect everyone to arrive at an agreeable set of arrangements that will provide an interim solution while further discussions take place about a permanent sustainable solution for the Beatson.

Richard Simpson went on to talk about the new south Glasgow university hospital. Last week, there was a major transfer of patients and staff from the Victoria infirmary to the new hospital. Such transfers are complicated and difficult to make, and some challenging issues emerged to do with the availability of beds and staff. There were some pressure points at the end of last week. I can tell him, though, that as of yesterday the hospital was performing very well. A and E was performing very well, with—I think—around 91 per cent achievement of the four-hour target and patients flowing through the system.

Richard Simpson mentioned the Western, which will begin to move across this weekend. Staff are absolutely looking at the lessons learned from the transfer of the Victoria and making sure that the pressure that emerged are addressed in the way in which they move the Western. I do not think that there would be anything to be gained from not sticking to the timetable of transfer so that we can get all the services transferred across, staff can get working in their new environment and patients can be settled into their new environment.

I hope that, despite some of the challenges that have come with the transfer, Richard Simpson will recognise that what we have is a first-class, world-class hospital. I hope that he will visit it at some point and be as impressed as I was. I am, of course, being kept in touch on a daily basis with the detail of what is happening at the front door of the hospital to make sure not only that we are alerted to any emerging issues but, more important, that those are addressed. A big move such as this one brings with it some challenges, but I hope that we will have Richard Simpson's support as we work through those challenges over the next few days and weeks.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Clearly, the concerns of the Beatson clinicians have to be taken very seriously. As Richard Simpson said, it takes a lot for clinicians to go public as they have done. I would be interested to know whether any of the concerns were raised via the NHS Scotland national confidential alert line. Also, given that that line has now been in place for two years, what assessment has been made of its

effectiveness? I understand that a review of it is taking place. When will that be published?

Shona Robison: I will get back to Nanette Milne on whether any issues have been raised. The information will not be as specific as saying that a particular clinician from a particular location raised a particular issue, but I will get back to her on the general point about the alert line.

On this issue, there has definitely been an on-going dialogue with clinicians and the board. It is not that the board was not speaking to clinicians; it is just that there was a failure to agree on certain aspects of the way forward. The clinicians have a strongly held view about certain aspects of the arrangements going and they did not agree with the board on that. Those issues must be resolved not just to the satisfaction of the clinicians but to the satisfaction of us all. Patient safety is paramount and we will take absolutely no risks.

I am confident that, through those on-going negotiations—the meeting tomorrow is an important part, as is the involvement of the chief medical officer—we will get to a place where the clinicians are satisfied and the board has a sustainable model to take forward the excellent, world-class service that we have at the Beatson, which is one that we should all be proud of.

High-speed Rail

2. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government on the subject of HS2. (S4T-01033)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (Keith Brown): I discussed the weekend newspaper reports about the HS2 Ltd study with Sir David Higgins, the chair of HS2 Ltd, this morning. I have written to the Secretary of State for Transport, Patrick McLoughlin, on several occasions, including three times subsequent to his statement to the Conservative Party conference in favour of three-hour journey times between Scotland and London. I have made it clear to Mr McLoughlin that the Scottish Government's position—indeed, the position of, I think, all the parties in the chamber—is that high-speed rail must come to Scotland.

Despite those challenges at ministerial level, my officials are in contact with their UK Government counterparts and with HS2 Ltd. Transport Scotland officials sat on the steering group for the HS2 Ltd study into broad options for extending HS2 to Scotland. The study's advice has been with UK and Scottish ministers since December, but despite, as I said, several requests for a meeting with the Secretary of State for Transport, I have had no positive response; indeed, he has not

managed to meet me since he was appointed in September 2012.

Mike MacKenzie: Does the minister agree that including Scotland in HS2 would deliver significant economic benefits by improving connectivity and removing barriers for everybody in Scotland, but particularly for businesses in the more remote parts of the country?

Keith Brown: Yes, I agree with that, as does civic Scotland—in particular, the business community to which Mike MacKenzie referred, but also our councils, trade unions and many others. Significant economic benefits would accrue at both ends of high-speed rail and at all points in between. There would also be far greater environmental benefits from modal shift if we could achieve the journey times of two and a half hours to three hours between Scotland and London that HSR can bring. That would be in addition to the already required additional freight capacity, which would help in terms of the environment and productivity.

Mike MacKenzie: Given the minister's answer to my initial question, does he agree that the UK Government has shown a lack of ambition and insufficient consideration for Scotland throughout development of the plans for HS2?

Keith Brown: I agree. The UK Government has been unambitious and disrespectful in respect of there having been a complete lack of dialogue, and leaking of its reports—the confidentiality of which it asked us to respect—on high-speed rail coming to Scotland.

I encourage all parties and interest groups to join me in demanding that the Secretary of State for Transport start to discuss how he can bring HSR to Scotland as quickly as possible. It is, of course, also worth saying that if high-speed rail goes to the north of England but does not come to Scotland, that will be the worst of all worlds for Scotland because it will put us at a substantial disadvantage. There is substantial unity on the issue across Scotland in political parties and in civic society. The UK Government would be ill-advised to ignore that unity.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): The minister will be aware that one of the dimensions of the development of high-speed rail in recent months has been the discussion that has been taking place between cities in the north of England on how they can steer the development. Has the Scottish Government had contact with the organisation that has been formed by those north of England cities and has he facilitated any contact between Scotland's major cities and those north of England cities?

Keith Brown: Yes—there has been such contact with cities in the north of England. I have

spoken at conferences, the most recent of which was in Manchester, at which the leaders of various cities in the north of England gathered to talk about high-speed rail and its implications. My predecessor, Alex Neil, had particular discussions with some of the cities that will be affected. Of course, some of the high-speed rail proposals are not actually about high-speed rail services—for example, the proposals for services traversing the north of England are for higher-speed rail rather than high-speed rail.

However, we think, for the reasons that I have already outlined, that if we can get high-speed rail to Scotland—to both Edinburgh and Glasgow—all points between Manchester, Leeds and Scotland could benefit from it. We urge everybody in the chamber, including Conservative members who might hold some sway with the Conservative Government, to get behind high-speed rail and to get the transport secretary to come and speak to people in Scotland so that we can progress the issue.

Police Scotland (Use of Facial Recognition Technology)

3. Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that Police Scotland has been using facial recognition technology on images stored on the police national database. (S4T-01034)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): Police Scotland retains images in order to prevent and detect crime. It has provided assurance that photographs are taken only when a suspect is detained, arrested and/or charged. The service does not retain indefinitely images of people who were not subsequently charged with, or convicted of, an offence. The images are retained on the criminal history system and uploaded to the police national database, which was created and is administered by the Home Office. The facial recognition technology has been available to Police Scotland on the police national database since 2014 and it has been used on 440 occasions. The police national database is an extremely valuable resource that helps to prevent and detect crime in order to make communities safer across Scotland.

Alison McInnes: Of course facial recognition technology has the potential to help to detect crime, but like other biometric technologies, its use must be properly regulated. However, the technology has been put into operation without any public or parliamentary scrutiny. The Commissioner for the Retention and Use of Biometric Material has warned of the dangers in creating the facial recognition database because it is subject to none of the controls and protections

that currently apply to DNA and fingerprint databases. Does the cabinet secretary share the concerns of the expert independent biometrics commissioner?

Michael Matheson: It is important that we take into account any concerns that are raised on such matters, but Alison McInnes will be aware that in Scotland we have the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010, which includes provision on retention of information on the criminal history system that Police Scotland operates, and which feeds into the police national database.

It would be wrong to suggest that there is no provision for how records are held on individuals who are charged for or convicted of offences. As ever, we are prepared to look at areas in which improvements can be made, but I am not aware that any particular concerns have been identified about how Police Scotland operates the system that is presently administered by the Home Office.

Alison McInnes: It is important not to be complacent; we do not have a clear regulatory framework or proper safeguards. What prevents the police from using the technology to go on fishing trips or to embark on mass surveillance? Could the police identify individuals at football games, for example? The technology has also not been rigorously tested. What safeguards, if any, are in place to prevent wrongful or mistaken identification?

Michael Matheson: In my earlier response, I described how Police Scotland operates the photographic facial recognition system. Photographs are taken only of individuals if they are arrested, detained and/or charged. Police Scotland does not retain indefinitely images of people who have not been charged for or convicted of a crime. If the person is not charged, is dealt with under a non-prosecution disposal, or is found not guilty, the criminal history system that Police Scotland operates is updated to recognise that. It then weeds out the files and updates the police national database, which means that any information that has been put on it is removed. The system's weeding mechanism removes individuals who have not been charged for and/or convicted of offences, which ensures that the images are not retained on the police national database.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary know whether the Scottish Police Authority agreed to Police Scotland uploading custody photographs to the police national database? Was the SPA aware, was its agreement sought, and if not, is this situation just like the deployment of armed police and stop and search? Is the SPA doing its job? If it is not, can the cabinet secretary have a word to get it to take

some control of what Police Scotland is getting up to?

Michael Matheson: It is important to maintain perspective in such matters. Trying to wrap the issue up with armed police officers and stop and search is to blow it out of all proportion, to be perfectly frank.

There are areas in which the Scottish Police Authority can improve how it operates. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary has already looked at that and an action plan is in place. It is therefore important to recognise that although we will have to address issues in policing and how the SPA is operating, to try and roll everything up together and say that everything is just bad does not help anyone and does not help us to progress in a reasonable and considered way.

Education (Equity and Excellence)

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-013246, in the name of Angela Constance, on equity and excellence in education.

14:23

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): I start by informing members that I have issued a correction and an apology to the Presiding Officer and Michael McMahon MSP because of an inadvertent error that I made during general question time on 13 May. I wanted to take the first opportunity that I have had to get to my feet in the chamber to put that on the record.

The education of our children is one of our greatest responsibilities, so it is right that we debate our education system with frankness, with conviction and always with our children's best interests at heart. The experience of our children's learning in schools here in Scotland has changed greatly for the better in recent years. We look to the future from a position of strength, and there is much to be proud of.

Since 2007, we have delivered a 45 per cent increase in childcare to 600 hours, which provides more hours of childcare and early learning than any other part of the United Kingdom does. We have secured agreement with local authorities to maintain teacher numbers and provided £51 million for them to do so. We have delivered improvements in class sizes in primary 1; achieved record exam passes in 2014-15, with a record number of higher passes gained; and reduced the proportion of young people from the most deprived communities who leave school with no or very low levels of qualifications from 9.7 per cent in 2007-08 to 5 per cent in 2013-14. We have secured positive destinations for a record 92.3 per cent of school leavers, which is up from 86.6 per cent in 2006-07, and we have overseen a fall of just under a quarter—22 per cent—in the youth unemployment rate over the past 12 months, so that it is now at its lowest level in six years. Through the attainment Scotland fund, we have allocated more than £100 million over four years to closing the attainment gap between children in the most deprived communities and those in the least deprived communities. We have also rebuilt or refurbished 526 schools.

That is a substantial set of achievements, but there is and always will be much more still to do. Although we have halted the recent decline in programme for international student assessment—PISA—scores overall, we remain mid-table, so we

are similar to most, better than many but not as good as some. The recent Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy scores also make it plain that, although attainment in literacy and numeracy is high for most children, there are some worrying indications of decline at particular stages, especially among children from our most deprived communities.

Our challenge is to deliver equity and excellence for all, so that every child in every community gets every chance to succeed at school and in life. As "Teaching Scotland's Future" recognises, the foundations of a successful education system lie in the quality of teachers and their leadership. Teachers are key to all that has been achieved so far and will remain so. As part of a significant long-term effort to raise teacher quality, we have invested more than £5 million since 2012 in supporting initiatives in teacher professional learning.

We must ensure that new teachers have the skills and confidence that they need to teach literacy and numeracy to the highest standard. Every teacher training course must spend sufficient time and resources on those basic skills. In the next phase of embedding curriculum for excellence, we cannot afford to stand still. Our shared focus must be on delivering equity and excellence for all.

The starting point must be the evidence about what works in Scotland and internationally. Next week, as has long been planned, we will welcome an international expert team from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to undertake an authoritative independent review of our performance. We expect to receive the final report from the OECD before the end of the year. That will provide a clear and unbiased assessment and will be fundamental to how we take things forward.

There is much that we can learn from other countries. In Ontario recently, I saw how effective focusing on a small number of key priorities can be. I am sure that that would be beneficial in Scotland, particularly if we considered underpinning those priorities with a statutory framework.

I will talk about five priorities that are particularly important. I have stressed that we must tackle inequity in Scottish education. We must address the impacts of poverty and austerity but not allow them to be an excuse for leaving some children behind. We cannot and must not underplay the role that poverty plays. Scotland is one of the richest countries in the developed world, yet tens of thousands of families depend on food banks, and poverty rates are on the rise in our country for the first time in a decade.

The Government is committed to doing everything in its power to eradicate poverty in Scotland through our welfare fund, bedroom tax support, council tax reduction scheme, emergency food action plan and free school meals for primary 1 to 3 children.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome the idea that nothing is off the table. However, will the cabinet secretary explain how a council tax freeze benefits the people who are most in poverty, given that people at such income levels do not pay the tax?

Angela Constance: Ms Lamont will be aware that poverty affects not only people who are on benefits but people who are in work. We know that, given the state of the economy, we have lived through challenging times. That has also affected people who are not entitled to any benefits and who are by modern standards not considered to be paid excessively. There is something in having benefits that are available to everyone. I am proud that the council tax reduction scheme has been part of the social wage.

I recognise and deplore the effect of austerity and poverty, and the impact that it can have on the life chances of Scotland's children, but it will never be acceptable for poverty to be an excuse for any child's lack of success at school.

We have outstanding practice in our communities. An example comes from Langlee primary school in Galashiels. It has paid forensic attention to its data, which showed that, although children made good progress in reading in primary 1 and 2, progress dropped off thereafter. Through engagement with the raising attainment for all programme, the school is addressing the issue and literacy skills are improving.

It is in our gift to raise attainment and close the equity gap. Targeted interventions and using evidence of progress can make a difference, which is why the First Minister launched the Scottish attainment challenge earlier this year.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The cabinet secretary is right to point to that good example of how attainment can be raised. How can that be put into a national framework?

Angela Constance: That question is apposite, because the national improvement framework is the second important issue that I will raise and which we must debate this afternoon.

As we implement initiatives such as the attainment challenge, we need to gather reliable data on experiences and attainment and use it intelligently. The data must show us not just what is working but why, for whom and in what circumstances. A lot of the work that is taking place in the raising attainment for all programme

will be imperative as we move forward in our discussions with everyone across the sector about the shape and substance of the national improvement framework.

To ensure that we gather that information, I announced recently that we will work with partners to develop the national improvement framework. It is crucial that the framework has the buy-in and support of teachers and others in the system.

As the First Minister said in the chamber last Thursday, we will not jump to making decisions about the detail of the framework before we have properly considered and discussed with all our partners how best we should move forward. I firmly believe that that is the right thing to do.

Documenting children's progress in literacy as a core basic skill is vital to understanding how children are doing at school generally. We need to collate such data consistently and proportionately. I confirm that I will make additional tools, such as reading score assessments, available to the raising attainment for all programme to help schools to achieve improved literacy and numeracy. We will also explore with the schools how their experiences of working with data can inform the development of the national improvement framework, as I said.

Thirdly, preparing children to succeed in life and for the world of work through success at school must be a central goal. I am passionate about the developing the young workforce agenda, which will transform our approach to tackling systemic youth unemployment through offering a new wave of vocational pathways that are accessible to all young people. The pathways start in school and—crucially—allow progression to college, university, training or a job. I believe that that will usher in a genuine personalisation of the senior phase of the curriculum for excellence. Developing Scotland's young workforce is crucial to building a fairer society, tackling inequality and ensuring sustainable economic growth.

Fourthly, through all that work, we need to recognise and support the role of parents. Evidence shows that parents' involvement in their children's education through taking an interest, helping with homework and providing motivation and moral support has a significant and positive impact. However, we know that some parents and families do not feel a positive connection with their child's school or education. Our efforts to encourage more parents back into work create other challenges, as many parents re-enter the labour market when their children start school.

We need to overcome the barriers that exist. Our education system needs to reach out to parents and develop channels for two-way communication. We know that good practice exists

but, across the education system, we need to think more creatively about when and how we interact with parents.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I very much support what the cabinet secretary is saying about opportunities, but many opportunities are limited by people's level of literacy. Is she concerned that, in teacher training colleges in Scotland, as little as 20 hours in a four-year course are allocated to literacy training, compared with a minimum of 90 hours in England? A freedom of information request from Stewart Maxwell got that information.

Angela Constance: Absolutely. I addressed that several minutes ago, and I have certainly reflected greatly on the issue. To my knowledge, in my time as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, the issue was first raised in the chamber by Stewart Maxwell when we last debated attainment in education. I will seek to address the issue further with the providers of initial teacher education and the General Teaching Council for Scotland. It is an important point that, if we want our children to achieve the highest levels of literacy and numeracy, we need to consider what support we give people, particularly as they enter the profession.

I will finish by touching on the needs of a group of children who are hugely important. We know that children who experience a secure, loving and nurturing home environment are better able to withstand life's challenges and achieve their full potential. That is why we are developing a national mentoring scheme to provide an opportunity for looked-after children and young people to build long-term relationships with a supportive, reliable and trustworthy adult who is consistently there for them. Earlier this year, I announced funding of £500,000 per year with the intention that the scheme will eventually be available to all looked-after children and young people across Scotland. We have to understand that inequality and disadvantage come in many forms and that, although tackling poverty and income inequality is important, so too is supporting looked-after children and other children with additional support needs.

My aims are clear. I want to have an education system that achieves equity and excellence and is based squarely on the professionalism and dedication of our teachers. In achieving that, I will be led by the evidence, not by dogma or ideology. That should be the ambition of all of us. Everyone in the chamber has a contribution to make to help to realise that ambition.

This is a good time to take stock of our successes and our shortcomings and to consider what is next for Scottish education. It is a good time for us to look collectively to the future and to

chart a course to a destination where every child in every community has every chance to succeed.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that there is much to be proud of in Scotland's schools, with children achieving record exam results, fewer young people leaving school with no or few qualifications and record numbers securing positive destinations on leaving school; recognises that Scotland currently sits mid-table in the international rankings for school education; believes therefore that much more needs to be done to make all of Scottish education truly excellent; further believes that tackling inequity by delivering excellence is a key priority for the Scottish Government; acknowledges that, while the Scottish Government is committed to doing all that it can to eradicate poverty and that poverty can be a barrier to attainment, it should not be used as an excuse for failure; welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government has said that all options will be considered and that the evidence of what works will determine future policy, and calls on all involved, including parents, teachers, school leaders, employers and politicians, to play their part in overcoming barriers to delivering an education system that ensures that every child in every community has every chance to succeed at school and in life.

14:39

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The Government's motion is, properly, in the name of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, but we know that it has the weight of the First Minister behind it. Ms Sturgeon told us once again yesterday—in the pages of the *Daily Record*, no less—that her own education is the reason why she is now First Minister and that it is her “sacred responsibility” to ensure that every child in Scotland gets the same chances as she got.

In that, she is not so different to any of us. I, too, am the first of my family to go to university and to start working life in one of the professions. That will be true of many of us here. The difference is that the First Minister has been part of the Government for the past eight years. If, as she says, our education system is “not good enough”, she cannot escape the real responsibility for that.

Indeed, it is the whole history of Scottish education that any education minister in this Parliament holds in sacred trust: our being the first nation to invest in and legislate for universal education; our universities ancient, yet open to the fabled lad o pairts; and a system that prided itself on its breadth and its world-class quality. Like all the best myths, those are part true and part false, but they point the way to our future aspirations as well as telling us about our past. They are at least partly true. After all, the embodiment of Scotland's intellectual and cultural life, Burns, may have been the son of a tenant farmer and have been a sometime ploughboy, but he could read Latin and Greek, and he could speak French.

The recent and worrying trends in our education system strike at the very heart of the historical and traditional strengths—and the trends are recent in origin. The evidence that we have drawn to Parliament's attention about the impact of the new national exams is so worrying because it demonstrates a narrowing and worsening of achievement at a crucial stage in our schools.

The statistics show that an unintended consequence of the way in which curriculum for excellence has been rolled out is that pupils sit fewer exams and are failing more of those that they sit. The ministers' response has been to try—and fail—to trash the statistics or to point to progress that has been made by pupils who have not sat the new exams or followed the new curriculum because it has only just reached fifth year. Even then, it is the case that higher and advanced higher pass rates last year had also fallen.

That ministerial complacency is reflected in the Government motion, which is why we cannot support it, although there is little else in it with which we would disagree.

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): I hope that Iain Gray will not view it as ministerial complacency if I point out to him that there is a record number of provisional entries for the current highers diet—201,000 compared to 191,000 in 2014. I really do not think that that shows a curriculum that is failing young people.

Iain Gray: Let us see what happens when we get the results. Last year's pass rates for highers dropped from 79 per cent to 77 per cent, and in advanced highers they dropped from 84 per cent to 81 per cent. Those are the very years to which the cabinet secretary made reference.

These are early warning signals that we are presenting—as is the furore over this year's new maths higher—and they cannot and should not be ignored. Has the education secretary spoken to the Scottish Qualifications Authority about the higher maths exam problems? Has she asked for an investigation? Does she understand that scaling marks will not be an answer for pupils who were too upset—and there were some—to complete the exam? We have already told the cabinet secretary that the new appeals system is not fit for purpose and is likely to be tested to destruction by this looming problem.

Perhaps even more alarming is the evidence, to which the cabinet secretary herself referred, of a sharp decline in standards in the basic skills—literacy and numeracy. Scotland introduced universal education exactly to guarantee those skills for all, but now standards are moving in the wrong direction. The correlation between a child's

family income and their success in reading, writing and counting remains stubbornly unchanged.

The cabinet secretary has said that she will support what works. Any independent study is very welcome, but we know much of what works already: start early, get the basics right, work with parents as well as children, target resources not equally but for equality, support teachers and raise their professional standards, and demand that everyone have the highest aspirations for the children whom they teach. All of that is why we welcome the Government's attainment challenge, but question how it is being deployed. The blunt instrument of targeting seven local authorities simply means that children and families in communities like Craigmillar and Wester Hailes in this city will miss out. Using the resources to appoint advisers in authorities rather than practitioners in communities cannot be the first priority.

Angela Constance: I point out to Mr Gray that it is a matter of public record that the Government has already said that we will start with the seven local authorities that have the greatest proportion of children from disadvantaged communities, but that we will, as we move forward, certainly look across the country at areas where there are pockets of deprivation, and we will be giving consideration to challenged schools and communities.

Iain Gray: The problem with all of that is that the children about whom we are talking cannot wait. By the time the Government gets around to doing that work, their opportunities will have passed them by.

We now find that the attainment adviser posts that I mentioned are secondments, which I presume will involve identifying the teachers who have the greatest knowledge and skills in overcoming educational barriers, then removing them from our schools for two years.

All of that is why we have proposed doubling the resources that are devoted to the attainment gap, and using them to employ more teachers, more classroom assistants to free teachers up and teams of literacy specialists in the school clusters where the problem is sharpest and the biggest gains can be made most quickly. That is why we suggest that, instead of taking teachers out of classrooms, we reintroduce and revamp the chartered teacher scheme to reward teachers for staying in the classroom and working at the hard end of the attainment gap.

The truth is that we will not reduce the attainment gap while we are cutting thousands of teacher posts, increasing class sizes and spreading resources ever thinner. That is why we should commit now, as a signal of intent, that

when we have the power to raise a top tax rate of 50p we will use the resource to raise the life chances of those children.

Early intervention is the key, but it is not the only challenge. We are the worst in the United Kingdom at getting students from poorer backgrounds into university. The Government's widening access commission is very welcome indeed, but we already know some of what is wrong. When I was a teacher in Livingston, I lost a whole higher physics class because Ferranti took on 100 apprentices. Every one of those pupils would have got the highers for university and would have succeeded there, but they left because Ferranti was offering them a job. They could see how they would live as well as how they would learn for the next four years. So although I welcome the cabinet secretary's correction, cutting bursaries for poorer students, as this Government has done, cannot encourage such students to take the leap into university, and needs to be reversed.

Here is another thing: I bet that many of those pupils of mine ended up with a degree at some point after their apprenticeship, having gone to college and then on to university. That touches on the other thing that the Scottish Government has got spectacularly wrong: if we are to close the attainment gap over people's lifetimes, second chances matter, too. Some 140,000 students have gone from our colleges: the part-time students studying while in jobs, second-chance learners, women returning to work, and people trying to get the highers that, for whatever reason, they did not get at school. Ms Constance styles herself the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. However, she should change her title or, better, change her Government's policy on colleges, because the truth is that lifelong learning looks like it is a long way towards being gone.

We all have a "sacred responsibility" to ensure that no child in Scotland is left behind and that every one of them has the best possible chance in life. That is why we will continue to hold this Government to account for its failings of the past eight years, and why we will always press it for action—not just words.

I move amendment S4M-13246.2, to leave out from "with children" to end and insert:

"particularly the patience, hard work and dedication of teachers to their pupils' futures; recognises that this has been delivered under the severe strain of over 4,000 fewer teachers in Scotland's schools, leaving teacher workload pressure at an all-time high; acknowledges that, despite these efforts, numeracy and literacy standards are declining at all stages and the attainment gap remains persistent; notes concerns from teachers, headteachers, educationalists and parents regarding the implementation of new national exams, and recognises that these cannot be addressed by simply asking teachers to do more; welcomes the Scottish Government's attainment fund and widening access commission but believes that change

requires targeted resources and attention to lift the standards and aspirations of those young people who need the most help, and calls on all involved, including the Scottish Ministers, parents, teachers, school leaders, employers and local government, to play their part in overcoming barriers to delivering an education system that ensures that every child in every community has every chance to succeed at school and in life."

14:49

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As well as the amendment in my name, we will be supporting the Labour and Liberal amendments.

The Scottish Government has chosen a very interesting topic, as equity and excellence are two extremely important things. I note that the cabinet secretary has asked us to accept the definitions of both words that she produced in her lecture at the University of Glasgow's Robert Owen centre for educational change. On the definition of "equity", the cabinet secretary says that it is about ensuring that every child has the chance to succeed, and "excellence" is about ensuring that every child has the best possible learning experience at all ages and stages of education. I think that is absolutely right. The question, of course, is how we go about that.

Before we debate the matter a little more fully, it is useful to consider the response from the Royal Society of Edinburgh to the new Education (Scotland) Bill. It clearly says that there is a very important difference between the terms "equity" and "equality", a difference that matters greatly, not just in terms of the loose language that is used in the bill as introduced, but in terms of what a desirable and achievable outcome is, given the changes that are taking place in Scottish education.

The RSE is absolutely correct when it makes that distinction and when it puts emphasis on the need for greater equity, ensuring that every child has the chance to succeed, as the cabinet secretary rightly says. Not only is that much more practical and educationally the right thing to do; it is in line with what is happening in Scottish education. Radical change is coming, whether politicians like it or not. There are two drivers for that: first, the changes that are taking place in further and higher education, which reflect a fast-changing world of employment; and, secondly, the fact that the current comprehensive system of schooling is not making sufficient progress when it comes to improving literacy and numeracy or closing the attainment gap.

As a result, our foremost educational thinkers have challenged what has become a consensus that the Scottish school system is fully fit for purpose and that the curriculum for excellence will be the panacea that we all crave. Secondly, they have questioned the wisdom of adopting a

philosophy that treats equity as the same thing as equality and of a system that is built to offer uniformity across the board.

At the same time, Sir Ian Wood has made plain the need for a much more diverse form of schooling that responds to the different needs of the economy and the desire among a growing number of parents that there has to be greater responsiveness to what is happening in our schools. That does not mean the wholesale dismantling of the school structure, which would be both unacceptable and unwise, not to say very expensive, but there has to be a degree of reform that allows the weaker-performing parts of the system to match the stronger-performing parts—in that regard I have sympathy with the Liberal Democrat amendment and the reference to pupil premiums—and where the expertise of teachers, the talents of pupils and the wishes of parents can all be much better aligned, and perhaps free from political interference.

Messrs Bloomer, Donaldson, Paterson and Cameron have all had very important things to say in this regard and, at a time when the monopoly of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has been broken and there is much discussion about the reform of local authorities, I believe that there is real scope for change.

That means challenging whether catchments are really the best means of deciding where pupils go to school, and it means allowing new or different types of schools to start up if that is what parents want. It means ensuring that particularly relevant and appropriate criteria are set when it comes to all the work that is carried out so well by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and the Care Inspectorate. It means questioning whether what we know as comprehensive education really fits with the ethos of the curriculum for excellence and the very extensive changes that are taking place in higher and further education.

Dr Allan: The member has mentioned comprehensive education a couple of times. I might be misinterpreting her tone, but can I clarify that the member is in favour of Scotland having a comprehensive education system?

Liz Smith: Up to a certain age, but not when it comes to secondary 1 and 2, where I think we have run into difficulties with the curriculum. Considering how we are measuring up for the future phases of the curriculum for excellence, we have severe problems if we are to allow the S1 and S2 curriculum to be as diverse as it is, and that is one of the reasons why we are having a struggle with literacy and numeracy.

The cabinet secretary was quite right when she addressed the issue of why there is a deterioration in the standards of literacy and numeracy between

primary school and the early years of secondary school. That is a very important point, which Keir Bloomer has reflected on. I am not in favour of comprehensive education right throughout the school, and I think that we will find that the way the world is changing agrees with that point.

I will finish my remarks by speaking about excellence, which is just as important as equity. Two years ago, Lindsay Paterson of the University of Edinburgh produced an interesting paper in which he said that Scottish education

“has rather neglected the outstanding students”

and that,

“in the interests of public accountability,”

the system

“has neglected the diverse, imaginative and controversial ideas that might be provoked by diverse sources of finance.”

That is important. To take up Iain Gray's point about the history of Scottish education, we have a proud history in this country of ensuring that such philanthropy benefits everyone, no matter what their background. I hope that the Scottish Government will address that and see what it can do to inculcate a real spirit of excellence.

Excellence demands free thinking. I hope that the Government will give careful thought to how it might progress, given that its educational policy tends to be very centralised and dependent on the Government taking much more control over educational institutions than those institutions have. It is interesting to have a debate about equity and excellence, but that requires a spirit of free thinking. I urge the Government to think further about that.

I move amendment S4M-13246.1, to leave out from “with children” to end and insert:

“but believes that these qualities are undermined by the persistent failure to close the attainment gap, declining standards of literacy and numeracy and the failure of the Scottish Government to introduce more rigorous testing of these basic skills, and further believes that, in order to achieve both excellence and greater equity in education, there has to be much more focus on tailoring the learning experience to the best educational interests of individual children, which, in turn, demands greater diversity in the school system, one which allows full autonomy for headteachers and is more responsive to parental choice.”

14:56

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The debate follows hot on the heels of a similar debate last week, but that is perhaps no bad thing, given the importance of attainment, the lack of progress that we have seen in closing the gap for those from more disadvantaged backgrounds and the range of other indicators that illustrate that the

Scottish Government has rather taken its eye off the ball.

Like other members, I welcome some of the statements that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and the First Minister have made in the past few days. However, their call for a fresh start on education serves to underscore the Government's failure to get to grips with the issues in the past eight years in office. Although the debate will have a useful purpose only if we focus on where we go from here, it is not unreasonable at the same time to reflect on the Scottish National Party's record in government, both good and bad. That appeared to be acknowledged and accepted by Angela Constance in her generally measured opening remarks.

For example, as my colleague Willie Rennie pointed out in the debate last week and as Iain Gray highlights in his amendment, since 2007, teacher numbers have fallen by well over 4,000. The average class size for P1 to P3 is not 18 as the SNP promised eight years ago; it is closer to 23. PISA scores for mathematics went backwards in 2009 and 2012 and the latest Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy makes for disappointing reading. As the Educational Institute of Scotland suggests, given the drop in teacher numbers, the increase in pupil ratios and the ballooning of workload pressures, it is hardly an appropriate response from the cabinet secretary to turn round and blame teachers.

That applies all the more so given that, in the past eight years, any of us who raised concerns were told by SNP ministers that we were wrong, that everything was fine and—irony of ironies—that we were all guilty of talking down Scotland's teachers. That was never the case, and perhaps now that ministers appear to be prepared for a fresh start, we can have a serious debate, with the frankness that Angela Constance alluded to, about the improvements that are needed and where and how resources can be effectively targeted.

When the SNP came into office in 2007, the OECD made it abundantly clear that the major challenge for Scottish schools and our education system as a whole was the need to close the achievement gap for children from poorer backgrounds. Quite apart from the damaging effect that the gap has on individuals and the lack of opportunity that they have to fulfil their potential, all the evidence shows that it also has a debilitating effect on wider society and the economy. It is not someone else's problem; it affects us all.

Ms Constance can reasonably argue that closing the attainment gap is not a new challenge. However, the concern is that, in the past eight years, we appear to have been moving in the

wrong direction in too many areas, often because of steps that have been taken or not taken by the Government. I will return to some of those decisions relating to colleges and universities, which are referred to in my amendment, but I will start with the crucial early years.

No one now seriously disputes that investment and intervention in the earliest years bears the greatest return. Among others, Professor James Heckman and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have shown how the gap between those from poorer backgrounds and their more affluent peers invariably begins to open up well before school age and thereafter grows wider and more difficult to address. However, evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation also shows that there is nothing inevitable about the link between poverty and poorer attainment, as the cabinet secretary underscored. The effective provision of pre-school education—EPPE—project makes clear that access to high-quality early learning and childcare support before the age of three can help children develop their communication, language and literacy skills, as well as their reasoning, thinking and maths skills.

That is why the Liberal Democrats have attached such a high priority to ensuring that such provision is made available to those who need it most. As I have said many times, I am pleased that the SNP dropped its initial opposition to doing more to extend such provision. However, the 27 per cent of poorest two-year-olds who will benefit from that provision this year still falls well short of the 40 per cent of their peers who have been benefiting from such provision for a couple of years south of the border.

There is a need for greater ambition from the Government—ambition that can be achieved with the powers that we already have. In terms of ambition, the establishment of the attainment challenge funds is welcome and Angela Constance is to be congratulated on that. However, although the principle is sound and deserves support, I—like Iain Gray—have grave misgivings about an approach that targets areas of deprivation rather than individuals from deprived backgrounds. Those of us who represent any of the 25 local authority areas in Scotland that stand to be excluded at this stage from the £100 million fund will be able to point to any number of children, young people and families who are as deserving of support as those from the seven council areas that ministers have selected.

I appreciate that specific challenges face those communities with the highest levels of deprivation and I do not seek to diminish them, but nor should ministers overlook the difficulties of those who live in poverty amid plenty. Moreover, I understand that in targeting by area, the Government risks

excluding well over 60 per cent of those who live in the greatest poverty.

When pressed on that point at First Minister's questions last week, the First Minister appeared to concede that she may look again at that area-based approach. Angela Constance suggested earlier that the Scottish Government may look to go further, but in what timescale and with what budget remains unclear. I hope that that happens and that support is targeted at those individuals who need it most, wherever they live in Scotland. That is the underlying principle of the pupil premium, which was introduced by the previous coalition Government thanks to the Liberal Democrats.

Backed by £2.5 billion of funding, the pupil premium has enabled tailored support to be provided where and how it is needed, whether by means of additional tuition, educational materials, or work to involve parents in their child's learning. As well as targeting substantial resources at individuals in need—because of poverty or for any other reason—that approach has enabled banks of best practice and banks of resources for teachers and schools to be developed. Are there things that could be done to improve the pupil premium? Without doubt. Would its introduction in Scotland require adaptation? Almost certainly. However, does it offer a more sensible approach to using the resources available than one that is inevitably more indiscriminate? I think that most people would agree that it does.

Given the time available, I will return in my closing remarks to the issues regarding the Government's approach to colleges and universities, which seems to go against the grain of what we are seeking to achieve with regard to equity and excellence. For now, I urge ministers to show more ambition on early learning and childcare, and more open minds with regard to a pupil premium and targeting what resources are available at individuals—not simply postcodes—in need.

I move amendment S4M-13246.3, to leave out from “further believes” to end and insert:

“recognises that the early years of a child's life are the most influential in shaping an individual's life chances and that quality early years education is therefore crucial to closing the attainment gap and creating equality in education; believes that targeted funding for school-aged pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in the form of a ‘pupil premium’ should be explored in Scotland as a means of giving disadvantaged pupils a better chance of reaching their potential; further believes that targeted funding should be available for students from cradle to college to ensure equality of opportunity regardless of background; views the loss of 130,000 college places, which has hit female, mature and part-time learners hardest, as a regressive step in the drive for educational equality and excellence; notes the Scottish Government's failure to deliver on its promise to ‘dump’ student debt, with loans having more than

doubled while bursaries have been cut; believes that such funding arrangements are disproportionately affecting poorer students, and considers that, if equality and excellence are to be available to all, the Scottish Government must consider its approach to education funding from the early years through to student support.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):
We are pretty well on time, so members have six minutes for their speeches.

15:03

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): I am grateful that we have the opportunity to focus on the progress that is being made in our education system and to assess what challenges lie ahead for the Scottish Government in building on the success that we have already achieved.

I would argue that the importance of education transcends that of any other Government portfolio that is debated in this chamber. The success of our education system is fundamental to how we create a successful economy, tackle poverty and create a society that serves all its citizens. An education system that enables individuals to meet their own personal goals will ensure that we maximise the potential of the whole nation.

A key indicator in judging the health of our education system is not only how well students can memorise certain information but how the system empowers them with skills that they can use throughout their lives to adapt and thrive in whatever environment they choose to go into. I am proud of what we have already achieved in that regard and, like the cabinet secretary, I am committed to an education system that is free and open to all; recognises the needs of our children as individuals; and values and invests in the vital work being undertaken by our teachers.

I am particularly keen to ensure that we continue to develop an education system that gives our children the best possible start in life, regardless of their background. I therefore welcome the Scottish Government's £100 million commitment to closing the attainment gap and I believe that if we can implement the policy effectively, it will result in significant and long-term benefits.

The principle of creating equality in our education system will help to break down the crippling barriers that people may face due to poverty. Unfortunately, there are still too many people in Scotland, particularly children, who are held back by their economic circumstances. A report that was issued in October 2014 demonstrates clearly how that can be the case. The report outlined that just 3.9 per cent of pupils from Scotland's most deprived areas achieved three A grades in their higher exams, in

comparison with 24.2 per cent of those from the wealthiest areas.

I am sure that members on all sides of the chamber will agree that the issue of poverty is deeply ingrained in our society. It has not been caused by a single Government, nor can it be solved by the Government working in isolation. We all have a responsibility to tackle the problem of poverty and, in creating a more equal education system, we can transform individual lives and generate benefits for the whole of society.

Closing the attainment gap has been a major focus of the Education and Culture Committee's recent work, as my fellow committee members know, and I look forward to the cabinet secretary giving evidence at the committee later in the year. That will be an opportunity for the Scottish Government to provide additional clarity around how we can tackle the attainment gap in the most effective way.

I firmly believe that the Scottish Government, in partnership with organisations in our system, has already made significant progress on the issue. In my region, West College Scotland delivered 45 per cent of its learning to students from some of the most deprived backgrounds in Scotland; that is more than any other college in 2013-14.

That important work complements the successes that the Scottish Government has already been able to achieve—namely, a record drop in the number of those leaving school with no qualifications; record numbers of school leavers securing positive destinations; and a record proportion of Scots from the most deprived areas entering higher education. That is not enough, and we still have a long way to go, but we cannot ignore the successes that have been achieved. Scottish Government schemes such as opportunities for all and the modern apprenticeship programme have been particularly effective in achieving some of those results.

The Scottish Government is investing more in colleges than Labour ever did, with investment reaching £526 million in 2015-16, and it has surpassed its commitment to provide 116,000 full-time equivalent places, reaching a total of more than 119,000 places. The Scotland's schools for the future programme is investing £330 million, which will allow dozens of schools throughout Scotland to be built or refurbished. Those have recently included Crookfur primary school in Eastwood.

At this point, it is worth issuing an unequivocal reminder that, unlike the Labour Party and some of the other parties, the SNP will never allow front-door or back-door tuition fees. We remain resolutely committed to an education system that

is based on the ability to learn and not the ability to pay.

Liz Smith: I accept Stewart Maxwell's point, but where does equity come in when those who are from England and from foreign countries are paying fees whereas those who are domiciled in Scotland and in the European Union are not?

Stewart Maxwell: I am sorry that Liz Smith has raised that issue. We are responsible for those who live here in Scotland; we are not responsible for young people from around the world. We should take responsibility for the young people of Scotland, and that is what the Scottish Government is doing.

I know that, despite the Scottish Government's success, many challenges remain with regard to improving the education system. I regret that some will seek to paint an inaccurate picture of those challenges, and I believe that those who do so are doing a disservice to both teachers and pupils. The results of the 2014 Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy highlight one such area in which the Scottish Government can still do more. While the survey results were extremely disappointing, however, we should keep a sense of perspective. Around eight out of 10 pupils at all stages are still performing well or very well in reading, and a number of programmes have been launched since the survey took place. The Scottish attainment challenge, raising attainment for all, the read, write, count campaign and primary 1 literacy assessment have all been introduced recently.

In light of that, I welcome the cabinet secretary's assurance that the Scottish Government will reflect on those results and redouble efforts to ensure that we continue to give students the best possible start in life. As an aside, I am pleased to hear that Mary Scanlon is following my work, and my FOI requests, closely.

It is clear that there is much to be optimistic about in our education system. Scotland continues to enjoy a high-quality system from primary school up to the further and higher education sectors, and there are many programmes currently in place that will deliver positive results for the future. However, we are taking nothing for granted and we must identify those aspects of the system in which progress has not occurred at the necessary rate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must close, please.

Stewart Maxwell: We must use a rational evidence-based approach to these challenges, and we will ultimately give parents throughout Scotland confidence that our education system is empowering children to reach their full potential.

15:09

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): It is a privilege to add my reflections and observations to this debate. In opening, I say to Stewart Maxwell that education is not simply about children, schools and teachers; it is a lifelong opportunity for people to learn. It is critical to understand that we can close the attainment gap by supporting parents to learn as well as supporting children.

I start with two quotes that I like to think could frame this debate. The first is a Japanese proverb:

"Vision without action is a daydream."

The other, from an American senator, is a little more sharply put:

"Don't tell me what you care about—show me your budget."

Yes, we should have the optimism to see the power of education—a vision of opportunity for all—with a focus on those least well served by the current system. However, we also need the rigour and focus of a plan, with people across education and beyond clear about the scale of the challenge and about their role. I welcome all the initiatives that the cabinet secretary has identified, but it is critical that the plan follows the vision.

Yes, we should care. However, caring will only make us feel better unless it is supported by resources that are properly directed. That may mean increasing resources through the imaginative use of the taxation system or challenging our own spending priorities in terms of our own claims to equity and equality.

I taught for 20 years, which is longer than I have been in this place. For only two years of that time did I teach under a Labour Government—and yes, it did make a difference. Yet even in the years when there was a Tory Government, amazing initiatives were taking place, particularly because local government at that time saw its role as that of a dented shield against attacks from a Tory Government. We saw areas of priority treatment. We saw early intervention programmes that looked at early years. Those were initiatives that have stood the test of time and which made a difference in those toughest of times.

Yes, of course, we must, can and should talk about the impact of Tory policy on the capacity of this place to deliver a fairer education system, but we cannot stop there. In these times it is even more important that we adopt the notion of the dented shield—that we protect our poorest and more vulnerable and defend the basic values of an education system that will deliver for all.

That should mean that nothing is off the table. I believe the cabinet secretary when she says that, but it would appear that her own back benchers

have not yet got the message. Everything must be tested against the evidence and not assertion. It must be about mitigating the impact of a Tory Government or of poverty and disadvantage and not amplifying it. We should test those choices and justify them.

On the current funding of higher education, should it be funded at the expense of further education as it currently is? Do we have the right funding regime in place if the poorest children and young people from the poorest backgrounds have support that is less than in the rest of the United Kingdom? Should it be a concern for us that we in Scotland have the highest drop-out rates? Is it right to prioritise 16 to 19-year-olds in a further education system at the expense of part-time students? Those with caring responsibilities—often women with children or who are caring for elderly people—are the very ones who need training and support to access education. They are the ones we are not prioritising at this stage.

Should we have a system of regionalisation of a further education sector that in reality defines cuts as savings, with a consequence for students across the FE sector?

Angela Constance: I draw to Miss Lamont's attention the fact that the number of full-time students over 25 years old has actually increased by 25 per cent. The number of women studying on full-time courses has increased by 15 per cent. Of course the point that she makes about part-time provision is important. We have invested £6.5 million in additional funding for part-time provision, which is important to some women.

Johann Lamont: The reality is that the FE sector has been cut and cut and cut again, and we know that. The cabinet minister may be able to justify it, but she needs to justify it rather than simply allowing it to continue in the way that it is. Can we justify this Government's choices in and control of local government funding if they are having a direct and long-term impact on the way in which education is delivered within our communities?

I understand the importance of teachers, but the reality is that education is delivered in our communities not just by teachers but by the support staff who work alongside them. I urge the cabinet secretary to give particular attention to them. Those staff support children in challenging episodes in their lives, such as bereavement or family break-up. Attendance officers can identify young people who are in danger of dropping out of the system. I fear that young people are dropping out in second and third year who are not being picked up in the way that they might have been in the past.

Classroom assistants and personal assistants support young people to achieve their potential in education. Teachers matter but those support staff are absolutely critical if we are going to ensure that children sustain an education. I raised that issue with the minister at general questions and was surprised to find that it would appear that the Government does not know the number of support assistants available in our schools, never mind being able to identify standards that it would be reasonable to expect.

I urge the cabinet secretary to be true to her word that nothing is off the table and that we can work together, in the reality of what is happening in our schools, colleges and universities, to ensure that we achieve what we all aspire to, which is the hope that education gives to all families throughout Scotland.

15:16

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in the debate, mainly because I believe that no child should be born to fail. That is probably the most important thing that I will say all afternoon.

On the bank holiday weekend, I visited my five-and-a-half-month-old granddaughter Daisy. Like every other grandparent does, I held my grandchild on my knees and I thought about what she could do with her life and what she could achieve. I remember the day that my daughter was born at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley, and the discussion was very similar then. All parents want the very best for their children; that is one of the reasons why I think that educational attainment is one of the most important issues that we have discussed.

I have mentioned in other debates the way that we had a lost generation during the Thatcher years. Friends of mine drifted away and effectively just became husks of themselves. They became instinctive survivalists, as life made things extremely harsh and difficult for them. That is why this issue is so important to me, and it is why I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has made education and educational attainment its top priority.

The First Minister recently said:

"I am determined—indeed I have a sacred responsibility—to make sure every young person in our land gets the same chance I had to succeed at whatever they want to do in life."

That is the most important part of the debate, because those opportunities are what will make the difference to our young people's futures.

Since taking office in 2007, the Scottish Government has seen a return to free university

education, free school meals for children in primary 1 to 3 and an increase in the number of modern apprenticeships. Although we have much to be proud of, children who grow up in deprived areas too often achieve lower attainment than those in more affluent areas. That has not just happened overnight; it has happened over decades, if not lifetimes.

I take no pleasure in saying that, in my home town of Paisley, fewer children in an area such as Ferguslie will achieve positive learning outcomes and go on to positive destinations when leaving school than children from another area, such as Ralston, only 10 minutes away—one in the east end of the town and one in the west end. The difference is such that, as far as many young people are concerned, Ferguslie and Ralston might as well be in different universes. Although many of those young people will attend the same high school, factors outwith their control will dictate their educational achievements and therefore their life chances. As elected representatives, we have a duty to everyone in our towns to ensure that we are doing all that we can for our children. In Paisley, numerous groups outwith the traditional educational framework help to raise attainment and close the gap.

As a member of the Education and Culture Committee, I have heard evidence from numerous people on how we could close the attainment gap. The committee is undertaking a year-long inquiry into educational attainment. Recently—and totally coincidentally—we heard from Brian Caldwell, chief executive of St Mirren Football Club and Stephen Gallacher, manager of street stuff, which is a local project run by St Mirren. We also heard from the local authority, Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. It was really interesting to hear about the impact that street stuff has had in our area. Not only has it been a way to stop antisocial behaviour in Paisley and Renfrewshire; it has developed into a way to get hard-to-reach young people and ensure that people can work with them and offer them something better for the future.

Some of those young people have gone on to better educational attainment and college places, whereas others have managed to find employment at the football club, which represents quite an opportunity. When we talk about attainment, we must ask ourselves what the best way to achieve that is. We talk about hard-to-reach children and hard-to-reach parents, but the language is bad. It would be better to find ways of ensuring that the parents and the young people have a common goal and common interests.

Projects such as the one that St Mirren is doing illustrate perfectly how we can give young people access to an activity that they want to do—

whether it be sport or culture—and thereby provide them with an opportunity to see that there is something else to do. Not every child who is born in an area such as Ferguslie Park believes that they are born to fail; like the rest of us, they are born with dreams and desires and hopes and wishes to do better in life. We must take it upon ourselves to ensure that we can engage with those young people and their parents to show them that there is a better way forward.

When we talk about attainment, what exactly do we mean? Is it a positive destination for the young person concerned, or is it a place in higher or further education? During the Education and Culture Committee's inquiry into attainment, much has been said about that. It appears that some schools are focused purely on the academic and are not showing the leadership that is necessary to offer our young people other careers. When he was asked about the issue, Phil Ford of the Construction Industry Training Board Scotland said:

"Some schools measure success by the number of pupils who go to university. We need to challenge that and promote vocational careers as being equally valid."—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 21 April 2015; c 11.]

We had a similar debate last week, in which we identified the need to find a way of providing a different stream to enable young people to access a vocational future. There seems to be an overreliance on going down the academic route. Terry Lanagan of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland said:

"I believe that vocational education is as important to academic young people as it is to others ... The skills that are developed through work-based learning are important to everyone in society. One of the challenges is to persuade Scottish society—and particularly, but not exclusively, parents—to recognise the value of different routes to lifetime achievement."—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 10 March 2015; c 12.]

I think that that is an important part of the debate.

It is right for us to highlight and build on the Government's achievements so far, but we must ensure that no child is left behind and that no child in Scotland is born to fail.

15:22

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I am pleased to have an opportunity to contribute to this important debate to recognise the many achievements that have been made, collectively, by the Government, the profession and the thousands of pupils and students who are studying in Scotland today, and to explore exactly what it is that we want from our education system for our young people.

I am sure that all of us want the same end point for our children. We want our students to get the best possible education that will give them opportunities to work and earn a living, be good citizens and, ultimately, share their wisdom and experience for the greater good of society. We will probably argue about which route is the best one to take to get us there, but I hope that we do not end up squabbling about the details of the route that we choose but instead share some ideas and thoughts about the real purpose of education and the value of being educated in a country such as Scotland, with its long history of excellence and achievement.

What has been achieved so far is certainly impressive by any standards. We have record exam results—the number of higher passes is up, and more pupils are leaving school with four, five and six highers. The same is true of youngsters from our deprived communities. There are record numbers of school leavers in work, education or training. The Accounts Commission reported that performance has improved against all 10 of the attainment measures that it has examined in the last decade, and the majority of those improvements have been made in the past five years. In addition, of course, we do not charge our students tuition fees when they go to university. All those achievements are worth celebrating, but they are never enough, as many members have said. We should always strive to do better.

The £100 million attainment challenge fund, which is targeted at those communities that need help the most, is a fantastic opportunity for schools and youngsters who learn in challenging environments to start to realise their potential. It will focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing in primary school. It will provide more teachers and resources and, importantly, more opportunities for learning outwith the school setting. Will it help to close the attainment gaps that the Education and Culture Committee is currently considering? Time will tell, and our colleagues on the committee will undoubtedly give that close consideration.

There are some wonderful quotes about education. Johann Lamont mentioned a few that are perhaps some of her favourites. Nelson Mandela said:

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

Martin Luther King told us:

"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically."

One of my particular favourites is from none other than Malcolm Forbes, who said:

"The purpose of education is to replace an empty mind with an open one."

That really begins to point us in the direction of how we best develop the skills that enable young people to think critically, to challenge accepted wisdom and to open up new possibilities for themselves and the rest of society.

When I think back to my time at school, I recall some of the pain of having to learn the next page of Latin verbs or to read the next 10 pages of a history book about the Tudors. For me, that was not education. It was no more than absorption of information and a test of my memory, and I think that we might be having a debate along similar lines today.

University, though, was an incredible leap in complexity and challenges. I am so thankful, now, that along with my computer science degree I was required to study other areas, and I chose sociology and psychology. I learned about social and political systems and I began to listen to others who thought differently about a lot of things, so my mind was not too cluttered with things such as recursive algorithms, Turing's virtual state machines or solving mountains of differential equations. It was reasonably balanced and widened out for me, and what a wonderful experience that was. My—perhaps—once empty mind was at last beginning to open, too.

We owe a debt of gratitude to our colleagues on the Education and Culture Committee, who are asking some fundamentally important questions such as exactly what we mean by increasing attainment and closing attainment gaps, how we measure the success of that, whether we are still too fixated on passing exams, what the relationship should be between schools, colleges and universities, and why we are still pushing our youngsters more towards university rather than to the colleges. Is it about numbers and getting more of one group through college and university to catch up with another group? Those crucial questions are already being posed by stakeholders, so the committee is engaged in some crucial work that will, I hope, take Scotland forward yet again to a new level of understanding about the role and purpose of education.

Scotland has a lot to be proud of given the quality of the education that we offer our young people, the achievements that they have made and the professionalism that is shown by our teachers and lecturers, yet it is right that we also challenge ourselves and continue to improve and that we offer our young people a pathway to critical thinking and informed learning. Making progress on that and opening that doorway for all our youngsters is a task that we should all relish.

15:27

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): I am delighted to have the opportunity to take part in today's debate on equity and excellence in education. Nothing is more important than ensuring that every child has the best possible start in life, and that we develop the ambitions of all our young people. I got involved in politics to fight for social justice, as I am sure many members throughout the chamber did, and I believe that we will only ever achieve a fairer and more progressive Scotland—and, indeed, a fairer and more progressive world—if we ensure that life is fairer, better and more equal for every single child.

The fact that right now in Scotland the lottery of birth—where a child is born and who their parents are—has more impact on their life chances than their ability, their efforts or their talents is simply unacceptable. I know that members throughout the chamber recognise that. However, it is even more unacceptable that the gap in attainment levels between children from the richest and children from the poorest backgrounds is continuing to grow.

There are lots of statistics out there on the impact of poverty in education. I will not repeat them today, but the outcome is that tens of thousands of children in our communities right across Scotland are simply caught in a cycle of disadvantage from which there is little prospect of escape. I want to live in a Scotland where every single child in every community has the best possible start in life, the opportunity to fulfil their potential and the support that they need to be all that they can be.

I was pleased that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning said in her speech at the University of Glasgow that she would be

“led by the evidence of what works”

when looking at ways to make improvements. In that respect, I highlight Fife's success in bucking the national trend in both literacy and numeracy, in closing the attainment gap and in reducing educational inequality. In the past few years, Fife Council has made closing the gap its top priority by embracing a radical approach and investing £7.8 million to create transformational change in the early years, based on early and targeted intervention to ensure that every child in Fife has the best possible start in life in order to reach their potential.

Central to that approach has been the development of a nurturing school initiative, which is aimed at making teaching in Fife schools as inclusive and supportive as possible for all our children. That has been backed by an additional

£2.5 million investment to help to break the cycle of disadvantage. That investment has been targeted at the key areas that have been proved to have positive effects on children's education, and includes the introduction of an additional 51 classroom assistants.

Fife has also embraced a radical workshop for literacy and numeracy approach that has transformed learning and teaching approaches in all primary schools and is now being rolled out into secondary schools. A Fife-wide team has been set up to develop professional learning for headteachers, teachers and support staff, thereby ensuring a consistent and effective approach to teaching of literacy in every Fife school. Improving outcomes in literacy and numeracy has been at the centre of all school improvement plans in Fife over the past few years: those plans have been delivered more intensively in the most disadvantaged communities, using the best evidence of what actually works.

The intervention is being continually tracked and monitored to ensure that it is making a difference to the social and educational experience of children and families. Central to the Fife approach is the recognition that resources need to go where they are needed most, which means targeted work in schools that focuses on supporting children and young people who are looked after, who are not attending regularly, who have high levels of exclusions or who live in areas of deprivation. It is an approach that is already delivering real results, because although the recent literacy stats for Scotland made worrying reading for mums and dads across the country, the results were good in Fife, and are improving.

For all pupils in Fife, reading accuracy has improved, with reading comprehension showing a highly significant improvement. For pupils from the 20 per cent most disadvantaged backgrounds, performance in reading accuracy is above the national average and reading comprehension showed a highly significant improvement.

It is not just literacy levels that are rising; Fife is successfully starting to close the attainment gap. The attainment gap for literacy at S4 closed by 5 per cent last year in Fife, with a 10 per cent improvement among children in the most deprived areas of Fife. Clearly, Fife's approach works and is delivering results for children in Fife, which is a huge credit to the Labour-led Administration and to the teaching staff and all the other partners that are involved in making the approach a success.

I have visited a number of schools in my constituency to see the workshop for literacy approach work in practice, and it really does engage and include every single child; it is certainly a departure from what we can remember happening when we were at school. It engages

every child and captures their imagination. I hope that the cabinet secretary will reflect on and learn from Fife's success and look at what can be achieved when new approaches are adopted and when ending the cycle of disadvantage is the top policy priority. Fife is a lot closer than Ontario; I know that the cabinet secretary will be visiting Queen Anne high school in my constituency on Thursday, so that may be an opportunity to catch up.

The Scottish Government's motion quite rightly highlights the fact that although

"poverty can be a barrier to attainment",

it should never be "an excuse for failure". Education should always be a route out of poverty and it should enable every single child to reach their full potential.

However, the fact is that too often our education system reinforces inequality rather than unlocking potential. We will successfully close the gap only if we recognise that measures to tackle the attainment gap go hand in hand with a determination to fight inequality and to end child poverty. That is why Scottish Labour has proposed using the powers that we will soon have at Holyrood to redistribute wealth and to deliver extra resources to help the poorest children by using the income from a 50p top rate of tax. Across Scotland, our schools and teachers are committed to tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment, but they need the resources to do that.

I note that I am running out of time, Presiding Officer, so I will finish here.

We need to make tackling the attainment gap the Scottish Government's top priority. As Iain Gray said, we need action, not words. We owe it to our children to get this right in order to ensure that every single child in Scotland can be the best that they can be, and that Scotland really can be the best place in which to grow up.

15:34

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): It is interesting to hear echoes in the debate. Cara Hilton has just mentioned Queen Anne school, where my mother started teaching 85 years ago. Her first year's wages were £36, which was not a great deal of money then and sounds even less now.

We are a different Parliament to that which we see down south. Most of us went to our local school and we have had some exposure to the subject that is under discussion—albeit that I left school in 1964 and I can see other members who might have left at a similar time or even earlier, so we are probably significantly out of date. That said, even then we saw change. In 1962, I was in

the first fourth-year cohort to sit ordinary grade exams. They were introduced in that year and as fourth and fifth years, who would previously have sat lower grade exams to complement the higher, we were the first to sit the ordinary grade. There has been change in the system for many years.

As we always will do in such debates, we have talked a bit about money. It is interesting to note that the average spending per primary school pupil in Scotland is nearly £400 higher than it is in England, and in secondary education, it is approaching £300 higher. Some of the reasons for that can be geographic, and some of our schools are smaller and the overheads are therefore higher, but we have seen expenditure in education rise by about 4.5 per cent since the Scottish National Party has been in Government. I do not think that we should imagine that throwing more money at education while doing the same things is likely to lead to significantly different outcomes.

The motion and amendments that are before us are interesting. The Government says that there is

“much to be proud of in Scotland’s schools”

and who could disagree? The Labour Party

“welcomes the Scottish Government’s attainment fund and widening access commission”

and it is good that it does so. The Liberal Democrats, like Harry Burns, the former chief medical officer, focus on the early part of life.

I want to talk about a few eclectic things that matter to me. Willie Coffey talked derisively about Turing, but the Turing test is one of the most important tests in artificial intelligence and, of course, the first book on artificial intelligence was written in Edinburgh in the early 1970s. The Turing test was developed in 1950 by Alan Turing. I am a great fan of Alan Turing and of many other things.

I confess that I am currently a student: I am doing an online course to improve my genealogical skills—a hobby I have had for more than 50 years—through the University of Strathclyde. I do not visit the university; I spend so many hours on the train each week that I can do my studying then with a few hours on a Saturday and Sunday night online. The world of learning has changed dramatically; my lifelong learning is quite different from that of previous generations.

As somebody who studied mathematics, I am naturally interested in how we deal with numbers. I am currently reading a book on quantum mechanics and steeping myself in Einstein, Dirac, Pauli, Schrödinger and many other great luminaries of the 20th century. I admire the work of many of the women in computing, including Rear Admiral Grace Hopper, who was, in the modern era, probably the first computer programmer and, of course, Ada Lovelace, who was Byron’s niece

and the programmer for Babbage in the 19th century.

I ask the cabinet secretary why we do not put some money aside for some relatively small-scale but long-run tests of different approaches. I have raised previously the Trachtenberg system of speed mathematics, which is a terrific system that was developed by a Jew in a concentration camp during the last war. It enables children to develop their memory and mental arithmetic skills. I used it on a previous occasion to demonstrate that 2^{40} is 1,099,511,627,776, which, of course, we can immediately work out is the square of 1,048,576.

The real point about that is that if we add the digits in 1,048,576, we find that, if we keep adding them up, we get 4. Multiply 4 by 4 and we get 16, and add 1 and 6 together, we get 7. Keep adding the digits of 1,099,511,627,776 together and we end up with 7. In other words, it is not just about doing the arithmetic but about having checking systems. Other countries use the Trachtenberg system to good effect.

I also look to the work of Tony Buzan and the mind-mapping approach that he has developed to memory work. It may be worth equipping children with specific skills in improving their memory.

I echo what others have said about diversity in education being well worth having. I was a very poor student at all stages of my educational career, but I studied maths, natural philosophy, chemistry, psychology, geology, logic and metaphysics, French, Latin, English, biology, geography and history at various times—and I am amazed by how useful I find much of that learning to be.

This is a good and timely debate. The Government accepts the nature of the challenge; I hope that it demonstrates that it is open to other ways forward, and to diversity, as we work our way towards new solutions for those who are most disadvantaged in our communities.

15:40

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands)
(SNP): Presiding Officer,

“Scottish education is in a very strong position at the moment.”

Those are not my words but the words of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland when it gave evidence to the Education and Culture Committee in September. It highlighted that

“We are well placed to move forward, but that is not to ignore the major challenges that are ahead.”

There is no doubt that challenges lie ahead, whether in dealing with UK austerity measures or

in closing the attainment gap, but we should recognise what has been achieved against that backdrop.

At the same committee meeting, the General Teaching Council for Scotland stated:

“we are trying to deliver, for the first time ever, an ambitious curriculum programme that covers ages three to 18. That has never been done before in the history of Scottish education.”

Curriculum for excellence encourages each child to be a successful learner who is also a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor. The success of curriculum for excellence is witnessed in inspections, audit reports and examination results. In addition, the proportion of school leavers who go to a positive destination in work, training or education is, at over 92 per cent, the highest level on record.

Back in September, Education Scotland stated:

“we have seen a transformation in learning and teaching in Scottish schools. For example, 90 per cent of secondary schools inspected have been found to have young people’s motivation and engagement in learning as a key strength.”—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 30 September 2014; c 3, 5.]

The Accounts Commission’s report “School education”, which was published in June 2014, stated:

“Performance has improved against all ten of the attainment measures we examined over the last decade ... The vast majority of the improvements in attainment have been made in the past five years.”

Exam results are at record levels, with higher passes up 3 per cent from 2013 and more pupils leaving school having gained three or more highers. In addition, the new national qualifications were successfully introduced this year, with nearly 300,000 passes at national 4 or national 5 level.

However, one of the biggest challenges that education still faces is the need to close the achievement gap between pupils from poorer families, who are not performing as well, and pupils from advantaged backgrounds. That is not a new problem, as the Royal Society of Edinburgh stated in its written evidence on the Education (Scotland) Bill:

“Over a period of at least fifty years, many of the most important initiatives taken in Scottish school education have been intended to improve outcomes for the disadvantaged. From the introduction of comprehensive secondary education in the 1960s to the initiatives of the present, this has been a consistent policy objective. Teachers and government at both national and local level have been committed to this aim. In these circumstances, the rate of progress is all the more disappointing and demonstrates the intractability of the problem.”

The Scottish Government has increased education spending by £208 million, with the average spend per primary school pupil and per

secondary school pupil respectively 9 per cent and 12 per cent higher than south of the border. Since 2007, 526 schools have been rebuilt or refurbished. That is almost 200 more than in the preceding eight years of the Labour-Lib Dem Administration. The education maintenance allowance has been retained, which helps 35,000 young people from the least well-off families to stay in education by granting £30 a week to those with 100 per cent attendance rates.

In Scotland, we have improved the curriculum, increased education spending, refurbished schools and incentivised the less well-off pupils to stay at school. However, the attainment gap still exists. Could that be because the Scottish Parliament does not have the power to tackle poverty?

In its written evidence on the Education (Scotland) Bill, the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland stated:

“It is important to consider that the proportion of time children spend in school ... means that social inequities cannot be remedied by schools alone nor solely within school hours.”

Save the Children’s written evidence on the bill said:

“There is a large and growing group of children who are socio-economically disadvantaged. At present, 1 in 4 children in Scotland experiences poverty. We are concerned that the number of children affected by poverty is expected to rise to 1 in 3 by 2020. This suggests the challenge we face to reduce inequality of outcomes will become even greater in coming years.”

That is even before the next round of cuts is imposed by the UK Government, which intends to cut welfare by a further £12 billion. It is unacceptable that, when we are one of the richest countries in the developed world, children and families in Scotland are suffering because of UK Government decisions.

The UK Government should at the very least honour the spirit of the Smith commission agreement and devolve meaningful powers over welfare and the minimum wage to the Scottish Parliament so that we can start to tackle poverty and boost the closure of the attainment gap. If we can do that, I will accept that what the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association stated could be true for every pupil:

“This is a very exciting time in Scottish education, and I think that we have a very exciting future ahead of us”.—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 30 September 2014; c 6.]

15:47

Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I associate myself with Willie Coffey’s comments. I agreed with most of what he said. In particular, he

congratulated all pupils across Scotland on where they are at with their education and on the success that they, their parents and all those involved in schools, including the teachers and all the other staff, are having.

It is important that we recognise that teachers and other staff work under a lot of pressure. One of my daughters is a secondary school teacher, so I know the amount of work that teachers do not just in school but during the evenings and the weekends. That is true of the teaching profession across Scotland. We should recognise that.

Education authorities are under immense pressure. The more we can localise decision making, take the powers from central Government into local education authorities, schools and classrooms and empower parents, the more successful we will be.

In its 2014 report, Audit Scotland pointed out that

“Councils’ spending on education reduced by five per cent in real terms between 2010/11 and 2012/13”.

That has placed a major pressure on the system.

I have looked at Fife Council’s education budget for 2009-10 to 2012-13, which related to the previous administration—it was a Lib Dem and SNP coalition—to the one that I was in. From 2010 to 2013, primary school budgets were cut by more than £2.5 million. Support staff in primary schools were cut, free bottles of water for primary 1 were removed, swimming lessons were withdrawn and study support funding for primary schools was cut. As we go through the list, we see about £30 million of cuts for schools in those years. We can see from that list the pressure that education authorities are under.

When I was a council leader, the chief executive and the director of finance at my council were always keen to stress to me that education and the education budget were not protected, so that budget had to have its share of the cuts. We know that local government faces some horrendous cuts. If we are to have this debate, we need to be honest about the pressures that our education system is under.

I disagree with a lot of the points that Liz Smith made about where she wants comprehensive education to go, but I agree with her that we need to think out of the box. She talked about the spirit of free thinking. We need to think out of the box in looking at education because, although we are doing the best that we can, we have to do a lot better. Our education system has to do a lot better if we are serious about reaching the point at which every child can reach their potential. That is not just about kids who get few exam passes but about kids who are doing well but could do a lot

better if they had more support. We should be doing much better and we need to do much better across the education system in Scotland.

As I listened to Angela Constance, the lack of ambition struck me. We talk about poverty, but the Scottish Government lacks an up-to-date anti-poverty strategy. If we are to tackle inequality and poverty, that surely will not and cannot be done simply through the school and education system; it must be done through all aspects of Scottish life, and every bit of the Scottish Government and local government has to be joined up to tackle poverty.

As Angela Constance spoke, I thought about a Home-Start project that I visited some years ago in Benarty, which is in my constituency. The workers there explained to me that, without their intervention and support, some kids would still be in nappies when they went to primary school. That is social and family breakdown. The root causes of poverty and deprivation and their impacts need an injection of support and cash and need projects through community planning partnerships to tackle inequality and poverty at that level. We cannot simply say that schools can do that.

Cara Hilton spoke about Fife, and members would expect me to endorse what she said. However, I remember the time when I visited Benarty primary school. The kids came through and gave me toast and tea in the early morning meeting. The headteacher explained to me that the teachers bought bread and made the tea, and the kids were involved in that. For some children, just getting a slice of toast and a cup of tea in the morning contributed to their education. If they sat in the school absolutely starving, they were hardly likely to be focused on learning and education.

At that time, one of the things that we did in Fife was put pockets of money—they were small amounts, such as £10,000—into primary schools in the areas of highest deprivation, as measured by free school meals, so that the headteachers could use that at the local level in deciding how they would improve numeracy and literacy and tackle inequality. That can make the difference at that level.

I will send the minister information about what was done in Fife. Over a number of years, we put in more money and started to reverse some of the cuts in classroom assistants and other resources.

We invested in information technology. Just weeks ago, I visited Cowdenbeath primary school to look at what the investment in IT had achieved there. In that school, young children were learning about computers and talking a language that I certainly did not know.

The lessons are that we need to put in more resources, recognise the issues that exist and

empower education authorities. If we can do that, we can move forward.

15:54

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): It is but six days since we discussed a similar motion and but three months since we debated an equally similar motion, which harnessed constructive and aligned Opposition amendments. I understand and share frustration, but I believe that we will have improved outcomes. We should pay attention to the views of those who are a bit more discerning in this matter and who recognise that outcomes have improved in general. Save the Children said on 16 February after our most recent motion that it welcomed the cross-party focus on tackling the achievement gap over recent months and fresh leadership by the First Minister to put this challenge at the top of the agenda—and it is. On the cross-party focus, there is agreement.

Closing the attainment gap is the number 1 education priority, which can only be buttressed by attending to the greater priorities of inequality of income and inequality of opportunity, and tackling those two together. We can stand here and throw numbers at each other, anchored by targets rather than improved outcomes, but let us try to command the cross-party focus to which Save the Children referred.

On outcomes, I have to say that I am somewhat bemused by the amendment that calls for “more rigorous testing” of literacy and numeracy, which presumably includes that of primary school children, but goes on to say that there has to be

“much more focus on tailoring the learning experience to the best educational interests of individual children.”

Is that one test for all primary school children or one test for each child? I hear echoes of the 11 plus.

Of course literacy and numeracy must improve, but we should be establishing a system that prepares children for life, not for exams. We could trade numbers all day. We on the SNP side could highlight more spending per pupil here than elsewhere or more expenditure on new or refurbished schools. The Opposition will talk of literacy and numeracy attainment or pupil teacher ratios.

I believe in one thing: the Education and Culture Committee, which involves nearly all our parties, will tackle the issue head on, using informed data and in a constructive way. I predict that we will get answers and will propose serious actions for the earliest implementation.

Change is a constant—it is always there. In education, as in other areas, we face changes, indeed big challenges. We face changes such as

falls in pupil numbers, changes to the curriculum and infrastructure, and challenges around the iniquitous inequalities in living standards and income, all of which have to be addressed.

Poverty and inequality are overarching and critical issues in relation to educational attainment. Indeed, they are eating away at the fabric of our society and impacting on children in particular. Even in those straitened circumstances, I add my commendations to those of Alex Rowley for the work that teachers do. However, I believe that there is an incumbency on parents and the wider family, many of whom accept their responsibilities for their children's progress and attainment but some of whom cannot or do not.

Three weeks ago, I attended a meeting on a social housing programme that is being built in Spain, which seeks the building of low-energy-cost three-tier family homes, where the grandparents live on the ground floor, the parents on the middle floor and the children on the top floor. That unit cannot of course apply to all families, but it becomes an integrated unit, not just for care but for the development of the children and frees up employment opportunities for the parents and, therefore, aggregate income for the family. One might even call them the modern-day “los tenementes”.

Highlighting the curses of inequality and poverty—the two-headed attack on attainment—is right. We can rightly expect the Opposition to pursue them, but those monsters will not be defeated by intense debate alone, and not just in this chamber. I repeat that parents and the wider family must be helped to understand their role in the joint war on the attainment gap.

There is no shame in learning from the examples of others, such as the London challenge. It is not the children who are the problem. What we need is high calibre leaders in our local schools, untrammelled by targets or paperwork, and a change in the schools' cultures, along with the parents' role in those cultures.

Can we do it? Of course we can. I, for one, do not like sitting in the middle of any ratings table, least of all one that is concerned with international education. I am sure that all of us in this chamber will work to ensure that we become top of that table.

16:00

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I doubt that there is anyone in the chamber today who would disagree that education provides the main route for anyone from any background to reach their full potential, and I believe that the Scottish Government is absolutely

committed to delivering an education system of which this country can be proud.

We now have record exam results, with fewer pupils leaving school with no qualifications than was the case when the SNP was first elected to Government eight years ago, and pupils who are leaving school with not just one, two or three highs, but four, five, six or more highs.

Those educational achievements—which, we should remember, are not solely down to the Government but also involve the efforts of all stakeholders, including local authorities, parents and, most crucially, pupils themselves—have fed into post-school results. According to national statistics on attainment and leaver destinations, the proportion of school leavers staying in a positive destination, whether that be work, training or education, reached 90 per cent in March 2014, which is an increase over the previous record of 89.5 per cent, the year before.

Skills Development Scotland has expanded on that, with its school leaver destination return statistics report noting that 92.3 per cent of school leavers entered an initial positive destination in 2013-14, which is a rise of 0.9 per cent on the previous year. Meanwhile, the report further confirmed that the percentage of leavers who reported as unemployed and seeking employment or training has fallen to 6.3 per cent, which is down from 7.1 per cent the previous year, and is the lowest that that figure has been in the last decade.

Those figures are a reflection of the fact that the Scottish Government's programme for education is bearing fruit, although there is no doubt that more can always be done. We cannot forget those who do not manage to go on to a positive destination, or those who do not leave school with enough qualifications to attend college or university. This Government's initiatives have been a start, but we all know that there is much more to do.

We are well aware that improvements in education need to start as soon as possible in the early years. To that end, we have more hours of high quality childcare than in any other part of the UK, and our time in Government has seen an increase in the annual funded entitlement of early learning and childcare to 600 hours. That is the equivalent of a 45 per cent increase in hours for three and four-year-olds over the past eight years, helping 120,000 children per year and saving families a much-needed £707 per child a year.

The Government's 2016 manifesto will set out a plan to increase childcare provision by the end of the next parliamentary session from 16 hours a week to 30 hours a week, and we will shortly receive the findings of Professor Iram Siraj—a leading childcare expert—who was commissioned

to conduct an independent review of the early learning and out-of-school care workforce. I look forward to seeing how Professor Siraj's findings will feed into the Government's education programme.

It would be remiss of me not to mention our free school meals programme, which is now benefiting an additional 135,000 pupils in primaries 1 to 3, over and above the 35,000 pupils who were already entitled to free school meals. The families of those pupils will now be saving at least £330 a year, and we know from the results of a similar pilot scheme in England that free meals have a positive impact on nutrition and health, with the increase in attainment being strongest among pupils from less affluent families and those with lower prior attainment. I would like to mention at this point that average spending per primary school pupil stands at a higher level in Scotland compared to England—£4,899 versus £4,500.

We need to ensure that, once pupils reach secondary schools, they will have the support that they need to attain the highest number of qualifications possible, and the Scottish Government has not been behind in that regard. As with spending on primary school pupils, the average spend on secondary school pupils is higher here than it is in England, standing at £6,738, compared with £6,700.

Work with local councils is fundamental to providing schools and pupils with the tools that they need to attain at the highest level. The Education (Scotland) Bill places a statutory duty on both the Scottish Government and councils to reduce inequality of outcome in schools. It also includes a requirement for them to report on progress made in narrowing the attainment gap.

John Fyfe, the president of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, stated of the bill's requirement for each local authority to create a chief education officer post:

"The action being taken by the Scottish government to address the disparity in outcomes faced by pupils from disadvantaged communities is positive, as is their commitment to ensuring that each and every local authority has a chief education officer.

That officer will play a key role, ensuring that our approach to the delivery of education is built on a clear understanding of what works. We look forward to working with ministers and Parliament as the Bill is progressed."

However, our job does not finish once Scotland's young people have left school and are taking their first steps into their new lives. The newly established commission on widening access met recently for the first time to examine how barriers to fair access can be broken, so that children born today, irrespective of background, have an equal chance of attending university.

We have also legislated, through the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013, for statutory widening-access agreements and we are the only country in the UK to do that so far.

All of the aforementioned should be put in the context of the severe cuts that Westminster has imposed, and will be continuing to impose over the next parliamentary session. Welfare reforms will mean an additional 100,000 Scottish children living in poverty by 2020. I am sure that no one here would consider that having one in five children growing up in poverty is in any way acceptable.

We have come far in eight years of SNP Government, but there is more work to be done. I believe that the intended measures will help to ensure that Scotland has an education system of which we can justly be proud, and which will provide our young people with the support that they need to make the most of their lives, whatever their background.

16:07

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome this afternoon's debate on educational attainment. Over recent years, there have been considerable changes to teaching in Scottish schools through curriculum for excellence and, more recently, changes to the examination system. Many of our young people leave school with a very good record of achievement, but too many have persistently underachieved and the evidence consistently points towards poverty as the main reason for the attainment gap. Children from low-income households continue to do worse at school than those from better-off homes.

How do we meet those challenges? Of course, tackling poverty is fundamental, but we also need education policies and priorities that recognise the challenges. The evidence suggests that progress has been too slow. The priorities of the Government's educational policy have made little impact on those trends. By the age of five, the gap is between 10 and 13 months. By the ages of 12 to 14, pupils from better-off backgrounds are more than twice as likely as those from the most deprived backgrounds to do well in numeracy.

Save the Children recently made an interesting comment:

"We have concerns that current approaches have so far been too focused on improving attainment for all children in Scotland. We question the benefit this has for the poorest children."

The recent financial commitments to attainment are very welcome, but we need to be clear about where the money is going and what it is there to achieve. At the end of school, the attainment gap between the richest and poorest young people is

equivalent to around three A grades at higher level—a statistic that talks of limited opportunities, wasted talent and underachievement. To change those statistics, we need to be focused, to prioritise activity, to evaluate properly and to do what works. Early years, parental involvement and prioritising the learning needs of children who are living in poverty—evidence suggests that all of those make a difference. However, we need robust evidence on what works, and the "Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education" report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlighted the lack of data, research and evaluation as a hindrance to making progress.

This is an area of education that needs additional investment, which must be targeted in the right areas. That is why, in the spirit of constructiveness, Labour is proposing to double the number of teaching assistants in every primary school associated with the 20 secondary schools where the attainment gap is most acute. We would look at the opportunities to invest in those areas that will come from increased revenue-raising powers for the Parliament. That would be in addition to what the Scottish Government has already announced.

Although the additional money that is to be targeted at attainment is welcome, I am disappointed by the initial allocation decisions, as Fife is to receive no support in the first tranche of funding. Fife is Scotland's third-biggest authority and has a diverse population. The allocation of money purely on a local authority basis means that too many schools and communities in which poverty impacts on the educational achievement of children and young people have missed out.

It is less than 16 miles' drive from Methil to St Andrews, but too often the two places are worlds apart, including in educational attainment. Because of the geography, Levenmouth, which has some of the highest levels of deprivation in Scotland, never mind Fife, will not receive any of the additional support that will be targeted at addressing educational attainment. Fife has the third-largest number of children living in poverty in Scotland, so the methodology that has been used to allocate the early resources is flawed and unfair. A methodology that fails to recognise the needs of areas such as Levenmouth is not good enough. We should get support to where it is most needed.

High schools in the area are working hard. They are acutely aware of the additional challenges that their pupils face and they see the bigger picture, including the importance of inclusivity and shared experience and learning. Last summer, I visited Kirkland high school in Levenmouth for its end-of-year show. It was a school of ambition, but the scheme was dropped by the SNP Government in

2007. The additional investment at the time enabled the school to focus on drama, music and performance by improving its facilities and opportunities. The level of involvement in the arts is important to the school and to the pupils, parents and community. The confidence, teamwork and ambition of the young people demonstrated to me the importance of the arts in school.

Meaningful engagement in the arts supports other academic learning. The Sistema Scotland projects in the Raploch and, more recently, in Glasgow are an ambitious and intensive approach to raising attainment through artistic engagement. Such projects help to create the right environment for learning, confidence and wellbeing. Earlier this year, along with the minister, I was at Balwearie high school in Kirkcaldy for a meeting of the instrumental music implementation group. There is evidence that learning music can have a positive impact on other learning. However, schools often find it difficult to deliver, and children whose parents can afford private tuition get greater benefits.

When we look at those who reach the attainment levels that are needed for art college acceptance or entry to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, we see that, increasingly, there are groups of young people for whom a career in the arts is just not possible because of a combination of financial constraints and a lack of opportunity. James McAvoy recently stepped into the debate, saying that, although no one detracts from the talent and success of actors who come from more privileged backgrounds,

"we are ... worried about a society that doesn't give opportunities to everybody from every walk of life to be able to get into the arts, and that is happening."

If we refuse to accept the current situation, we need change at all levels—in Government, local authorities and schools—and we need real investment in the areas where it is needed the most.

16:13

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): I begin by saying loudly and clearly that Scotland's education system must be fair and must provide excellence to every child, irrespective of their background or circumstances. We must provide the best possible chances for our children and young people to thrive and be the best that they can be. That is why the SNP Government will, I am sure, continue to take action. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Angela Constance, has already made it clear in a recent speech at the University of Glasgow's Robert Owen centre for educational change that

nothing is off the table in developing evidence-based work to tackle educational inequality.

That is because there is no quick fix to the issue. We must take a collective approach to tackling the attainment gap. That has to start with Government and measures such as the introduction of the national improvement framework, which follows best practice from high-performing systems around the world and will be used to gather data that shows not only what is working in Scotland but why it is working, for whom and in what circumstances. However, everyone has an important part to play. Teachers must play their part in raising attainment, which includes understanding more about how poverty affects children's lives, and parents need to be involved and interact with our children and young people's education. That is absolutely essential to overcoming any barriers that our children and young people face.

An aim of this Government in relation to equality in education has been that a child born today in one of our most deprived communities should, by the time that he or she leaves school, have the same chance of going to university as a child who is born in one of our most affluent communities. Members across the chamber must surely agree that no child should be born to fail and that every child, regardless of their background or circumstances, should have the same chance to fulfil his or her potential.

This Government is taking action through initiatives such as the raising attainment for all programme. It is starting to make a positive impact and we should be proud of what has been achieved.

Claire Baker: I have heard a lot of praise and support for Angela Constance this afternoon, which might fairly be merited. However, given that the SNP has been in government for the past eight years, will the member give an evaluation of Mike Russell's record to date?

Richard Lyle: I have great respect for Angela Constance, whom I have known for years. I have also known Mike Russell for years and I have great respect for him, too.

I agree that more needs to be done. Too many of our young people have their life chances narrowed as a result of circumstances that are out of their control and we should do all that we can to ensure that that is not the case.

I want to share a quotation that I am sure many people remember:

"I am determined—indeed I have a sacred responsibility—to make sure every young person in our land gets the same chance I had to succeed at whatever they want to do in life."

Those are the words of the leader of this SNP Government—the First Minister of Scotland—Nicola Sturgeon. With passion and determination, as shown by the First Minister and Angela Constance, we all have a responsibility to make sure that children and young people get the best chance of success.

The Scottish Government is acting on that responsibility by introducing the Education (Scotland) Bill, which will place a statutory duty on the Scottish Government and on councils to reduce inequalities of outcomes in schools and will include a requirement for them to report on progress in narrowing the attainment gap. The bill supports the Government's existing work to raise educational standards and to raise attainment for all Scottish children, and underlines our expectations of local councils with regard to addressing educational inequality. Most councils are Labour councils and I would like to see what they are doing.

Of course, all is not rosy in the garden, but there is much to be proud of in Scotland's education and we should celebrate the many successes of our children and young people—and, of course, the role of our talented teachers.

Under this SNP Government, through the hard work and talent of pupils and teachers, we have record exam results. The number of higher passes is up by 3 per cent, from 144,749 in 2013 to 148,684 in 2014. In that same year, we saw the successful introduction of the new national qualifications, with 173,648 passes at national 5 and 123,734 passes at national 4. An important point is that fewer pupils are leaving school with no qualifications now than was the case in 2007. Also, more pupils are leaving school with not just one, two or three highers, but four, five, six or more highers. That is not just true overall—it is also true for those in the most deprived parts of this country.

National statistics on attainment and leaver destinations that were published on 16 June 2014 show that the proportion of school leavers staying in a positive destination—work, training or education—after leaving school reached 90 per cent in March 2014. That is the highest level on record, up from the previous best of 89.5 per cent in March 2013.

It is clear that this SNP Government stands ready not only to always champion the successes and achievements of Scotland's children, young people and teachers but to make improvements and change the picture where needed, and that is just what we will do.

16:19

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): A strong education is an essential cornerstone for any young person to begin building their life upon. The necessity for strong numeracy and literacy skills is prevalent throughout everyday life. It rests on us to provide children with access to the resources that are needed to foster those skills and allow them to grow.

It is essential that our education system is fair, and that it operates at an unparalleled level of excellence for every child regardless of their background. We need an education system that will not settle for good enough, but which aims to deliver a level of outstanding quality and equity in education that will apply to all children.

The equity that we speak of is about ensuring that each and every child is given the best possible chance to succeed in school. The excellence we want to see is all about ensuring that children get the best possible learning experiences at all levels and ages, and ensuring that we invest in teachers and other staff so that they have the skills, knowledge, competence and confidence that they need to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

Parents, teachers, academics, and local and central Government all owe it to the children of Scotland to rise to the challenge of tackling the inequalities that persist in our education system. No child should be born to fail. Every child should have the same chance to fulfil his or her potential. The determination to tackle educational inequality is at the heart of the SNP Government. Despite the claims that our political opponents try to make, the Government has accepted the problems that are still facing us.

In her speech announcing the Scottish attainment challenge, the First Minister highlighted the fact that school leavers from the most deprived 20 per cent of areas currently do only half as well as school leavers from the least deprived areas. In the most deprived 10 per cent of areas in Scotland, fewer than one young person in every three leaves school with at least one higher. That rises to four out of five in our most affluent areas.

The Scottish Government established a commission on widening access—which met for the first time last month—to help to ensure that a child who is born today, irrespective of background, has an equal chance of attending university. The commission will identify the key barriers to fair access. We have already legislated, in the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013, for statutory widening-access agreements, and we are the only country in the UK to do that. Universities and Colleges Admissions Service statistics show that a higher percentage of 18-

year-olds from disadvantaged areas are being accepted to university under the SNP, with a rise from 6.4 per cent in 2007 to 8.9 per cent in 2013.

At this point, I will play the role of proud grandfather. My granddaughter comes from a normal working-class family; her mum and dad work extremely hard to ensure that she can get what she needs to study to get into university. She was fortunate enough last year to get the required five As at band 1—he says, with a smile on his face—to ensure that she was accepted for university this year.

Abigail is going to that university, and it has cost her parents a lot of money to ensure that she can study and get all the books and whatever else she requires, but they would have struggled much more if they had also faced having to pay her university tuition fees. I accept that there are costs and challenges with young people going to university, but not having to pay those university fees is a great load off their mind, and I am sure that, in two years' time, they will be saying exactly the same thing when Mark follows in Abigail's footsteps.

The First Minister said:

“Over the next months and years, making sure the Scottish education system becomes, genuinely, one of the best in the world will be a driving and defining priority of my Government.”

That statement highlights how much our SNP Scottish Government is focused on working for the Scottish people, aiming to improve lives and give Scotland the future that it deserves.

As an ex-Glasgow city councillor and as a Glasgow MSP, I see attainment as being at the heart of what I want to see in any education bill. The Education (Scotland) Bill that was introduced on 23 March will place a statutory duty on the Scottish Government and on councils to reduce inequalities of outcomes in schools and will include a requirement for them to report on progress in narrowing the attainment gap. The bill supports the Government's existing work to raise educational standards and to raise attainment for all Scottish children, and underlines our expectations of local councils in the process of addressing educational inequality.

We will defend the achievements not just of the Government but of students, pupils and teachers across our country, but we will also be open to looking at where we need to do better. There is work to do in our education system—we make no bones about that—but we will not allow any politician in any party to traduce the achievements of our pupils. As Richard Lyle mentioned, we have record exam results, and fewer pupils are leaving school with no qualifications now than was the

case in 2007. More pupils are leaving school with more highs than was the case previously.

National statistics on attainment and leaver destinations show that the proportion of school leavers staying in a positive destination—work, training or education—after leaving school reached 90 per cent in March 2014. That is the highest level on record, up from the previous best of 89.5 per cent in March 2013. Such high levels of school leavers moving on to work, training or furthering their education allows for youth unemployment to remain low. In a comparison with 20 other EU countries, only five come in lower than Scotland.

It is important for this Government to continue building upon the groundwork that it has laid down with the Education (Scotland) Bill. With record exam results and a record number of school leavers finding work, training or education, it is clear that we are on the right pathway. Even though we have more work to do to improve those numbers further, it is refreshing to have seen such great progress made.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

That brings us to the closing speeches. I call on Liam McArthur; you have seven minutes, please.

16:25

Liam McArthur: I did not participate in the debate last week, so I am not sure whether this debate has reflected much of the tone and themes from then, but I have certainly found it interesting. I think that every speaker has tried to rise to the challenge of coming up with an alternative to sacred duty in terms of underscoring the importance of the issues that we are discussing.

Stewart Maxwell made a fair attempt by describing education as the subject that transcends all other policy areas in the transformative effect that it has. It was a point that was emphasised by all speakers.

Willie Coffey, George Adam, Gordon MacDonald and all the SNP back benchers who spoke rose to give support to the cabinet secretary by identifying the areas where progress has been made; that was entirely right and fair. I do not think that any of us is trying to denigrate what is happening within our education system or denying that achievements have been made in a range of areas.

However, it is incumbent on all of us to recognise where we are not coming up to the mark. That has been fairly articulated by many speakers this afternoon. I think that there are figures, not just from the SSLN but from PISA as well, that indicate where progress is not being made and where, in fact, we are potentially going

backwards—although I was interested to note Cara Hilton's comments about Fife, which may suggest that there are regional variations even within that.

I have to say that listening to Stewart Stevenson and his description of the Trachtenberg system had me questioning my numeracy skills quite profoundly.

The idea that pupils do not lack potential—many are already showing how they can overcome the obstacles that are in front of them—was a theme that was picked up by a number of members. The attitude that we all should have—that no one is born to fail and that the efforts of staff should not go unremarked—was drawn to our attention by Alex Rowley and Willie Coffey.

Another common theme was a broad welcome from across the chamber for the statement by the cabinet secretary in a recent speech at the University of Glasgow about a willingness to keep an open mind and a commitment not to take anything off the table. Observing the exchange between Richard Lyle and Claire Baker, however, it was interesting to wonder why, if Mike Russell did such a great job, it was necessary to have such a profound fresh start.

At the outset of the debate I set out the compelling case for greater ambition from the Scottish Government in relation to early learning and childcare. An individual's life chances are invariably shaped and determined in the earliest years, and sometimes even before birth—yet nothing should be preordained or inevitable. As with any complex problem, closing the attainment gap does not lend itself to quick or easy solutions. Magic bullets are unlikely to penetrate.

However, great investment and extending more widely access to good quality early learning and childcare, delivered by highly trained staff, can and do go a long way to rebalancing the scales in favour of those from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

Building on the laudable steps that have been taken in the past 12 months both for 3 and 4-year-olds but crucially also for disadvantaged 2-year-olds, it is now time for Scottish Ministers to commit to going further; it is time to match the 40 per cent provision for 2-year-olds from the poorest backgrounds that exists south of the border.

On the pupil premium, as I said before there are also lessons that can be learned from targeting support for individual children and young people at where, when and how they need it. Unfortunately, as Claire Baker, Iain Gray and others suggested, the area-based approach that has been adopted by the Scottish Government in its otherwise welcome attainment challenge fund risks overlooking the needs of about two thirds of the

poorest children in Scotland, who happen to live outside the seven council areas that have been selected.

Although the case for early intervention is the most compelling of all, any debate about equity and excellence cannot ignore what is happening later on in the education system. Here again, aspects of the approach that has been taken by the Scottish Government appear to be difficult to reconcile with its stated commitment to equity and excellence. Cuts to college budgets, for example, have understandably attracted most of the attention and criticism. Between 2011-12 and 2013-14 there was a 12.3 per cent cut in real terms, which has resulted in a major reduction in staff numbers, but also in a loss of about 130,000 college places. Ministers have sought to dismiss those places as unnecessary duplication and as being places on hobby courses. However, that glosses over the practical effect, which has been a loss of opportunities, particularly for women, for older learners and for those who are in need of additional support. As Iain Gray said—and despite the stoic efforts of Stewart Stevenson to upgrade his genealogy skills—that has implications for genuine lifelong learning.

Meanwhile, according to statistics from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, participation rates at university for young full-time first degree entrants from the poorest families in Scotland are down by 1.2 per cent since 2005-06—withstanding what Stewart Maxwell said—yet they have risen by 3.3 per cent across the UK as a whole. Of course, ministers like to focus solely on the issue of fees, but that ignores the impact of their decision to replace grants with loans—quite apart from how that squares with their 2007 promise to dump the debt. Johann Lamont echoed comments that were made by the Government's former head of higher education, Lucy Hunter, who recently explained:

"For young students in full-time higher education in Scotland, the net effect of policy decisions over the decade to 2015-16 will be a resource transfer from low-income to high-income households."

After a cut of £35 million last year, total spending on grants and bursaries is now barely half what it was in real terms when the SNP came into office. As the Financial Times pointed out recently,

"Statements from Ms Sturgeon in 2006 show that she believed debt of 'more than £11,000' would 'impede access to education'. However, the amount of debt many of the poorest Scottish students will graduate with today is now often double that."

I recognise that small steps were taken by the cabinet secretary earlier this month—although not quite amounting to the £19,000 that was heralded in a parliamentary motion that was signed by 19 Scottish National Party MSPs last week. Let us

only hope that no student rushed out on a spending spree in misplaced anticipation of such a ministerial windfall. In order to ensure equity and the widest possible access for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, ministers need to take a fresh look at all the costs that are associated with attending university.

Closing the attainment gap, achieving greater equity and delivering excellence will require more than ministerial statements and, as the Royal Society of Edinburgh points out—perhaps in a warning to Richard Lyle and James Dornan—vague commitments written into legislation. It will require ministers to target their energy and resources at where need is greatest, from the earliest years and throughout the education journey. I have tried to offer some ideas about how that can best be done and hope that the cabinet secretary is true to her word about having an open mind so that those ideas can at least form the basis for the fresh start that we are told is under way.

16:32

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

We agree with much of the Government's motion, particularly when it says that

"there is much to be proud of in Scotland's schools",

that much more needs to be done to give every child an education that will enable them to grasp opportunities in life, and that

"all options will be considered".

I put on record that we welcome the OECD report that is due by the end of this year. However, we also say that there is an evidential base for doing more work now. I trust that Angela Constance will apply Stewart Stevenson's quantum theory mathematics to attainment issues. I look forward to her announcement to the chamber, preferably in Latin or Greek. Mr Stevenson would appreciate that. I also say that my colleague here, Liz Smith, has some Latin. That may satisfy Mr Stevenson for one afternoon.

There has been no independent evaluation of spend on education and what that delivers in improved attainment and achievement. To be fair, we are further forward than we were a month or two ago. I cannot speak for everyone, but I think that we all want better attainment and we all want the equality gap to be narrowed. We may have different ideas about how to pursue that, but we all want the ends in themselves.

The fundamental issue is that we need a system that can identify when a child—not an area—is struggling to keep pace with the rest of the class, whether that is in a single subject or in all subjects. Only when development needs are identified for

that individual child can appropriate and uniquely tailored support be given.

Allocating resources to areas of greatest deprivation will help, but only if drilling down is done to find each and every child in need; otherwise the money will be lost in education departments, which will need to tell the Scottish Government what efforts they have made to address poor attainment in our schools only every two years.

There is no direct correlation between the areas of highest deprivation and the areas of lowest attainment. That point is lost on many SNP members. For example, Midlothian Council, which is the fifth-lowest local authority in Scotland on achievement at level 5, and Angus Council, which is the ninth-lowest local authority on achievement at level 5, get no attainment challenge funding. Last week and this week, SNP members have focused almost exclusively on poverty and deprivation as the main issue that determines attainment levels. It is one such issue, but it is only one of many. Last year's Audit Scotland report confirmed that although East Lothian Council and Inverclyde Council have almost identical levels of attainment, they have widely different levels of deprivation. Inverclyde Council will receive funding while East Lothian Council will get nothing, even though their achievement levels are identical.

Audit Scotland also said that some schools achieved better attainment results than their level of deprivation would suggest. Although deprivation is a factor, Audit Scotland identified improving teacher quality and developing leadership as two important factors in raising attainment. Glasgow City Council is already taking action in those two areas. It has invested in staff development: 90 managers have completed the aspiring heads programme and more than 100 teachers have achieved the Harvard leaders of learning accreditation.

What happens to the child who lives in an area of medium to low deprivation? They get nothing. It is not a system for entire areas that we need, but a system that identifies every child in need. From Glasgow City Council's approach to leadership and development to East Renfrewshire Council's approach, which involves testing every child to identify learning needs, the Scottish Government would do well to look at what is working in Scottish education and to obtain an evaluation and an understanding of the money that is spent and what is achieved by way of attainment to ensure that the £100 million does what we all want it to do.

I hope that some resources will also be put into pre-school education to ensure that children are provided with the appropriate support when they start school. Most of the speeches in the debate

have been about what happens in school, but we also need to consider the pre-school stage.

Given that the percentage of pupils who achieve five awards at level 5 is at 30 per cent in Dundee, Clackmannanshire and Glasgow, whereas it is higher than 70 per cent in East Renfrewshire, East Dunbartonshire, Shetland and Perth and Kinross, there is no doubt about where some of the hard work needs to start.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh confirms that there are no national assessment data on broad general education and states that the Scottish Government's strategic approach to addressing attainment is seriously unclear in the Education (Scotland) Bill.

Sue Ellis from the University of Strathclyde has made four fairly simple proposals. First, the General Teaching Council for Scotland should consider whether

"sufficient weight has been given to literacy teaching".

I mentioned that earlier. Secondly, Education Scotland should look at linguistic analysis and literacy teaching. Thirdly, a new understanding should be developed of

"the usefulness of data in schools."

Finally, the Scottish Government

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

Therefore, testing is the answer—it has to be done to identify those individual children who need support.

16:39

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Addressing the attainment gap in our schools is one of our top priorities, and we welcome the Scottish Government's recently announced plans to tackle it—after eight years in government. Educational inequality is a symptom of a deeper problem of poverty that we need to address so, as Liam McArthur said, it is vital for any programme to be focused rather than area based.

In a debate last week, I talked about the situation in Cumbernauld, where the variation in educational attainment is massive. In the council ward of Cumbernauld North, the child poverty level is 8 per cent, which is too high, but when we cross the footbridge over the M80 to Cumbernauld South, which is a two-minute walk, the child poverty rate trebles to a staggering 23 per cent. That is another example of the different universes that George Adam mentioned when he talked about east and west Paisley, except that the two areas in Cumbernauld are just a two-minute walk across a motorway apart.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Griffin, will you pull your microphone slightly towards you? There is a bit of an echo. Thank you.

Mark Griffin: That difference in child poverty levels impacts on the educational attainment of young people and can prevent them from breaking out of the vicious cycle of poverty. As a result, the measures that we agree on to tackle the attainment and equity gap must be focused on our most deprived communities. The examples from Fife that Cara Hilton and Alex Rowley gave show that that targeted approach really sees results.

With that in mind, we would use the additional revenues from a new 50p tax rate to redistribute resources from those who can afford it to those who need them most and 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 all primary schools that are associated with the 20 secondary schools that face the greatest challenges of deprivation.

We have supported the provision of high-quality wraparound care for primary school pupils, such as breakfast clubs and homework clubs to give pupils a productive start and end to the school day. That extends the ability of education to break people out of the cycle of poverty. Gordon MacDonald said that education alone is not enough but, if we extend the impact of education to include wraparound provision, it can make a bigger difference.

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 the 20 secondary schools in the areas of highest deprivation. Johann Lamont and Chic Brodie mentioned the intervention and support of parents in their children's education, and the importance of that should not be underestimated. That is why we would offer parents support so that they can learn with their children. We would also introduce a special literacy support programme for looked-after children.

I support Mary Scanlon's point about a review. We would ask Education Scotland to carry out an annual review of progress on tackling educational inequality through the schools inspectorate programme, rather than a two-yearly assessment. We would look for the report to include a section on looked-after children and for the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to report to Parliament annually on the progress that is being made on reducing the attainment gap, to allow it to be monitored and scrutinised by Parliament.

The contribution that the key subjects of science, computer science and maths can make to the economy has been raised in a wider context. When we talk about the attainment gap and equity in education in the abstract, we forget that we need to be skilling our young people to enter the jobs market and fill highly skilled positions. There is an expectation that, by 2030, more than 7 million jobs in the UK will depend on science skills, and those science roles are exactly what we need—high-quality, highly skilled, highly paid jobs that other economies will struggle to compete with us for.

Claire Baker: Does Mark Griffin agree that this is about not only science, technology, engineering and maths—STEM—subjects but science, technology, engineering, arts and maths—STEAM—subjects and the important role that the arts play in making sure that we have fully rounded people going into the workforce?

Mark Griffin: I totally agree. The contribution that the arts make was clear in my field of study at university—engineering—from the creative skills in design and invention that were brought to bear by those who had studied in those fields.

I was about to make the point that, by 2030, when those science skills jobs will be available, four and five-year-olds who are starting primary school this summer will already be in work or possibly in the final years of study. According to a recently published report from the learned societies group, if current spending levels continue, the same pupils in England with the same academic ability and the same aptitude for science as those in Scotland will have enjoyed more than 10 years of state education with 80 per cent more in primary school and 27 per cent more in secondary school having been spent on science equipment. The report also flagged up that 98 per cent of Scottish schools depend on external funding for science equipment, which has a bigger impact on deprived communities, where parents struggle to make a contribution to their children's education, than on affluent communities.

We have spoken in Parliament about science equipment, but Johann Lamont raised the issue of school staff other than teachers, who include support staff and science technicians. I recently submitted an FOI request to all 32 local authorities on science technicians and science support staff and found that there has been an overall drop in the numbers of science technicians, with one authority cutting technician staff by more than 50 per cent. Those are the staff who maintain and repair equipment and give advice in that regard that is beyond the teacher's capability. If such skills were focused in the right areas, they could bridge the attainment gap for pupils in our most deprived communities.

I have previously raised in the chamber the issue of computer science. As a result of cuts, the numbers of computer science teachers have fallen. There is a disparity in how we are able to tackle that and identify the computer science teachers who are required to give pupils in our most deprived communities the opportunities to bridge the attainment gap across the piece and enter highly paid and lucrative professions.

As I said, we would use the additional revenues from a new 50p top rate of tax and redistribute resources from those who can afford it to those who need them most. We would invest an additional £25 million per year, over and above the Government's proposals, to tackle educational disadvantage and ensure that pupils who face the greatest educational challenges have the opportunity to achieve the qualifications that they need.

I am glad that the Government is making educational attainment a priority after eight years of being in government. I hope that it will look at where our proposals can improve plans by redistributing wealth and increasing the resources that are available.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call on Angela Constance to wind up the debate. Cabinet secretary, you have until 5 o'clock.

16:48

Angela Constance: Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

I start by saying to Stewart Stevenson and Mary Scanlon that I think that the days of children learning their times-tables backwards in Latin are probably long gone. However, my seven-year-old assures me that mental maths is alive and well in our primary schools.

Touching on maths, I will make a serious point about an issue that was raised by Mr Gray and other members: education ministers have, indeed, discussed the concerns of parents and young people about the SQA with regard to last week's maths and biology exams. The SQA has made a very public statement and assured us that it has robust, regular procedures in place to ensure that no candidate is disadvantaged if an exam paper turns out to be more demanding than intended.

Iain Gray: I appreciate the cabinet secretary's response to one of the questions that I posed but I made the point that the SQA employs proportionate marking and scales the results, which will not solve the problem for those students who were so upset that they left the exam early.

Angela Constance: The SQA has also confirmed to ministers that it will consider evidence for whether a question that came up

early in an exam paper put students off, caused them distress or limited their participation in the rest of the paper.

Johann Lamont: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angela Constance: I might take one later but I want to make a wee bit more progress.

I have enjoyed today's debate and the many contributions. I pay tribute to Cara Hilton because I welcome the positive developments that she described. They show what can be achieved through focused local action that is backed up by the good use of data. We will certainly work with Fife and other councils to develop our national improvement framework.

At this point, I say to Mary Scanlon that I am well aware of the work that Professor Sue Ellis has undertaken. When I spoke at the Robert Owen centre last week, I agreed with her that we need to debate the use of data that is proportionate, sensible and not a burden to children or teachers.

When we consider our education system, it is crucial that we consider it in its entirety and most members have done exactly that. Equity and excellence have to start in the early years and continue throughout school and onwards into vocational education and further and higher education.

I reassure Liam McArthur that we are most certainly not turning back the clock to year zero. Under this Government, we have seen a massive expansion of early learning and childcare, and we are not done yet. We have also introduced or implemented the golden threads of opportunities for all, which was, I have to say, pioneered by Michael Russell. We were the first country in these islands to introduce a guarantee for every 16 to 19-year-old of a place in education or training. We also have the teaching Scotland's future programme, the curriculum for excellence and the developing Scotland's young workforce recommendations.

Liam McArthur: As I said earlier, the cabinet secretary has adopted a generally constructive approach to the debate and I welcome that. In that spirit, can she set out a likely timeframe for increasing the opportunities that we see provided for 27 per cent of two-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds here, to the 40 per cent provision that we see south of the border?

Angela Constance: Mr McArthur will be well aware that we are just about to increase nursery provision for the 27 per cent most vulnerable two-year-olds. I suppose that I am little bit sceptical about the progress that has been made south of the border, where recent surveys have shown that 40 per cent of councils in England have struggled

to deliver that 40 per cent commitment. This Government has done more than any previous Administration to massively expand provision for the early years. We must also remember that it is not just about childcare, important though that is. We are talking about childcare and early learning.

Throughout its tenure, the Government has had to make difficult decisions about reforming public services at a time of great financial pressure. College reform has been challenging and it has not been without controversy, but it has delivered more for those who are under 25 and those who are over 25, as I hope I demonstrated during my exchange with Johann Lamont earlier today. Johann Lamont is right, and we need to do more about ensuring that parents who need additional support with their own literacy and numeracy can access that support, whether it be through colleges, adult learning or community learning and development. We have already started some of that work with our ambitious statement on adult learning. The evidence tells us that parents' involvement and their own literacy and numeracy are vital in raising attainment for all children.

Johann Lamont: I welcome what the cabinet secretary has said, but I encourage her to reflect on what I said about support staff in secondary schools. Boys, in particular, drop out of the system in the first and second year, which explains the low level of literacy among some young adults. If we sort that out, we will have less of a problem at a later stage.

Angela Constance: I am encouraged by what Ms Lamont says. I am not blind to the gender challenges for young women and young men, either.

There has not been a fall in the number of classroom assistants; the number has increased by 6 per cent from 5,700 to in excess of 6,000. Nonetheless, we must recognise that, although the Government is committed to maintaining teacher numbers, there is a wider education and learning community.

What the Government has not done, and will never do, is allow austerity to limit our ambitions for our children and young people. We have proceeded with £100 million of funding for the Scottish attainment challenge, which will, in the first instance, reach 50 per cent of Scotland's poorer children. However, we want to reach all Scotland's children. We will, therefore, continue to pick up the pace of that work and will say something soon about how other areas in Scotland can benefit—particularly those areas with deeply entrenched pockets of poverty.

I can clarify for members that the total revenue spending on schools has risen by £208 million and that councils plan to spend more on education in

2014-15 than they did last year. We will see whether that has been borne out in the figures that are due to be published later in the week. More disadvantaged young people are going to university under this Government than did so under the previous Government, but we know that we have more to do and that we need to improve that area. That is why we are proceeding with the work that is being overseen by the commission on widening access.

Curriculum for excellence is a success story, but time stands still for no one. The Accounts Commission's report of 2014, which Mary Scanlon mentioned, shows that performance has improved against all 10 of the attainment measures that have been examined over the past decade and we know that the proportion of young people with low or no qualifications has fallen further and faster under this Government. However, although I can point to disadvantaged young people achieving more and better qualifications, the gap remains. For example, a third of our most deprived young people left school with at least one higher and, although that is up from 20 per cent, the gap remains massive, with 82 per cent of children from the least deprived communities leaving with one higher.

As Liz Smith said, this has to be about raising the attainment of all children as well as closing the attainment gap. All our children must be challenged throughout their educational journey, but they also have to be cherished and cared for at the same time. I say to Liz Smith and Iain Gray that, although we will honestly and dispassionately appraise where we are today in education, we should be careful not to hark back to the past and look at our past educational performance through rose-tinted glasses. We must be firmly focused on the future.

Some members have made personal reflections in the debate, and I will end on a personal note. I am an education secretary who, once upon a time, was a kid with a free school meals ticket from a family and community that, in today's parlance, would be described as "poor"—in quotation marks—or disadvantaged. I am thankful that, at times, I was very well supported, but there were also times when I was held back or written off. Therefore, although I know that, at times, I am far less than word perfect and not all that polished, I have a grit and a determination—indeed, an anger—to ensure that in resource-rich Scotland no child is left behind.

We must have the highest expectations, hopes and dreams for all our children. If I had one mantra it would be this: if it is not good enough for my son, it is not good enough for anyone's child, and it is most certainly not good enough for Scotland's poorest children.

As a Government, we will absolutely do everything that we can to eradicate poverty. We will not lie down. We will do everything, despite our limitations, to overcome it. What is the alternative? Our children do not deserve our anguish: they deserve our anger and action. We are most certainly not powerless.

We must proceed with courage: the courage to have a conversation with and challenge each other, and the courage to embrace debate and be led by the evidence to ensure that every child and every community has every chance.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-13264, in the name of Joe Fitzpatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to this week's business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Wednesday 27 May 2015

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

6.00 pm Decision Time

(b) Thursday 28 May 2015

delete

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Scottish Elections
(Reduction of Voting Age) Bill

and insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Historic Child
Abuse Inquiry

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Scottish Elections
(Reduction of Voting Age) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Scottish Elections
(Reduction of Voting Age) Bill—[Joe
FitzPatrick.]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:01

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

I remind members that in relation to today's debate on education, if the amendment in the name of Iain Gray is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Liz Smith and Liam McArthur fall.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-13246.2, in the name of Iain Gray, which seeks to amend motion S4M-13246, in the name of Angela Constance, on equity and excellence in education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
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)
McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
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)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 47, Against 58, Abstentions 4.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Liz Smith is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Liam McArthur falls.

The next question is, that amendment S4M-13246.1, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S4M-13246, in the name of Angela Constance, on equity and excellence in education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
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)
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)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 13, Against 97, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-13246.3, in the name of

Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S4M-13246, in the name of Angela Constance, on equity and excellence in education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McGregor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

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)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 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)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 17, Against 64, Abstentions 29.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-13246, in the name of Angela Constance, on equity and excellence in education, 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)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

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

Abstentions

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)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 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)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 67, Against 13, Abstentions 30.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that there is much to be proud of in Scotland's schools, with children achieving record exam results, fewer young people leaving school with no or few qualifications and record numbers securing positive destinations on leaving school; recognises that Scotland currently sits mid-table in the international rankings for school education; believes therefore that much more needs to be done to make all of Scottish education truly excellent; further believes that tackling inequity by delivering excellence is a key priority for the Scottish Government; acknowledges that, while the Scottish Government is committed to doing all that it can to eradicate poverty and that poverty can be a barrier to attainment, it should not be used as an excuse for failure; welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government has said that all options will be considered and that the evidence of what works will determine future policy, and calls on all involved, including parents, teachers, school leaders, employers and politicians, to play their part in overcoming barriers to delivering an education system that ensures that every child in every community has every chance to succeed at school and in life.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Lyle, do you have a point of order?

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): No.

The Presiding Officer: You do not have a point of order.

Richard Lyle *rose*—

The Presiding Officer: You do not have to say anything, Mr Lyle.

Richard Lyle: I believe it was motion S4M-13264, not S4M-13246.

The Presiding Officer: That was not a point of order. It could have been a point of information, but I have been assured by the clerk that I called the motion number properly this time.

I remind all members that we do not have points of order during votes.

Kinship Carers

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-13110, in the name of Christine Grahame, on "Through Our Eyes". The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it considers the invaluable role of grandparents and other kinship carers throughout Scotland but, in particular, Grandparents Parenting Again and Kinship Carers (Midlothian), which was formed in 2005 and provides a listening ear, peer support, direction and guidance to kinship carers and the children they look after, carers who can find themselves raising children at a moment's notice; commends the charity's book, *Through Our Eyes*, which is a collection of stories and poems by individuals telling their unique experience of becoming kinship carers, stories such as *I don't want this*, *Where do I begin?*, *It was Only for a Couple of Weeks!*, *Our Precious Grandchildren*, *Life Changes*, *A Long Road Ahead*, *It's Hard Thinking Back* and the many heartfelt poems, and commends this book to all involved with the welfare of looked-after children for the insight that it brings to the trials and sacrifices of the kinship carers but more importantly their selflessness and love of the children and young people they find themselves caring for, often with hardly a moment's warning.

17:08

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I thank all those who supported the motion, the authors of the booklet "Through Our Eyes", which is the product of kinship carers who took part in a creative writing course, and all kinship carers in Midlothian—many of whom are here—and across Scotland. Without them, many children would be without the love, support and guidance that are essential to childhood.

As at 31 July 2014, there were more than 15,500 looked-after children. From 2013, there has been a decrease, but that gives an indication of the number of families who are affected.

I want to focus away from figures and statistics and on the impact on the carers as described in "Through Our Eyes". The best thing that I can do is read extracts from it. I will start with a passage entitled, "Where Do I Begin?". We are told:

"Life, as we knew it, changed and 'normal' routine became a series of meetings, Core Groups, Looked After Children Reviews, Children's Hearings and Child Protection. Jargon such as parallel planning, rehabilitation and Section 11 Residency Order was commonplace at the meetings.

It was presumed that I understood the purpose of each different meeting, presumed that I understood Social Work terminology, presumed that I would make myself available for every meeting and for Social Work visits, presumed that I was coping fine. I cannot count the number of times I was

told I was 'doing a great job'. I was not in control of my life anymore!"

It continues, under the heading, "And Life Went On":

"Now we are almost 8 years down the line I cannot imagine what my life would be like if I were not raising my grandson."

It goes on to say:

"Was it the life I would have chosen? - NO WAY!

Would I ever change it? - NO WAY!"

Another extract called "I Don't Want This", reads:

"Well, my family are fine, strong and supportive we will deal with this, but I don't want this. This mess that wasn't my making. I could start at the very beginning and tell you about my daughter and her 'problem' or I could tell you about the hell of living with a drug addict, I could call 'him', the father, any vile name I could think of but this is not about them, and I will not make it about them. But I don't want this!

This is about my grandson and about adoption; about him being adopted, this can't be happening."

Another one called "Our Precious Grandchildren", which is about a court battle, reads:

"We went to court again and it was Dad against Mum. The judge told us it was only those that mattered who could stay, we told him that we had been looking after our grandchildren for the last year. The judge then told us we matter, at last we could have our say.

Mum said her piece, Dad said his and then we were able to speak. Our son was asked what he had to offer his children, he said 'Discipline'. We were asked the same question, we replied, 'Love'. Shortly after the hearing we were allowed to take the children away for a 3 week holiday to Canada. When we were there we found out we had won the case and could keep the children with us. It was a further 6 years after the court case that we found out we had section 11 and had Parental Rights and Responsibility. At last we could stop worrying about someone coming and taking away our Precious Grandchildren."

Another story called "Life Changes", which is from grandparents who take care of two granddaughters and a great grandson. The writer gives us a typical day, which some will recognise from their parenting:

7.00am Up, wash, shave and have a cuppa

7.30am Waken up eldest granddaughter for school

7.45am Waken up great grandson and dress him

7.55am Take granddaughter round to bus stop then home

8.00am Waken up my wife and help her if needed

8.15am Waken up my other granddaughter

8.30am Take great grandson to school then home

9.00am Make sure other granddaughter is ready for taxi to school

9.15am Check on my wife to make sure she is okay".

The rest of the day is all organised around the children. He goes on:

"My days are not what I imagined they would be like at this stage of my life. It is exhausting at times and sometimes I feel my life is no longer my own. But when I think back, I remember I was working so hard when my own children were growing up, I missed a lot. Now that I have my grandchildren, it's like having a second chance. I can now honestly say I enjoy our lives together and truly love seeing them develop into our next generation."

Those are all stories from the heart. Some of them tell, as many will recognise, of sons or daughters who become drug addicts or have relationships with drug addicts and the children who go to the grandparents are often quite damaged and traumatised. These are grandparents who were looking at a different stage of their life. Some of them had to sell their house and some of them had to give up jobs, but not one of them thought that they would turn their back on the children.

We do to some extent take those people for granted. I do not mean that we mean to take them for granted, but the thing about this book, "Through Our Eyes", which I found extremely moving, is that there is guilt; there are people who wish for a time when they did not have that life but would now never change it; and there are people who were thrown into the situation when they thought that their life was going to take a different tack but would never have turned their back on their grandchildren.

A story entitled "Now" says:

"I have been a Kinship Carer for 15 years, but we had our Grandchildren a year before that ... Over the years I have heard so many things that have been done to ... Grandparents and the children through alcohol and drugs. But with all the things that happen to us, and against us, as Grandparents, we all become stronger."

The Grandparents Group lay on events and outings of the children and we all go too because we're just big kids ourselves ... I feel like we are all one big family helping each other."

I know that Grandparents Parenting Again and Kinship Carers Midlothian want social workers and trainee social workers to read these stories and to remember that, as the first story illustrates, the jargon that is put in front of the grandparents is bewildering, to be aware of the time that the process takes and to bear in mind grandparents' concern that, in spite of having looked after the children for years, they might be taken away from them.

This book is essential reading. I recommend it to parliamentarians and to anyone who is involved with kinship carers through the various agencies.

17:16

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Christine Grahame on securing the debate. I have signed the motion but, because I gave the wrong motion number, my name does not appear in the list of those who have done so. That should be corrected tomorrow.

I also congratulate the group, which has been meeting in Midlothian for quite a long time. I commend its powerful and moving publication, which I was pleased to read this morning. Christine Grahame's recommendation that all social workers should read it is a good one. We all talk about learning from the experience of service users, whether they be patients in the health service or those who use council services. That principle is correct. We should all learn from people who have experienced a system, and social workers could certainly profit from reading this publication.

Of course, in paying tribute to these particular grandparents, we should pay tribute to all grandparents who are kinship carers, and to all grandparents more widely. As a grandparent myself, I totally understand the amazingly strong bond that exists between a grandparent and a grandchild. In my experience, it is as strong as the bond that exists between a parent and a child. Grandparents in general play an important part in the lives of their grandchildren, and many of them provide childcare and other support. We should remember that as part of our consideration today.

However, clearly, being a grandparent kinship carer is of a different order of magnitude and many particular challenges and problems face grandparents in that situation. Those issues are powerfully documented in the publication that we are discussing, but others have written about them, too. For example, Citizens Advice Scotland did some work on the issue and highlighted problems such as having to give up work; arranging and paying for childcare; dealing with financial problems; the need for respite care; and pressure on the grandparents' relationship. Those issues have been documented in studies, but there is a particular truth that we get when we read the stories of grandparent kinship carers themselves.

As it happens, a constituent who is a grandparent and is just beginning to become a kinship carer came to my constituency office yesterday and outlined some of the challenges that she faces. For example, she is working full time, so how will she manage to look after the child? Obviously, one of her key demands is for some help with childcare. I am helping to investigate that issue with her and I hope that we can make progress on it.

Christine Grahame talked about there being 13,000 looked-after children. Of course, many kinship carers are looking after a looked-after child. Equally, there are many other children in kinship care who are not looked after in the formal sense of being looked after by a local authority, such as the grandchild of the woman to whom I spoke yesterday.

Clearly, there is a particular issue here in that, although looked-after children have certain rights by way of entitlements that the kinship carer will receive, those who look after children who are not in that category really have no rights at all, and the support that they get from local authorities is entirely discretionary. Perhaps the minister will speak about that in her winding-up speech. I realise that there are regulations coming on the back of the recently passed Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 that will give certain rights to kinship carers looking after children who are not formally looked after, and hopefully that will improve the situation. At present, however, although support can be given through the use of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 or the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, we know that it is entirely discretionary. The quicker the regulations are made, the better.

Once again, I pay tribute to Christine Grahame and, even more important, to the grandparents who have produced this magnificent publication, "Through Our Eyes".

17:20

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I thank my colleague Christine Grahame for securing valuable debating time to discuss this important issue.

The work of kinship carers is not always fully understood and, all too often, it is overlooked entirely. However, the love and care that they provide is invaluable, not only to the children they look after but to society more generally, and it allows some of our most vulnerable children to remain within their wider family instead of going into institutionalised care or to a foster family.

Kinship care is often far more challenging than many people realise, and it impacts enormously on the carer's life. For a grandparent, it can sometimes be quite daunting, particularly when they believe that their life is going to go along a different path from the one that they had perhaps envisaged.

It is wrong to assume that kinship care is simply a normal family obligation, with near-seamless transitions from one household to another. Indeed, the circumstances surrounding the need for kinship care can often be incredibly complex and

difficult to deal with, both for the child and for their carer.

As the book "Through Our Eyes" successfully explains, kinship carers can often find the role that they have assumed extremely demanding, and they simply do not have the knowledge or support to cope, at least initially. Children may experience mental health problems or be traumatised as a result of domestic violence, bereavement or neglect.

As Christine Grahame makes clear in her motion, and as stories with titles such as "I Don't Want This", "It was Only for a Couple of Weeks!" "Where Do I Begin?" and "A Long Road Ahead" show, this compelling and heartfelt book describes how kinship care affects people who have to deal with issues on a day-to-day basis and it provides a unique insight into the challenges that kinship carers face.

It is therefore important that we as a Parliament do what we can to recognise and confront that reality and to support kinship carers as they manage in what are often very difficult circumstances. In this vein, I make special mention of Children 1st, recognising the vital work that it carries out to support kinship carers through its national helpline and national kinship care service, which offers advice, support and information to kinship carers. It is through its consultations with kinship carers that we can build a picture of what level of service and support is required to improve on the current situation.

I am confident that the Scottish Government will continue to support Children 1st and other organisations and, most importantly, the kinship carers themselves in the excellent work that they do in the years ahead, as I am sure the minister will confirm.

Although there is clearly a need to strengthen and expand the support that is available to kinship carers, particularly befriending services and financial support, I am pleased to note that the Scottish Government has been moving in the right direction over the years. Indeed, the current Scottish Government was the first to introduce kinship care payments. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 provides for the first time specific legal entitlements to support for kinship carers and for eligible children themselves.

Financial support is clearly of great importance when we consider the increased costs of keeping a dependent child and the fact that 43 per cent of kinship carers have to give up work to fulfil the role, which undoubtedly causes financial strain. It is my understanding that the Scottish Government is currently undertaking a financial review of support for kinship carers to consider how best to support kinship care families in the future.

Unfortunately, despite assurances from the United Kingdom Government during the welfare reform process that it would exempt kinship carers from welfare reform changes for up to a year after they come into effect—including sanctions, return-to-work interviews, the bedroom tax and so on—many of them are affected. I therefore hope that, along with our colleagues at Westminster, we can compel the UK Government to look again at the issue and recognise the different legislative frameworks for kinship care north and south of the border, ensuring that families get all the benefits that they are entitled to on time.

Again, I thank my colleague Christine Grahame for securing the debate, and I look forward to exploring further how we can help those who sacrifice so much to help others.

17:24

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, commend Christine Grahame for securing the debate and for her moving readings from “Through Our Eyes”. As a grandmother, I am very much aware of the role and influence that grandparents can have in families and their key position in assisting and supporting parents, who often lead busy lives and at times require respite from day-to-day parenting.

When my children were young, I was fortunate enough to work for just two mornings a week, and my mum loved to look after them; she used her significant storytelling skills to enthrall and sometimes terrify them with tales of fairies and witches. She loved her involvement with them and they loved having her around. My husband and I were able to enjoy the occasional weekend away by ourselves when my parents-in-law had the children to stay, which I suspect was more of a treat for the young ones than it was for the oldies, but they never admitted that they were pleased to hand their young charges back to us.

However, many grandparents today have serious childcare responsibilities, which they sometimes find stressful and onerous. That is at a time when they have retired from work and had anticipated a life of their own, with time to do things that were beyond their reach when they were working. Grandparents are often the unsung kinship carers and they should be championed and recognised as vital components in the growth and wellbeing of children and young adults.

Christine Grahame’s motion is entitled “Through Our Eyes”, which as we know refers to a truly inspiring collection of poems and stories of kinship carers who have been at the coalface of looking after children in a number of circumstances. Having read the rave reviews, not least the one by Christine Grahame, I will definitely put the book on

my list for summer reading, as I have not yet read it.

As a grandparent, I know the importance of the presence of grannies and granddads in everyday life, and I count myself lucky that I have lived to see my older grandchildren grow up and to see the newest arrival, who will celebrate his first birthday next month. However, I have not had to make the real sacrifices that many kinship carers make to take care of their grandchildren.

The charity Grandparents Parenting Again and Kinship Carers in Midlothian, which is now in its 10th year, provides an invaluable service to people, as Christine Grahame described. Similarly, in my home town, the work of Family Law Aberdeen in Rose Street stretches across all areas, including advice about the role of grandparents when families experience divorce or separation. Sadly, grandparents are often caught in the crossfire of a separation, which leads to children not being able to see their grandmothers and grandfathers.

However, I know kinship carers who have literally been left holding the baby when their offspring have hit a crisis, whether that is through drugs or alcohol or a violent domestic relationship. Grandparents step in to take children to a safe place in an emergency and when they are not secure at home. Because those grandparents are not in a formal caring relationship, they are left without help or support in a situation that might not be resolved for years. They might have to give up their work and their lives for their grandchildren. They suffer financial hardship and stress, which can endanger their relationships. However, as Christine Grahame said, they do not abandon the children whom they love and care for.

I welcome the publication last year of the National Family Mediation leaflet that addresses how grandparents can help their grandchildren to cope with their lives after parents have separated. I also read with interest a recently published report by Grandparents Plus that highlights the fact that, since the late 1990s, grandparents have increasingly contributed to the upbringing of their grandchildren but without the financial means that come from being registered as a formal carer of looked-after children.

Figures that go back to 2010 show that one in every 100 children live with a grandparent because they cannot live with their birth parent for some reason. At the same time, more than 1 million children in the UK are denied contact with at least one of their grandparents. I have incredible sympathy for grandparents who voluntarily give up their time to look after their grandchildren without the necessary back-up from the state. If we want to reduce the benefits bill and get parents into work, we must think about

assisting grandparents who step into childminding roles.

All members of the Parliament and many outside it recognise the enormous contribution to society that kinship carers in general make. More emphasis needs to be placed on respite and allowing such carers much-needed time out from looking after loved ones, which can be a pressured job. I again thank Christine Grahame for lodging the motion and allowing us to celebrate these unsung heroes.

17:29

The Minister for Children and Young People (Fiona McLeod): I echo other members' thanks to Christine Grahame for bringing this important issue before Parliament. She has allowed us to highlight to Parliament and to the rest of Scotland the great work that is carried out by Grandparents Parenting Again and Kinship Carers in Midlothian and by all kinship carers and kinship care groups throughout Scotland. All the kinship carers should be saluted and thanked for the work that they do.

Christine Grahame has also introduced this librarian to a lovely collection of stories that I did not know. It was a delight to read—sometimes quite difficult, but informative.

The Scottish Government believes that the best place for a child to live whenever they need to leave their birth parents is in the wider family, if it is safe and in the child's best interests to do so. That allows the child to retain a sense of family, identity and heritage and helps them to feel safe, protected and valued.

Many children and young people in Scotland are living in kinship care arrangements; Christine Grahame highlighted some of the numbers. In 2014, 4,181 looked-after children were living with family and friends, and we estimate that as many as 15,000 non-looked-after children may be living in informal kinship care arrangements. Those numbers highlight how important kinship carers are and how much gratitude we owe them.

The Scottish Government recognises the crucial role that kinship carers play in providing secure, stable and nurturing homes. Kinship carers who take on that responsibility are providing a valuable service and it is therefore vital that we provide them with the right support at the right time to care for the children.

That is why, since 2007, we as a Government have done much to address kinship carers' specific needs. I will highlight just a few of our actions. We established the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009, which for the first time gave local authorities the power to pay an

allowance to kinship carers of looked-after children.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 enhances the support that is available to kinship carers of non-looked-after children who obtain an order under section 11(1) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 that gives them parental responsibilities and rights, residence or guardianship. That will now be called a kinship care order. That perhaps addresses some of Malcolm Chisholm's questions, as it means that there will for the first time be a specific legal entitlement to support for kinship carers of non-looked-after eligible children, subject to a kinship care order, and an entitlement for the eligible children themselves, which is important to realise.

The Government believes that support for kinship care, as set out in the 2014 act—and subsequently through secondary legislation—will make a positive difference to kinship carers and the children in their care. However, we recognise that more can be done to support kinship carers and those in their care and that greater fairness is needed in the provision of allowances. That is why we are reviewing the financial support that is available to kinship carers with a view to tailoring support and tackling inconsistencies across Scotland.

Kenneth Gibson raised the issue of benefits. I am sure that he knows this, but it is worth putting it on the record that, a couple of years ago, the Scottish Government managed to work with the Department for Work and Pensions to get a benefits disregard for kinship carers so that they did not lose out on their local authority allowances. I absolutely agree that we have to continue to be vigilant and to work with the UK Government to ensure that any changes in benefits do not impact negatively on our kinship carers.

I was interested in the first reading that Christine Grahame made from the book "Through Our Eyes" because it allows me to highlight the further support for kinship care families that we have provided. She talked about the need for jargon busting and how, especially when people are new to being kinship carers, there is a maze for them to work through.

Since 2011, the Scottish Government has funded—to the tune of about £1 million—Citizens Advice Scotland, Children 1st and Mentor UK to deliver information, advice and support to kinship carers. That has ensured that hundreds of kinship care families throughout Scotland have had access to the right support at the right time for them. I believe that I am on solid ground in saying that that support is out there to help kinship carers.

All those policies and programmes demonstrate how much the Scottish Government values kinship

carers, and they show that we are committed to tackling inequalities and ensuring that kinship care families are fully supported to carry out their important role.

As I said, "Through Our Eyes" is a wonderful book. It not only demonstrates the difficulties that kinship carers can encounter but emphasises the happiness, laughter and joy that the role can bring, as evidenced in the fifth extract that Christine Grahame read out.

Christine Grahame: Will the minister add her support to the call from me and from kinship carers for social workers to be made aware of the book? It would enable them to understand that many kinship carers keep quiet, when they are dealing with the professionals, about a lot of stuff that the professionals ought to know about.

Fiona McLeod: Ms Grahame got in just before I came to the librarian part of my speech. I believe that the book will become part of the body of evidence for practitioners and for students in social work. As I am a librarian, members will have heard me talking about evidence in peer-reviewed journals and random controlled trials. However, the body of evidence on kinship care must include real-life stories to enable practitioners to understand what it is really like to be a kinship carer.

Again, I commend the book and I salute kinship carers throughout Scotland for the role that they play in ensuring that the children and young people in their care are safe, secure, nurtured and loved and in enabling them to go on and lead happy and successful lives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank the minister and all the members present for taking part in this important debate.

Meeting closed at 17:36.

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