



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 27 January 2016

Session 4

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 27 January 2016

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Education and Lifelong Learning

#### Scottish Attainment Challenge (Dundee)

##### 1. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made on the Scottish attainment challenge in Dundee. (S4O-05474)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** Dundee is making good progress on implementing its Scottish attainment challenge improvement plan, which initially focuses on 11 primary schools and five nurseries and involves 2,600 primary-aged children and almost 1,000 nursery-aged children who live in the most deprived areas of the city. The Scottish Government is supporting the work there with a funding allocation of £2.14 million this year.

**Jenny Marra:** We understand that as much as half of the £2.14 million funding in year 1 of the four-year challenge programme may be unspent in the 2015-16 financial year and may not be available to Dundee City Council to spend on the attainment challenge, because it will be clawed back by the Scottish Government. Will the cabinet secretary please confirm that no money that has been allocated to Dundee will be clawed back by the Scottish Government and that all the money will be spent on the attainment challenge in Dundee schools?

**Angela Constance:** It is absolutely correct that all seven local authorities that are involved in the attainment challenge can draw down only what they spend, but it is important for Dundee and the other areas to look at the programme over the four years. We are committed to investing £100 million over the four years.

I hope that Ms Marra is reassured that, as a Government, we have invited Dundee to develop its plans for 2016-17, as the investment via the Scottish attainment challenge involves not just our allocating a sum of money; councils have to draw down what they spend, and that additional resource has to be tied into a bespoke improvement plan. I also hope that Ms Marra is encouraged that, at the previous quarterly meeting between Dundee City Council officials and my officials, on 12 January, there were clear signs of

increased activity across the primary schools and nurseries involved.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** I welcome the First Minister's recent announcement on the innovation fund. Will the cabinet secretary confirm whether local authorities and schools can apply for that money and what it will fund?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** Cabinet secretary, Jenny Marra's question was specifically about Dundee, but you might want to answer Colin Beattie's question briefly.

**Angela Constance:** I will be brief, Presiding Officer. The £1.5 million Scottish attainment challenge innovation fund was launched at the beginning of the month, and it is available to all schools in Scotland that do not already benefit from the attainment Scotland fund.

#### Education (Aberdeen City Council)

##### 2. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government when it last met Aberdeen City Council to discuss education issues. (S4O-05475)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** The First Minister undertook a private meeting with Aberdeen City Council and Police Scotland on 2 November, following the tragic death of the Cults academy pupil Bailey Gwynne. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning met representatives of the Scottish Local Government Partnership, including Aberdeen City Council, on 18 November, and directors of education or their representatives on 19 November at the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland conference. Scottish Government officials also met representatives from Aberdeen City Council in November to discuss their involvement with the attainment Scotland fund schools programme. Aberdeen City Council has four schools that are involved in that programme.

**Kevin Stewart:** I thank the minister for that comprehensive answer. Aberdeen City Council has had difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers, and the high cost of housing in the city has not helped the situation. What actions has the minister taken to help to attract more teachers to Aberdeen? Will he enter into a dialogue with the Minister for Housing and Welfare to see whether more investment can be made in housing for key workers in Aberdeen?

**Dr Allan:** The member rightly points to a problem that affects Aberdeen City Council and a number of other local authorities in the north-east. A number of measures are being taken to address that problem. Key public sector workers are set to benefit from more than 120 new homes that are

being developed at the Craiginches site in Aberdeen. The Scottish Government is also working to a timescale that will see Sanctuary Scotland Housing Association begin a two-year period of construction in spring this year. The Scottish Government is having on-going discussions with Aberdeenshire Council, which I am sure will involve a number of ministers and their officials, on other strategic opportunities to meet what I recognise are real needs in the teaching profession.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, if you turn away from your microphone, members in the chamber cannot hear you.

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Will the minister accept that the one thing that the Government should not be doing is penalising councils such as Aberdeen City Council and others in the north-east of Scotland for the very problem that he has described—the difficulty of recruiting teachers? Instead of reducing funding for those councils, the Scottish Government should surely be supporting them to make the recruitment that they need to make.

**Dr Allan:** As the member is more than well aware, the Scottish Government's grant has been cut by the United Kingdom Government—that is a fact that he did not and never does mention. Despite the difficulties, the Scottish Government has set out a number of arrangements with local authorities that are fair, although this year's settlement is challenging, given the circumstances in which the Scottish Government has been put.

### College Places (Employability Fund)

**3. Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to increase the number of college places funded by the employability fund. (S4O-05476)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** Skills Development Scotland's commissioning for the delivery of employability fund places in 2016-17 is under way. Places will be allocated in accordance with that process and on the strength of bids from colleges and other training providers. Separately, and in line with standard procedure, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council will discuss with colleges the element of the employability fund that it manages.

**Chic Brodie:** The cabinet secretary is aware that, in 2014-15, Scotland's colleges exceeded their target of 116,269 full-time-equivalent places. Figures from the SFC's statistical bulletin of 14 January 2016 show the delivery of 119,000 full-time-equivalent places.

**Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Question!

**Chic Brodie:** There was a combination of 118,407 SFC-funded places, yet only an additional 671 employability places were funded by Skills Development Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Brodie, question, please.

**Chic Brodie:** Will the cabinet secretary explain why?

**Angela Constance:** Mr Brodie is right to say that colleges have exceeded our commitment, as they have done every year since 2011. He is also right to say that provision includes courses under the employability fund that are delivered by colleges and independent training providers. The nature of commissioning our funding arrangements means that, since 2013-14, colleges have been funded to the tune of £24 million annually by the Scottish funding council and Skills Development Scotland to deliver employability fund provision. During that period, colleges have also bid into the SDS openly procured funds to deliver places over and above that provision.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before we move on, I say to Dr Simpson that I do not appreciate an intervention from a sedentary position to the chair. I will keep members to order.

### Local Authority Education Services

**4. Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to local authority education services. (S4O-05477)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** We provide local authorities with almost £5 billion of annual funding together with advice and guidance to enable them to provide high-quality education services. We also provide specific funding for building new and improving existing schools, for the initial training of teachers, for the probationer scheme that integrates them into the professional workforce, and for the continuing professional development of teachers and school leaders. We also provide targeted support for authorities and schools with the greatest concentration of primary-age pupils living in areas of multiple deprivation through the £100 million attainment Scotland fund.

**Margaret McDougall:** Scottish National Party-held North Ayrshire Council is proposing to cut £500,000 from its education services, and it will be the schools' front-line staff who will bear the brunt of the axe. A survey that was carried out by the GMB in December found out that 100 per cent of its members who are employed in North Ayrshire schools believe that cutting back on clerical workers, home-school inclusion workers and pupil support welfare staff will have a detrimental effect

on the services that are provided by each school, and so do I.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could I have a question, please?

**Margaret McDougall:** Councils across Scotland are increasingly cash strapped, and further cuts are coming. What assurances can the Scottish Government give me and constituents that no child's education will suffer due to council cutbacks, and has the Scottish Government been in contact with North Ayrshire Council regarding its shocking proposal?

**Dr Allan:** Over Scotland, the support that is given for education has been maintained. It is for individual local authorities to justify their decisions.

I return to a point that has been made by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy: if the member believes that the local government settlement should be increased, she and her party are free to tell the Government and Parliament where in the budget she would find the money to fund such an increase.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Can the minister say how much funding is being provided to North Ayrshire Council to enhance educational attainment through the attainment Scotland fund?

**Dr Allan:** I can certainly respond in writing to provide further detail, but I can say that the overall figures for North Ayrshire—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order, please.

**Dr Allan:** I am answering the question that the member has just put to me.

North Ayrshire Council has been allocated £1.96 million from the attainment Scotland fund this year. That is being used to develop a learning academy with the focus on developing effective literacy and numeracy strategies and developing nurturing approaches across the authority. North Ayrshire also received £79,000 from the access to education fund this year for projects in schools that are aimed at reducing barriers to learning for pupils from deprived backgrounds.

### European Union Students

**5. John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what information it has on how many non-United Kingdom undergraduate European Union students are studying in Scotland. (S4O-05478)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** The most recent data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency shows that in 2014-15, the number of non-UK EU undergraduates

studying at Scottish higher education institutions was 14,300.

**John Pentland:** What does the Scottish Government estimate are the costs and benefits of that, and has it made any progress towards implementing management fees?

**Angela Constance:** I hope that Mr Pentland is not going to become obsessed with the constitution or hark back to old debates that took place in and around 2014. However, in terms of the spirit of his question, lots of evidence gives testimony to the excellence of our higher education system. That is why it is attractive to students across Europe who want to come and study here.

It is important that, while there has been an increase in EU students coming to Scotland, there has also been an 11 per cent increase in first-time degree undergraduates from 2006-07 to 2014-15, which has to be good news, along with the record levels of Scottish-domiciled students being accepted into universities.

### Education (Dundee City Council)

**6. Lesley Brennan (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning last met representatives from Dundee City Council. (S4O-05479)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** I met with directors of education or their representatives from a range of local authorities on 19 November at the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland conference.

**Lesley Brennan:** Dundee City Council is facing the largest council cut in mainland Scotland. Teaching staff are protected from the redundancy round, but what reassurances has the cabinet secretary sought to ensure that the important work for support for learning is not further reduced in the city?

**Angela Constance:** I thank the new member for her question—this is the first opportunity that I have had to formally welcome her to her position in the Parliament.

It is important to recognise that the Scottish Government has always treated local government very fairly, despite the cuts to the Scottish budget from the United Kingdom Government, which Dr Allan mentioned. The 2016-17 draft budget confirmed that we will make available to local government a total funding package of £10.1 billion. That covers councils across Scotland, and it will increase to £10.3 billion once other sources of funding are included.

The Government is absolutely right to invest an additional £51 million in protecting teacher numbers. A high-quality graduate workforce is very important to all our children if we are to achieve our ambition of closing the attainment gap.

It is important to recognise that there is a broader education workforce and it is important to remember that, over the piece, the number of classroom assistants in Scotland has increased, not decreased.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** If questions and answers can be a bit more succinct, we might get on a bit.

### Student Bursaries and Loans

**7. Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it considers that the replacement of bursaries with loans results in students from the poorest families having the biggest debt and a reduction in terms of widening access. (S4O-05480)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** This year the Scottish Government has increased the level of bursary available to our poorest students by £125. In 2016, we will increase the household income threshold for eligibility for the maximum bursary of £1,875 from £17,000 to £19,000.

In tough economic times, the Scottish Government is working hard to put as much money as possible into students' pockets, something that the National Union of Students asked us to do when the new student support package was launched in 2013-14. That is in stark contrast, of course, with the position in England, where new students starting a higher education course in 2016-17 will receive no bursary at all.

Our approach to higher education means that average student loan debt in Scotland is the lowest in the United Kingdom. It contributes to young people from the most deprived areas in Scotland now being more likely to participate in HE by the age of 30 than they were in 2006-07.

**Anne McTaggart:** Young people from deprived backgrounds in Scotland who get to university are facing cuts to grants and bursaries. Now, 70 per cent of Scottish students who emerge debt free come from better-off backgrounds. Will the Scottish Government restore grants and bursaries to help poorer students succeed in higher education?

**Angela Constance:** It is of course this Government that has maintained free tuition. We have retained bursaries, unlike south of the border. We have also retained the education maintenance allowance. I would hope—referring

to my original answer—that even in these tough financial times we will always seek opportunities to put more money into students' pockets. We know that student debt is a real issue for young people leaving university, starting their career, buying their home or starting their family.

I am pleased to say that our commitment to free tuition must have contributed to Scotland having the lowest average student loan debt. We have the lowest average student loan debt in the UK, the average being £9,500, compared with over £21,000 in England. I am confident that we are giving our young people a far better start to their working lives.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary is aware that the Conservatives have decided to remove bursaries from the poorest students in England and from student nurses, while also removing the disabled students allowance. Can she once again give us an assurance that the Scottish Government will maintain those vital supports for students in Scotland?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary—as briefly as you can, please.

**Angela Constance:** We will not be scrapping bursaries; we will not be scrapping DSA support. We have quite a distinct approach to higher education and student support in Scotland. We have succeeded in putting more money into the pockets of students despite the financial pressures that we are under and we will continue to look for further opportunities.

### Edinburgh College (Student Numbers)

**8. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how many students attended Edinburgh College in November 2015 and how this compares with November 2012. (S4O-05481)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council is responsible for collecting participation data. Figures for the current academic year, 2015-16, will be published in January 2017.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** Is the cabinet secretary concerned that what was the largest college in Scotland at the time of merger has had declining numbers ever since? It is a decline that seems to be being managed by the college, as it has handed back £3 million to the Scottish funding council this year because it did not get the anticipated number of students. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the college is introducing a new enrolment procedure, which seems likely to make the problem even worse.



Will the cabinet secretary take a close look at what is happening at the college and strive to reverse that decline?

**Angela Constance:** I assure the member that I am taking a close look at Edinburgh College and that the Scottish funding council has already given practical and indeed financial support.

The news of the difficulties that are being experienced by the college, whether in regard to finances or the number of students that it is attracting, is disappointing. I understand that Edinburgh College is working with the funding council to ensure that the college continues to offer a high-quality education for students. That will of course help to grow the local economy.

I have indicated the support that the funding council has already given. The funding council will continue to support the college in making the changes and improvements that are needed in both the short and medium term.

### Education (Falkirk Council)

**9. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met Falkirk Council to discuss education matters. (S4O-05482)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning met directors of education or their representatives on 19 November 2015 at the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland conference.

Scottish Government officials met representatives from Falkirk Council in November 2015 to discuss their involvement with the attainment Scotland fund schools programme. Falkirk has one school that is involved in that programme.

**Angus MacDonald:** The minister may be aware of new figures that have been released showing that Falkirk Council's four private finance initiative schools, which were constructed for £63 million under a previous Labour Administration in 1998, will have cost around £420 million by the end of the contract period in 2025 and Falkirk Council will still not own them, making it possibly the worst PFI contract in history.

Does the minister share my serious concerns that Labour's implementation of Tory policies has resulted in the Labour-Tory coalition in Falkirk having a financial black hole in its budget that is disproportionately higher than the vast majority of Scottish local authorities, with the resulting impact that that will have on education services?

**Dr Allan:** The Scottish Government has made clear that the PFI approach that was used in the

past has not delivered best value for the taxpayer in Scotland. Certainly the project in Falkirk that was mentioned by the member raises some big questions of that kind.

Alongside the Scottish Futures Trust, we have been encouraging procuring authorities to look at how they can better manage contracts to ensure that they deliver better value for money in the future and to identify areas for potential savings, such as through benchmarking, rescoping services and sharing insurance costs. We will continue to support and work with authorities to identify where those savings can be made, but the member makes the important point that we have to learn from some very big mistakes indeed that have been made in the past.

### Attainment Scotland Fund

**10. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government how many schools and children in local authorities that do not receive attainment Scotland fund support meet the programme's criteria. (S4O-05483)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** The attainment Scotland fund is supporting more than 300 primary schools, which collectively serve more than 54,000 primary age children who live in the 20 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland. That represents 64 per cent of the total number of primary age children living in Scottish index of multiple deprivation 1 and 2 areas across Scotland.

We are well aware that there are children living in poverty who do not live in the 20 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland. That is why the Scottish attainment challenge also provides a package of universal support that includes the £1.5 million attainment challenge innovation fund. That fund will provide support to other schools across Scotland, including secondaries, to explore and develop innovative approaches to raising attainment.

**Liam McArthur:** I thank the cabinet secretary for her response, but it did not really address the question that I asked. I think that the answer she was searching for was that 36 per cent of disadvantaged pupils live outwith those areas, representing around 30,000 pupils, all told. Can she explain to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in Orkney and the other 10 local authority areas why their needs are less deserving of attention than those of their counterparts in the other local authority areas across Scotland?

**Angela Constance:** We will debate that issue at length later this afternoon. Then, perhaps, Mr McArthur will take the opportunity to tell us how he intends to pay for all his plans.

It is important to recognise that the approach taken by the Scottish attainment challenge is to focus on the areas with the highest concentration of disadvantaged youngsters, recognising that the scale of the challenge is greater in some areas of the country than in others. Nonetheless, as I said in my original answer, we recognise that there are children living in poverty in all parts of Scotland. Therefore, with any targeted approach, we have to ensure that we have a strong universal offer, giving us as many strings to our bow as possible to ensure that we reach the children who are most in need.

I have already alluded to the innovation fund. There is also the access to education fund. There are attainment advisers and there are other programmes such as the schools improvement programme and the attainment for all programme. There is a wealth of universal activity that is geared—front and centre—at closing the attainment gap and reaching those children who are most in need.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am afraid that I do not have time to take all the supplementaries that have been requested. I will take one from Mary Scanlon.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Despite what has been said, the Scottish index of multiple deprivation is a very blunt and ineffective tool for identifying children with low attainment in rural areas. What is the Government doing to ensure that individual children—whether in Bettyhill in Sutherland or in Inverness—get the benefit of additional support when it is needed? How are those children identified?

**Angela Constance:** That is the entire basis of the national improvement framework. The framework is very much about identifying the children who are most in need early in their school career, so that we can ensure that they get the right services and the right support at the right time.

### Student Bursaries and Loans

**11. Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the impact on poorer students in Scotland of the United Kingdom Government replacing bursaries with loans. (S4O-05484)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** The confirmation that the UK Government intends to abolish maintenance grants entirely for new undergraduate students in England from 2016-17 is of great concern to the Scottish Government because it raises the question of the potential impact on the Scottish funding block in future years.

**Drew Smith:** I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for that response.

Scottish National Party MPs apparently oppose the move from grants to loans in England but presumably support the Scottish Government doing exactly the same thing for the poorest students in Scotland. Does the cabinet secretary believe that the debate around inequality would benefit from more honesty about who the winners and losers are in her system? It is a system that sees richer students twice as likely to get to university as poorer ones and which, as a result of the £40 million cuts to bursaries in Scotland, results in poorer students carrying the largest burden of debt.

**Angela Constance:** Unfortunately, the member fails to recognise that, in the context of a record number of Scots being accepted into university, there is an increase in disadvantaged 18-year-olds applying and going to universities under this Government's terms of office. He has to recognise that, in consultation with the National Union of Students and others, the Government responded to the very serious request to put more money into the pockets of students.

We achieved that with the introduction of the minimum income guarantee, which I have increased over the past year. The minimum income guarantee is the best support package in the UK for students living at home. Of course, as we move forward, there will be further improvements to the package, with an increase in the income thresholds. The Government has much to be proud of. I would have hoped that, in the spirit of an open debate about tackling inequality, Mr Smith would have the gumption to recognise that the Government has maintained bursaries, introduced a minimum income guarantee, retained free tuition and, unlike others, retained the education maintenance allowance.

### Classroom Assistants (Secondary Schools)

**12. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how many classroom assistants have been employed in secondary schools in each of the last five years. (S4O-05485)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** Data from the annual teacher census that is published by the Scottish Government shows that the number of classroom assistants in Scottish publicly funded secondary schools was 877 in 2011 and 2012, 948 in 2013, 1,090 in 2014 and 1,052 in 2015. Those figures show an increase of 20 per cent in the number of classroom assistants over that period.

**Johann Lamont:** Does the minister recognise the critical importance of not just classroom assistants but all support staff in ensuring that young people who have additional needs can overcome barriers to learning? At secondary school level, support staff have a crucial role in preventing young people from dropping out of the system altogether. Given their importance to closing the gap in education, what steps will the minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning take to ensure that local authorities are fully resourced to support the support structures in our schools as well as the teachers and materials?

**Dr Allan:** Of course, I recognise the importance of all support staff in the education sector. The fact that the number of classroom assistants in the secondary sector has risen over the period is encouraging for that reason. To return to the local government settlement, I can only point to the fact that the draft budget confirmed that we are again making available a total funding package for local authorities of £10.1 billion. The important point that we have to recognise is the one that I and other ministers have made many times about our financial predicament as a country. However, that does not take away from the fact that, despite those difficult circumstances, we have shown our commitment to local government.

#### **Home-schooled Pupils (Scottish Qualifications Authority Examinations)**

**13. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what requirements must be met for home-schooled pupils to be eligible to sit Scottish Qualifications Authority exams. (S4O-05486)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** Home-schooled pupils must be registered with a centre that is approved by the Scottish Qualifications Authority in order to sit exams. It could be either a school or a college.

**Dr Simpson:** What are the options for students who for medical reasons, whether physical or mental, cannot attend school to complete the course work that counts towards their final grade through curriculum for excellence? Such failure to undertake course work appears to preclude their sitting the exam. Will the minister look into the issue to ensure that home-schooled pupils who have physical or mental illnesses are not discriminated against in relation to course work?

**Dr Allan:** I am happy to come back to Dr Simpson after I consider the issues that he raises. Home-schooled pupils in general—the member is aware that people are not always home schooled because of disability—can make arrangements to register with schools or colleges in order that they

can be presented for exams. We hope that local authorities will take a reasonable approach—we encourage them to do so—to ensure that other work that is necessary to gain a qualification of the kind that the member mentions is made possible and is available. However, on the specific issue of young people who have physical or other illnesses and disabilities, I am more than happy to investigate that and get back to him.

#### **University of the West of Scotland (Drop-out Rate)**

**14. John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to the University of the West of Scotland to reduce the drop-out rate, particularly among first-year students. (S4O-05487)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** Retention rates at the University of the West of Scotland have improved over the past two years, although I am that sure the university would always want to do better. I am confident that the university is focused on increasing retention and is working with the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council on a range of measures to support that. In the current academic year, UWS has been allocated more than £3.6 million from the widening access and retention fund that is operated by the funding council on behalf of the Scottish Government.

**John Scott:** Given the potential financial impact on the Scottish higher education sector of the Government's draft budget announcement, can the cabinet secretary confirm that the Scottish Government retains a commitment to ensuring that there is adequate funding in place to support the excellent work in student attainment at UWS, that funding will be safeguarded for that key policy initiative and that the possibility of additional funding is considered for universities such as UWS that are successful in widening participation in higher education?

**Angela Constance:** Over the past four years the Government has invested more than £1 billion every year in higher education, and the draft budget that is currently before Parliament shows a proposed investment again of more than £1 billion. That is a not-insignificant amount of investment. John Scott is right to say that it is not just about getting young people from diverse backgrounds into university but about ensuring successful completion of their university courses and successful progression on to the world of work, which raises issues about how we support—both pastorally and academically—young people who achieve a place at university. The University of the West of Scotland has commissioned a specific

report and has unleashed specific actions and initiatives to address that point.

Widening access is a core part of our programme for government, and through the funding council and through our guidance letter we will make clear our strategic priorities for the sector. Of course, the funding council has a role in liaising with, monitoring and supporting individual institutions via the outcome agreements.

### **Early Learning and Childcare (Dumfries and Galloway Council)**

**15. Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will fully fund Dumfries and Galloway Council for the capital and revenue costs of the increase in early learning and childcare entitlement to 1,140 hours. (S40-05488)

**The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell):** The Government has already provided local authorities with £329 million revenue and capital over two years in order to fund fully our most recent expansion of childcare to 600 hours. We have allocated an additional £140 million revenue and £30 million capital to local authorities in 2016-17. Dumfries and Galloway Council will receive an appropriate and proportionate share of that and future funding to meet its requirements. All local authority allocations are agreed with Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

**Elaine Murray:** The Scottish Government's discussion paper on expanding childcare states that

"Providing more flexible provision will be a key element of the expansion to 1140 hours pa",

and that the Scottish Government

"will build on the work done through the 'Scotland's Schools for the Future Programme' and the Scottish Futures Trust to support the expansion of local authority accommodation".

Can the minister advise how negotiations with local authorities will be taken forward and what consideration will be given to the particular needs of rural areas, where access to childcare and early learning can be more difficult for families?

**Aileen Campbell:** I thank Elaine Murray for raising those points. Work is on-going with the Scottish Futures Trust to scope out what we need in terms of capacity and the nature of that capacity. We are also working with the SFT to refine our understanding of capital requirements.

Dr Murray highlighted the rurality of Dumfries and Galloway. Rurality affects not only that area's local authority. The issue needs to be part of our consideration about how we deliver flexibility. When I visited the Borders, I was impressed by

how community childminders deal with barriers that they face because of the rural spread in which children and families live there. That is why the First Minister made an announcement about how we can enhance childminder provision. We are always acutely aware of the challenges that people are presented with in rural authorities, but we have given Dumfries and Galloway Council its appropriate proportionate share of the money that we have invested so far, which is nearly £15 million—a mixture of capital, revenue and additional funding for two-year-olds—and we will continue to work with local authorities and the Scottish Futures Trust to ensure that we can deliver for families in the way that we have set out.

## Education (Attainment Gap)

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-15430, in the name of Liam McArthur, on education. I notify members at the outset that we are very tight for time. There is no extra time at all in the debate, so brevity would be appreciated.

14:40

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I am aware that we have had numerous debates on education, even since the start of the year, but I make no apology for returning to the subject. Education, after all, is the key to unlocking the potential of each individual. It lies at the heart of what we aspire to be as a society and it determines our success as an economy. It is an area in which Scotland has traditionally excelled, and many aspects of our education system are still genuinely world class.

However, there are warning signs that in some areas trends are in the wrong direction and that the education system is failing far too many people from more disadvantaged backgrounds. The recent report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development captured that picture well. It offered signs of encouragement but confirmed that we are seeing falling standards in literacy and numeracy, while the gap in attainment between the rich and the rest remains wide and largely untouched.

The OECD concluded that we are at “a ‘watershed’ moment” for education in this country, and a leading educationist told the Education and Culture Committee this week,

“If we’re not careful, we could snatch defeat from the jaws of victory”.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats agree, which is why we are prioritising education—and proper funding of education—over the next five years. Ministers will argue that that is what they are doing, but too often their actions lack ambition or willingness to put their money where their mouth is. Good examples are the expansion of early learning and childcare and the establishment of an attainment fund: both policies are worthy in themselves, but they are underresourced, underdelivered and, in the case of the attainment Scotland fund, poorly targeted.

Meanwhile, savage cuts of £500 million to council budgets—the very same councils that are required to deliver school education—and an obsession with national testing in primary schools seem to be consistent with a determination to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

**Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP):** For clarity, and for members who were not involved in the informal discussion in the Education and Culture Committee, will Liam McArthur confirm that the individual to whom he referred also said that Scottish education is well above average and is seen worldwide as a beacon of good education standards?

**Liam McArthur:** I think that that is exactly what I said in my opening remarks. Scottish National Party ministers never tire of lecturing other parties on the need to offer alternatives and to make it clear how they would pay for their policies, despite the fact that SNP ministers are able to magic up money for projects whenever the mood or the news cycle dictates, and despite the Government running an underspend of hundreds of millions of pounds.

However, the challenge is not an unfair one, so I will respond. Unlike the SNP, the Scottish Liberal Democrats are determined to use to the full the powers of this Parliament in order to make a difference in education. With those powers, we can make a real difference in education. Earlier today, my colleague Willie Rennie set out plans to transform Scottish education in the next five years. By committing to raising income tax by 1p, we would be able to spend £475 million more on education next year alone. That would be the biggest investment in education since devolution. What a difference that could make. It could help to redress some of the damage that has been done to our college sector in recent years by a Government that is hell-bent on slashing budgets, jobs and places. There are 150,000 fewer places, which represents 150,000 lost opportunities for people who are looking for the skills that they need.

The extra resources could help to reverse some of the savage cuts that John Swinney is making to council budgets—cuts, let us face it, that will dig deepest into education and children’s services at local level.

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

**Liam McArthur:** I will not, at the moment.

There would also be an opportunity to deliver on ministers’ promises on early learning and childcare. Currently, a mere 7 per cent of two-year-olds from more disadvantaged backgrounds are reaping the benefits of free provision, rather than the promised 27 per cent. South of the border, the percentage is 42 per cent. That shortfall is unacceptable and does nothing to help to address the attainment gap.

Save the Children and others make it clear that the foundations for the attainment gap are established in the earliest years—often before a

child is even born. Evidence shows that for every pound that is spent before a child is three, £11 is saved later in life. As well as helping to close the attainment gap, that represents investment in our economy and the social wellbeing of our country. Consequently, the Scottish Liberal Democrats have placed a high priority on targeting resources at the early years and at those who need it most. The approach is reflected in our consistent argument for extending free early learning and childcare to two-year-olds from the poorest backgrounds, and it is why we have challenged this Government's approach to its attainment fund.

As I have done on many occasions, I again welcome the additional resources, but how ministers have decided to spend the money is wrong. First, it was targeted at a mere half a dozen councils. Since then, more local authorities and schools have been added to the list to the point at which the minister boasts that 64 per cent of disadvantaged pupils now benefit from funding. However, 11 councils, including Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council and Aberdeenshire Council, remain excluded. Children from poorer backgrounds in those areas, whose needs may be every bit as great as their counterparts elsewhere in the country, are deemed by this Government to be ineligible for that support. They are not alone: it appears that almost 30,000 children are set to lose out in a postcode lottery that is entirely of ministers' making.

I thought that Iain Gray in the education debate earlier this month summed up the absurdity of the situation very well when he talked about Cochrane Castle primary school and St David's primary school in Johnstone. They share one building, but while one school gets attainment funding, the other does not. In some cases, the inconsistency is not just between neighbouring schools but between neighbouring streets. How on earth can that be squared with the First Minister's promise to close the attainment gap completely?

I assume that the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning are serious in their intentions, so they must recognise that funding should be based on the needs of the individual child wherever they live. That is the underlying principle behind the pupil premium. It works south of the border—thanks to the Liberal Democrats. We want to see the same principle being applied here in Scotland.

**Chic Brodie:** Given their history on tuition fees, I am always somewhat apprehensive about a Liberal Democrat talking about finances for education. How much would the pupil premium be for each pupil? What would be the total cost? How much would the 1p rise in income tax raise?

**Liam McArthur:** I have explained that the 1p increase would deliver an extra £475 million a year to education. As a former spokesman on finance for the Liberal Democrats, I am sure that Chic Brodie would acknowledge that.

This year's funding that is available south of the border equated to £1,320 per primary pupil and £935 per secondary pupil. For an average-sized school, with average numbers in receipt of free school meals, that represents £200,000. Many schools use the funding for individual coaching, but other projects have included summer classes for pupils moving from primary to secondary school and transport for extra-curricular activities.

According to the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills—Ofsted—in 2014,

"The pupil premium is making a difference in many schools."

Similarly, the National Audit Office noted last year that

"Early signs are that the pupil premium has potential".

That is effusive praise, by auditor standards.

Are there areas that need improvement? Yes. Will it take time for the approach to demonstrate its full value? Probably. Is it delivering results in closing the attainment gap at primary and secondary levels in England and does it merit being rolled out here in Scotland? Absolutely.

The minister's spin doctor was busy earlier in the week dismissing the idea as "unfunded" and "unproven". Both of those are untrue. I presume that that spin doctor is less open to embracing new ideas than the First Minister and Ms Constance declare themselves to be.

The Labour Party seems to be supportive of the idea of a pupil premium, although the thesaurus has been used to find other ways of expressing the approach. However, I genuinely welcome its support for the principle of targeting funding at the needs of the individual child—which is something that the Labour peer Lord Adonis, who is a fan of the pupil premium, argued for strongly.

Meanwhile, the Tory amendment claims that it was all Dave's idea. I question that. The political drive behind the pupil premium certainly came from Liberal Democrat ministers in the previous UK Government. Nevertheless, I welcome Liz Smith's support, although clarity is needed on how the Tories plan to pay for such an approach north of the border. I am sure that Ms Smith will come to that in her speech.

It seems as though the Scottish National Party is the only party that is advocating an area-based approach, rather than one that is based on the needs of the individual child. That is a shame, but

it will not stop the Scottish Liberal Democrats continuing to argue for a more effective and well-funded approach.

The gaps in attainment and achievement continue to scar lives by preventing the potential of each and every individual from being realised. Those gaps are a drag on our economy and, invariably, a cost on our society. That is just one of the reasons why Scottish Liberal Democrats have taken the decision to prioritise not just education, but the means of delivering the ends. It would be the biggest investment in education since devolution, and it could deliver transformational change. I hope that, in the next session, Parliament will have the courage to use the powers at its disposal to make that happen.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the introduction of a pupil premium in Scotland would help enable every child to fulfil their potential, close the attainment gap and ensure a world-class education system; believes that it would give schools thousands of pounds of extra funding that they could spend to raise standards and increase attainment in every classroom; notes that it could provide practical support such as one-to-one tuition, extra staff and equipment, breakfast clubs and outreach programmes to help engage parents; recalls that Liberal Democrats in the previous UK administration successfully made the case for, and introduced, the pupil premium in England in 2011, now worth £2.5 billion a year, and that the party also subsequently secured its introduction in Wales; notes that Ofsted has said that the pupil premium “is making a difference” and that the National Audit Office observed that the gap between disadvantaged and other pupils narrowed by 4.7% in primary schools and 1.6% in secondary schools between 2011 and 2014, following its introduction; notes that, in comparison, the Attainment Scotland Fund only makes a difference in those areas and schools selected by Scottish ministers, currently ignoring the additional needs of disadvantaged children in 11 out of 32 local authorities; believes that tying funding to those children who need extra help the most, wherever they may live, through the pupil premium, would be fairer and more effective, and calls for it to be urgently introduced to help propel Scottish schools back to the top of the class.

14:50

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland’s Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** Two weeks ago in Parliament, the cabinet secretary set out the Government’s determination to focus on the twin aims of excellence and equity in our education system to deliver a world-class system that has at its heart the tenet that all Scotland’s children must be able to achieve their educational potential and which, in the process, breaks the link between poorer attainment and poverty. We have a duty to take bold action to ensure achievement of those twin aims.

The recent OECD report confirmed that we are, with curriculum for excellence, on the right track and that our system has many strengths, including our holistic approach, the four capacities,

professional engagement and a high degree of consensus on and enthusiasm for learning and teaching. I see that in action week in and week out when I visit schools.

We already know that our system is a good one and that it is delivering higher standards of achievement for most children. Last year, there was a record number of passes at higher and advanced higher grades and more young people received qualifications relating to wider skills for life and work. More students are staying on at school until sixth year, fewer are leaving with very low qualifications or no qualifications at all, and all young people can now undertake relevant work-related learning as part of their curriculum. More than nine out of 10 of last year’s school leavers were in employment, education or training nine months later.

Therefore, we are in a good place, but I accept that we cannot be complacent. We know that some children from our most deprived communities do not do as well as they should. In an excellent and equitable educational system, we cannot allow that to continue. That is why we already have a relentless focus on improving the outcomes of those children, which is supported by the additional four-year £100 million attainment Scotland fund.

**Liam McArthur:** The minister has set out the funding that is available and has explained the “relentless focus” on those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, but he will be aware that many of those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds—roughly 36 per cent of them—do not fall within the ambit of the attainment fund. How are their needs being prioritised to the same extent as those of other pupils elsewhere in Scotland?

**Dr Allan:** In addition to the local authority-based approach, 57 schools have been identified and, beyond that, there are many sources of intervention in the lives of individual families and communities. Those things are recognition of the fact that there are many solutions to the problem. I strongly defend the major intervention that the attainment fund represents.

The focus has been on primary schools, because we know how important early preventative work is in improving children’s longer-term outcomes. Some 54,000 children in more than 300 schools in our most deprived communities have benefited from the funding.

Local authorities and schools have worked hard to put in place approaches that will really make a difference and which are based on evidence of what works. They have thought long and hard about their schoolchildren and how the funding can support them. The result is targeted and

focused work on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing within and beyond the school. Alongside teachers, there are family link workers, speech and language therapists and community learning workers who are paid for by the attainment fund. Alongside that there is work to develop programmes and approaches to close the equity gap.

The pupil-premium approach that is in place in England and Wales, which some members seem to recommend, is yet to be shown to have had an impact. The June 2015 National Audit Office report concluded that it was too early for the impact to be known. It also concluded that per-pupil funding had fallen in real terms in 45 per cent of schools between 2011-12 and 2014-15, with funding for the 16 per cent most disadvantaged secondary schools having fallen by more than 5 per cent over the same period, despite the introduction of the pupil premium.

In Scotland, our average per-pupil spending in 2014-15 for both primary and secondary education was higher than spending in England. The attainment Scotland fund will provide additional funding to the children and communities who face some of the greatest challenges. We will continue to do that.

It is clear that where there are large concentrations of children who are living in deprived communities, there is a greater need for support. Our approach delivers that. We will continue to review how we target funding to ensure that we reach the children and young people whose outcomes are impacted greatly by living in poverty.

Although our focus is on schools where there are high concentrations of children living in deprived communities, we are also aware of the need for universal support to close the attainment gap. We have enhanced the support that is already available by putting an attainment adviser in place for every authority and by developing the national improvement framework, the primary 1 to 3 read, write, count campaign and the making maths count programme.

We must not lose sight of the fact that success is elusive for a small number of our children—and for a significant number of our children from deprived communities. The gap in attainment is narrowing, but if we are to achieve our ambition of delivering a world-class education system for all our children, we must and will do more. Our approach to targeted funding through the attainment Scotland fund is, I believe, clear evidence of our determination to achieve just that.

I move, as an amendment to motion S4M-15430 in the name of Liam McArthur, to leave out from “the introduction of” to end and insert:

“the £100 million Attainment Scotland Fund, which is additional to the almost £5 billion invested in education every year through local authorities, is rightly targeted at the primary schools that serve the most deprived communities in Scotland, with over 300 primary schools, which together support 54,399 pupils from deprived backgrounds, 64% of the total number of such pupils, benefitting from the funding; notes that this funding is providing a wide range of support to close the attainment gap including additional teaching and other specialist staff, support for parents to engage in their children’s learning, literacy and numeracy tools and extra training for teachers; further believes that the package of universal support that has been drawn together through the Scottish Attainment Challenge, including the appointment of attainment advisors for every local authority, the introduction of the Attainment Challenge Innovation Fund and the continued progress of the Raising Attainment for All programme will help ensure that there is support for every local authority to close the poverty-related attainment gap; recognises that the Scottish Government will continue to work with key stakeholders to explore and consider further approaches that will support schools to close the attainment gap, and acknowledges that the OECD’s review of Scottish education recognised the Scottish Government’s determination to focus on achieving both excellence and equity in the education system and that the national improvement framework has the potential to be a key means of driving work to close the attainment gap and strengthen formative assessment approaches.”

14:56

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** I rise to move the amendment in my name and, in truth, not in any great opposition to the motion from the Liberal Democrats because—Liam McArthur alluded to this—our proposals bear significant similarities.

However, in developing our proposal we consulted rather more than a thesaurus to find a different name for it. One thing that we consulted was the research and analysis that have been done on the pupil premium. I argue that the proposal that we are putting forward today—as we have already done on a number of occasions—is a more focused and detailed proposal. It is closer, in fact, to what has been introduced in Wales, where changes were made to the pupil premium precisely in order to address some of the flaws that had been identified with it. Perhaps the most significant flaw was that, although Ofsted, as Mr McArthur said, found evidence of effectiveness, it also found evidence of headteachers banking the pupil premium as part of their overall budget and not using it in any way to help to close the attainment gap. Our proposal—I will come to this later—tries to avoid that possibility.

Where we very much agree with Mr McArthur is on the weaknesses of the approach of the SNP Government. We have argued previously, and continue to argue, that the attainment fund, although welcome, is inadequate in that it does not have enough funds and is wrongly targeted. The minister rather gave the game away when he said that he will continue to consider how it is targeted.



Since the fund has been announced, the Government has shown every sign that it is making it up as it goes along when it comes to targeting.

In the past I have given examples of some of the worst results of that approach. Mr McArthur referred to one: the two schools in Johnstone—Cochrane Castle and St David's—which are on one campus with one entrance, one gym hall and one dinner hall. Pupils come from exactly the same streets, but one of the schools gets attainment funding while the other does not. In fact, the one that gets no attainment funding is the one that has more pupils from poorer parts of that community.

We see the same thing elsewhere. In Kilmarnock in East Ayrshire I have seen a street that is divided by a catchment area boundary, so that children from the same street go to two different schools. In one of those schools the children will benefit from attainment challenge funding and in the other they will not.

Earlier this week, I was in the Scottish Borders, where only two schools get attainment challenge funding. Both are in Hawick, which means that no schools in Galashiels, where I was visiting, benefit at all. I have also—and not surprisingly—previously highlighted the example of my constituency, where not a single school benefits from attainment challenge funding.

That is why we have proposed an alternative called fair start funding, in which £1,000 follows every child who is entitled to a free school meal to primary school. That approach would benefit pretty much every primary school in the country, but it would also mean that—as in Wales—the headteacher would have to use the resources in connection with a suite of agreed evidence-based interventions that we know will make a difference.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Will the member give way?

**Iain Gray:** I am sorry, but I am really pushed for time.

Our approach would also provide a lesser fund to nurseries for free nursery place entitlement. After all, Mr McArthur is right to point out that, as all the evidence suggests, intervention must take place as early as possible.

What would be the benefit of all that? In the Borders, which I have already mentioned, primary schools would share £860,000. East Ayrshire—a council area where at the moment only six primary schools benefit—would get £1.9 million and my East Lothian constituency would get almost £1 million, which would mean that every year some schools in my constituency would have a fund of around £85,000 that they could use to employ additional staff or classroom assistants, buy

particular equipment, run literacy or numeracy programmes or do whatever the staff and headteachers of those schools think would be possible.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Draw to a close, please.

**Iain Gray:** Schools in the Borders and East Ayrshire would benefit to the tune of over £100,000 a year.

The proposal would lead to a transformational change in the future of the children concerned and a transformational change in our country's future, which is why we think that it is worth not just the support of Opposition parties but of the Government.

I move amendment S4M-15430.2, to leave out from first "pupil premium" to end and insert:

"fair start fund for children from poorer families in nursery and primary education would ensure that every child from poorer families gets the required support to catch up with the rest, no matter where they live or go to school; notes that Scottish Labour's proposed fair start fund would link funding to children and ensure that every school has an attainment fund equal to its needs; further notes that it would be used to tackle the attainment gap by allocating £1,000 for each primary school pupil and £300 for each nursery school pupil from a deprived background, with decisions on how this money should be spent taken by head teachers; is deeply concerned that currently in Scotland more than 6,000 children leave primary school unable to read properly, more than one quarter of three and four-year-olds at nursery do not have access to a qualified teacher and that the OECD found that the achievement gap between the most and least deprived is growing; understands that the Scottish Government's flagship Attainment Challenge Fund misses the vast majority of pupils who need support, with at least 1,500 schools in Scotland and one third of local authorities not receiving any of this funding at all, and believes that the half a billion pounds of cuts to local services such as schools coming from the Scottish Government's budget means there is a real risk that pupils already at a disadvantage will get left even further behind."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I am afraid that I must reiterate that we are very short of time.

15:02

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** We are delighted that the Liberals have chosen this topic for debate, because it is incumbent on all of us, ahead of the election, to set out our manifesto stalls with regard to addressing the attainment gap. All parties in the chamber agree very much on the need for additional funding, but clearly there are sharp differences about its allocation.

The pupil premium is part of that debate. I know that the Liberals like to claim credit for the measure, but I have to correct them on that; it is actually a long-time Conservative pledge, and I have the evidence to prove that right here. The

policy has some very specific advantages in doing two things: first, identifying those most in need; and secondly, creating the incentives to ensure that every effort is made to target resources on the pupils in question. I notice that, in response to Willie Rennie just last Friday, the cabinet secretary said that the policy is

“neither costed nor proven to work.”

I want to challenge her on that, given that the facts—or most of them, anyway—prove otherwise.

Before I do so, though, I want to flag up the academic work of Sue Ellis and Jim McCormick, both of whom are, I think, respected as much by the Scottish Government as by the rest of us. That work clearly shows that the majority of deprived children do not live in the most deprived areas, which means that the usefulness of the Scottish index of multiple deprivation is very limited, given that it targets the whole school or, in some cases, the whole local authority by postcode. As Iain Gray and Liam McArthur have made clear, the benefit of the pupil premium is that it follows the individual child—although there is one proviso to that, which I will come to in a minute.

In England, the 2015-16 pupil premium varies from £935 to £1,900 per annum, and that money is paid to pupils who have been eligible for a free school meal in one of the six previous years. The money is paid directly to the school on behalf of each recipient pupil—which amounts to three out of 10 pupils in England and Wales—and it can be spent by the school in a way that best fits the pupils concerned. As for Iain Gray’s comments about not banking the money, I think that there is a way round that.

Recently, there has been a great deal of attention on helping schools to focus individually on the most disadvantaged pupils. Indeed, the reports from the vast majority of headteachers make it very clear that a high proportion of them have clear evidence that the pupil premium is working for the most disadvantaged. Of course, that can be measured, more than anything else, by the outcomes in these schools. The minister will perhaps be interested to read the 2015 Sutton Trust report, which helpfully provides some of the evidence that we need to ensure that the policy can be taken forward.

The cost of pupil premiums in 2014-15 was £2.5 billion, which was 6 per cent of the total schools budget down south, but the important thing is that schools are held absolutely to account—if necessary by the Comptroller and Auditor General—for exactly how they spend the money. There are no edicts from local or central Government. There are no right answers, but there is full autonomy and accountability.

One of the best and most important lessons to be learned from schools in England is that it is entirely up to the schools not to treat disadvantaged pupils as a homogeneous group. There are other advantages, but I will not go into them just now. The Liberals probably would not accept them, because they involve the provision of greater incentives to those who are at the cutting edge of encouraging academies and free schools. That is perhaps more a debate for down south, but it is nonetheless important in principle for up here, particularly at a time when we have more parents—who, incidentally, are wedded to the best values of the state sector—wanting some diversity in the state provision of schooling. That is something that the Scottish Conservatives want.

Both the Labour Party and the Liberals have committed to much higher tax rates in order to fund education. The Scottish Conservatives will not do that. We have based our costings on the Scottish Parliament information centre figures and the Scottish Government figures that were produced at the end of last year, which include the £100 million that has been promised for the attainment fund, and we have related that to the supplementary financial memorandum to the Education (Scotland) Bill that was published last week. In that memorandum, the Scottish Government acknowledges that there are clearly significantly increased costs, so it is presumably in the business of providing that money.

To our minds, the basic amount would be £136 million. I am happy to put on the record how we calculated that.

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

**Liz Smith:** However, we can use the supplementary financial memorandum to drill down further into that. The Scottish Conservatives are happy to put before the electorate not just the principle of our proposal but the costings.

The First Minister said:

“Our overall aim is to raise standards everywhere, but to raise them most quickly in the areas that most need it.”

I entirely accept that, but it will not happen if we use the SIMD. It has to be done on a pupil-by-pupil basis.

I move amendment S4M-15430.1, to leave out from “Liberal Democrats” to end and insert:

“in 2007, the Conservatives led by David Cameron proposed the introduction of the pupil premium, after which, along with the Liberal Democrats in the previous UK administration, they successfully made the case for, and introduced, the pupil premium in England in 2011, now worth £2.5 billion a year, and that the pupil premium has been successfully introduced in Wales; notes that Ofsted has said that the pupil premium ‘is making a difference’ and that the National Audit Office observed that the gap

between disadvantaged and other pupils narrowed by 4.7% in primary schools and 1.6% in secondary schools between 2011 and 2014, following its introduction; notes that, in comparison, the Attainment Scotland Fund only makes a difference in those areas and schools selected by Scottish ministers, currently ignoring the additional needs of disadvantaged children in 11 out of 32 local authorities; believes that tying funding to those children who need extra help the most, wherever they may live, through the pupil premium, would be fairer and more effective, and calls for it to be urgently introduced to help propel Scottish schools back to the top of the class."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. I ask for speeches of four minutes, please.

15:07

**Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP):** Recently, Parliament has dedicated a considerable amount of time to educational attainment, and it is quite right that we have done so. I am sure that the ambition that all of Scotland's children are given the opportunity to fulfil their potential regardless of their background is shared across the Parliament, and it is in that spirit that I welcome the chance to speak in this afternoon's debate on education.

However, I must say that I was more than a little disappointed to hear Willie Rennie describe Scotland's education sector as being at "crisis point". Although there is recognition that there is still work to do, particularly in areas such as attainment, it is rather disingenuous, to say the least, to describe Scotland's schools as being in some sort of crisis.

I realise that the Lib Dems might not be in a rush to consult the opinion polls, but I draw Mr Rennie's attention to the recent Survation poll that showed a positive net satisfaction rating of plus 28 per cent from voters in favour of the SNP's record on education. Such positive poll ratings are not exactly indicative of an electorate that considers Scotland's education system to be universally failing.

Indeed, the SNP in government has taken a number of positive steps in its drive to improve standards in Scotland's schools. On Monday, the First Minister announced a further £230 million for the construction of 19 new schools across Scotland, and since 2007 the Scottish Government has worked with local authorities to rebuild or refurbish more than 600 schools across the country.

Last week, thanks to a parliamentary question that was lodged by my colleague George Adam, we heard that the number of school leavers going into education, work or training is at a record high, contributing to the highest level of youth employment for a decade. The number of children in Scotland who are benefiting from free school

meals has more than doubled to over 259,000 in the past year, providing vital support to children from low-income families.

Earlier this month, the First Minister unveiled the innovation fund as part of the package of support through the £100 million Scottish attainment fund. The innovation fund is open to all schools, not just schools in the local authorities that have been targeted for support through the attainment fund, and it complements the work of the attainment advisers who have been recruited for every council area.

I have listened carefully to the case that the Lib Dems have put forward and I have tried to do so with an open mind, but I have yet to hear any compelling evidence that a pupil premium approach to tackling the attainment gap would be more effective than the attainment challenge programme that the Scottish Government advocates. The Lib Dems argue—we heard it again here today—that the pupil premium has been a rousing success in England.

**Iain Gray:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Stewart Maxwell:** I do not have the time—I apologise.

However, a recent YouGov survey of teachers in England found that less than half of teachers believe that the pupil premium has been effective. Indeed, 4 per cent of teachers said that they thought that the policy had had a negative impact on disadvantaged pupils. Furthermore, the report last year by the National Audit Office suggested that any reduction in the attainment gap as a result of the pupil premium has been marginal at best. I quote directly from the report:

"While the attainment gap has narrowed since 2011, it remains wide and, at this stage, the significance of the improvements is unclear."

That is hardly a rousing endorsement of the pupil premium policy that the Lib Dems advocate.

Removing barriers to educational attainment is a challenging but important undertaking. The OECD report in December underlined many of the successes in our education system, highlighting clear upward trends in recent years in areas such as attainment and positive school-leaver destinations. However, the OECD review group highlighted a number of challenges, and there is undoubtedly much more work to do to ensure that our education system delivers for every child in Scotland.

I believe that a good-quality education is key to ensuring that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have a ladder of opportunity to escape the poverty trap. I therefore welcome the Scottish Government's determination to further

strengthen Scotland's education sector and to ensure that our young people leave school with the education and the skills that they need to fulfil their potential.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call our next speaker, I remind members that the code of conduct requires that no member in the chamber turn their back on the Presiding Officer.

15:11

**Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab):** I agree with Stewart Maxwell that a range of factors will be important in closing the attainment gap. Those factors include the school buildings and facilities in which young people are taught. That is why I welcome the partnerships that have been put in place and acknowledge the investment of the Scottish Government and local authorities in them. Last week, I visited a new school build in Glasgow where three primary schools are being pulled together into one. That shows that local authorities are doing innovative work to get new facilities in place. I ask the minister to agree to visit Inverkeithing high school in my constituency, whose building is in a dire state and in need of replacement. Although I welcomed the announcement last week about new buildings for some schools, I was disappointed that Inverkeithing high school was not one of those schools, because school buildings are important.

It would be wrong not to mention the massive pressure that education authorities are under up and down the country. I would probably not use the term "crisis" about education. I would prefer to acknowledge the hard work going on in schools in every community in Scotland by the teachers and all the other staff in schools, who are under immense pressure. We just need to talk to teachers locally to know the pressure that they are working under because of the difficulties that are being caused by the budget cuts that are taking place.

Although those budget cuts might not be affecting teacher numbers, we are seeing the number of classroom assistants being cut and continuing professional development being cut, which will have a massive impact. Fife Council is an example of a local authority that focused millions of pounds on raising attainment. A big part of that was about leadership, so there was a major investment programme in leadership in schools. There was also a major investment programme to ensure that teachers had the support to be able to do more to lift attainment and numeracy and literacy levels. If education authorities are making cuts in the areas that I mentioned, that will have a negative impact on attainment levels.

Another criticism that I have heard of the Government's scheme, which is well intentioned, is that it tends to be just input based, with little regard to outputs, and to involve project after project. We find that more and more staff spend their time trying to write bids and write projects, but we need to move away from that.

Labour's proposal on the fair start fund would allow us to target money at schools and do something about that.

Alasdair Allan talked about the OECD report. I would be the first to recognise that there are many positives in that report on the curriculum for excellence and the direction in which we are going, but I want to mention a few other points. For example, page 80 of the report says:

"Not all the findings can be described as positive. *Education Scotland* inspection reports, for instance, gave as many as one in five schools only a 'satisfactory' evaluation in inspections".

That is quite staggering. Those schools were not good, very good or excellent; they were "satisfactory". That cannot be satisfactory for the Parliament. That shows that there are areas in which a lot of work has to be done.

There is not enough time for me to draw attention to other parts of the report. It talks about the number of different projects and the danger that we will end up with little strategic direction and focus.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close.

**Alex Rowley:** We can learn a lot from authorities that have brought about major improvement and focused that improvement.

In conclusion, I think that we have to start looking at outputs and move away from looking simply at inputs. That is the main criticism that I level against the Government.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I would appreciate members trying to keep to their four minutes.

15:16

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** Our aim is to have an excellent and equitable education system in which every young person throughout the country is able to achieve their full potential regardless of their family circumstances or the background that they were born into. I feel that I have said that or something very similar to it on numerous occasions in our debates. That is because the debate on the issue is very important. We all may disagree on how we will get to our goal, but we all know that the issue is one of the most important. The First Minister in particular is to

be commended on ensuring that it is a major issue.

The £100 million attainment Scotland fund is rightly targeted at the primary schools that serve our most deprived communities in Scotland. We have allowed parts of our communities to fail in education for far too long; we have done that over years or decades. I have mentioned before and take no pride in mentioning again that there is an east-west divide in my constituency. One area is an area of deprivation and another is obviously an aspiring area in which people are doing a lot better financially. That makes a difference in young people's attainment and what they do in education.

With the national improvement framework and the attainment advisers, we have the opportunity to ensure that we systematically get the resource to the right child at the right time. The attainment adviser's job will be to ensure that they get that resource. When Education Scotland came to the Education and Culture Committee, it mentioned that, if extra funding or resource was needed, the attainment adviser would be able to find ways to do things nationally and work with other local authorities in the area.

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

**George Adam:** I would love to, but I do not have much time.

That shows that the attainment adviser's position and the framework are important parts of the debate and that the Government is moving the argument forward.

The recent OECD report on Scotland's education system recognised the Government's determination to focus on achieving both excellence and equity in our education system. As I have said, I do not doubt anybody's commitment to trying to close the current attainment gap, but the Scottish Government is already tackling that through the £100 million attainment fund.

This week, the committee had an informal session in which we spoke to educationists—my colleague Mr McArthur mentioned that. One said to me that £100 million is more than enough to achieve what we want to achieve, but they wanted to know how we would get there and do that. For me, that is what the debate is about. We should consider the Scottish Government's plans and how we will move forward.

The attainment Scotland fund is already supporting more than 300 primary schools that collectively serve 54,399 primary-age children who live in the 20 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland. That is 64 per cent of the total across Scotland. We are well aware that there are children who live in poverty who do not live in the

20 per cent most deprived areas of Scotland—we have already mentioned that in the debate. That is why the £1.5 million attainment challenge innovation fund has been included. It will support other schools across Scotland to explore and develop innovative approaches to raising attainment.

Another thing that has also already been mentioned is the £230 million scheme. In these challenging times, the Government has been able to invest £230 million to build 19 new schools. When we are talking about targeting and how things are, we only have to look at one of those schools: St Fergus in Ferguslie Park, which will be rebuilt. That shows that the Government is moving in the right direction. There is still plenty of work to do, but we need to rise to the challenge and work together to make sure that we do it.

15:20

**John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw)**

**(Lab):** For some reason, the Scottish National Party still wants us to judge it on its record, so let us do that. After nine years of nationalist decline, the cabinet secretary's coat ought to be on a shoogly peg. Does she or anybody in the SNP think that it is acceptable that young people from wealthier families are twice as likely to go to university, seven times more likely to get three As at higher level and 12 times more likely to become a medical student? Do the cabinet secretary and the SNP really take comfort from an OECD report that notes the poor literacy of primary and secondary students and the

"declining relative and absolute achievement levels in mathematics"?

Should the SNP really take comfort from the fact that the report says that we might have a good system if it was strengthened with a stronger role for local authorities—so that the Scottish Government had less control—and more money for councils? How can the SNP pretend that things are wonderful when we see the narrowing of the curriculum, the decline in modern languages study and the lowest teacher numbers for 10 years?

In the face of such a mess, what do the cabinet secretary and the SNP do? They reprofile £500 million from council budgets while their back benchers, many of whom are ex-councillors, say nothing. SNP councillors mutter but comply if they control the council and, if they do not control it, they blame the council rather than the Scottish Government. Cabinet secretary, in case you do not know this, education is a huge proportion of council spending. In some cases, it is more than 40 per cent. You cannot make such extensive cuts without harming education.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Pentland, can you address your remarks through the chair rather than directly to the cabinet secretary?

**John Pentland:** United Kingdom cuts have been multiplied fivefold, with devastating consequences for council services such as schools and childcare. That severely undermines any good that is being done by the attainment fund. How much good that fund will do is highly questionable when it ignores more than 1,500 schools and 11 local authorities. Taking money away then making a big fuss about giving some back is not a solution to anything other than the quest for publicity.

The SNP is bereft of adequate answers but, with more than 6,000 Scottish children leaving primary school unable to read properly, we know that tackling the attainment gap must start in the early years. Scottish Labour has set out proposals that would more effectively target those who are in most need. The fair start fund would give primary schools £1,000 and nurseries £300 for every child who comes from a deprived background. The money would go directly to head teachers to spend in whatever way is most appropriate to tackling the attainment gap in their schools.

The Scottish Government needs to take on board the advice of the OECD, its poverty adviser and others who highlight its failings, no matter how unpalatable that may be. Those failings must be recognised if they are to be addressed, so sorting our education system will require a degree of honesty that is rarely seen from this Government. I will not hold my breath, cabinet secretary, but you could try being honest about your failures and then ask to be judged on your honesty.

15:24

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** This short debate will inevitably cover much of the ground that was covered in the Scottish Government's education debate a few weeks ago. That is no bad thing, as it gives us an opportunity to highlight some of the many initiatives that are under way in our schools.

In Scotland, we spend about £5 billion every year on our schools, despite the UK budget cuts. Raising the attainment of our young people and working to close the attainment gap across Scotland is already a big part of that spend. We already spend significantly more on each pupil than is spent in England, for example.

A number of key programmes that have additional funding attached are in place to focus on many of the compelling issues in improving attainment. The £100 million attainment Scotland fund, which several colleagues have mentioned, is supporting more than 300 primary schools and

more than 50,000 pupils from some of the most deprived areas in our country.

There is a host of other Scotland-wide initiatives, such as the challenge innovation fund, which also reaches out to our secondary schools and invites them to come up with new and innovative approaches to closing the attainment gap. The access to education fund is intended to identify and reduce the barriers to learning that are often more pronounced in our disadvantaged communities. That is a crucial piece of work.

Sometimes, we might think that the solution to those key issues is to provide more and more money. However, it can be as simple as providing a little support to youngsters to help them to overcome the most basic difficulties that they face before they even arrive to open a book at school. There are other initiatives, too, all of which seek to make a difference by giving our young people the crucial help that they need just to get on a level playing field with those who are perhaps more fortunate and by steadily improving performance across our country in the pursuit of excellence.

The independent OECD report confirms that improvements in attainment are taking place in Scotland. We are achieving scores in science and reading levels that are above international averages and we have record exam pass results and record numbers of school leavers who are working or staying in education. The decline in maths that began under Labour has been stopped. Further, we have almost doubled the number of young folk from our most deprived communities who are getting at least one higher. Those improvements have been recognised by the OECD and give us a solid foundation to build on.

Although the Ofsted report that the motion refers to records some positive differences that are being made in schools in England, it clearly says that it will take some time to establish whether the approach will lead to a narrowing of the attainment gap. A recent analysis by the Demos think tank, which was published in February last year, suggests that the attainment gap in England might be widening, with more than half of England's local authorities reporting such a trend in 2014. Parachuting a completely untried scheme urgently into Scotland, as the Liberal Democrats want to do, while our own programmes are under way would be a ridiculous and dangerous thing to do.

If we are to achieve the step changes and improvements that we all seek and move beyond what the OECD report calls the watershed moment for education, we will need more than cash, new processes and assessment systems to help get us there. The report says that we need to improve what it calls the middle area, which involves networking and collaboration. It says that that will help us to achieve the new dynamic in

learning and teaching that we need. Our new national improvement framework, with a reliable and consistent evidence base for assessment at the heart of it, and all of the interventions that are in progress, should give Scottish education the opportunity to realise its potential to be a world leader in education.

15:28

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

I thank the Liberal Democrats for securing this debate on educational attainment. I hope that we can move onward to attainment and achievement.

Like my colleague Liz Smith, I take issue with the part of the motion that says that Parliament

“recalls that Liberal Democrats in the previous UK administration successfully made the case for, and introduced, the pupil premium in England in 2011”.

I am afraid that, on this occasion, the Liberal Democrats are just plain wrong. The pupil premium was in a Conservative policy paper as far back as 2007 and was in the Conservative manifesto for the UK general election in 2010. Whatever claims the Liberal Democrats have about their power and influence in the coalition Government, they certainly cannot claim to have written that Conservative manifesto, although that is what they are trying to do today. Page 51 of that manifesto said:

“We will improve standards for all pupils and close the attainment gap between the richest and poorest.”

As well as supporting our long-standing commitment to the pupil premium, I would also like to consider the service pupil premium of £300 per pupil, which is available in England but not in Scotland. According to the armed forces covenant team, Scotland has its own needs-based formula for service children, which has been judged to be more effective.

I phoned Moray Council to ask what funding it gets for service children—especially considering that we have the Royal Engineers regiment at Kinloss and children of Royal Air Force personnel at Lossiemouth. I asked the convener of Moray Council what is given in Scotland as compared with the £300 per pupil in England. The answer was nothing. If such money is used in England so that new pupils who join a school receive a proper induction—including an initial assessment to avoid any potential gaps in their coverage of the curriculum—and if that is good enough for children of defence families in England, why is it not good enough in Scotland?

The Lib Dems claim that the pupil premium grant was their idea, but I add that the budget is now four times greater than it was at the time of introduction in 2010. That is certainly not due to any Lib Dem input—now or in the future.

Much has been said about the Scottish system and the English system. I do not think that anyone comes up with a system that is perfect on day 1. I am pleased to hear that a Labour MP, Frank Field, supported by two Conservatives, is seeking an early day motion to consider ways to improve the identification of children with low attainment, so that more children are eligible for the pupil premium. That is a grown-up way to look forward.

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, which is chaired by a Labour MP, is calling for improvements in identifying pupils who are in need. That is also the right way forward, and it should not be aligned to party politics.

There have been serious criticisms of the nationalist Government's approach to closing the attainment gap. Despite the Lib Dems trying to rewrite history in their favour, the debate has been a helpful contribution to the on-going debate on attainment—and, I hope, achievement in the future.

15:32

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

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. It has shown that there is a growing cross-party consensus on tackling the attainment gap, but not necessarily on the methods. As was noted earlier, however, there does not seem to be much difference between our methods and those that the Lib Dem motion proposes. I am encouraged that members on all sides of the chamber are committed to ensuring that tackling educational inequality is a top priority for the Parliament during this and future sessions, as has been set out in parties' manifestos.

It has been pointed out admirably by members that there is a gap in attainment between children from poorer backgrounds and those from more affluent circumstances. After eight years, the report card for the Scottish Government does not make for comforting reading. Pupils who entered primary 1 when the SNP began running our education system will now be hitting high school. In that time, that group of pupils has borne the brunt of education budget cuts, falling teacher numbers and the growing attainment gap—some will have watched their classmates from wealthier families pull away from them.

We welcome the Government's ambition to close the attainment gap, but there is a big question mark over how that will be achieved. The Scottish attainment fund should be used to close the gap, but thousands of pupils across the country are missing out on support.

Under the SNP's plans, more than 1,500 schools in Scotland get no extra support to close the gap between the richest and the rest. With

£500 million of cuts to local services, including our schools, coming out of the Government's budget, there is a risk that pupils who are already at a disadvantage will get left even further behind.

Labour members believe that there is action beyond what the Government is proposing that can make a difference. In the coming years, the Parliament will have a substantial suite of new powers, which will open up new choices in education. We would use the additional revenues from a new 50p tax rate on top earners to redistribute money from those who can afford it to those who need it most, by investing additional resources over and above the Government's proposals for tackling educational disadvantage.

The SNP Government's budget yet again slashes the funding for schools, which will make the problem even worse. We would use the Parliament's new powers to introduce a fair start fund, which would give every primary school an extra £1,000 and every nursery an extra £300 for every pupil from a deprived family.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mark Griffin:** I am sorry; I normally would, but I am short on time.

The money from our fair start fund would go directly to head teachers—that is different from the pupil premium scheme that is in place in England—who would be able to choose from a suite of proven methods. They would be able to spend that money in the best way, as they saw fit given their local circumstances, to close the attainment gap between the richest and the rest.

As I have said, we would use the additional revenue from a new 50p top rate of tax to redistribute resources from those who earn more than £150,000 a year to those who need help most. That is over and above what the Government has committed to investing to tackle the educational attainment gap.

Given the consensus on tackling the issue and the weight of the support that we have found for tackling our education challenges, it would be a shame if the opportunity were to pass by for us to put more resources into schools to tackle the problem.

15:36

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** How we ensure that resources, services and opportunities reach the children who are most in need is indeed a central, fundamental question in how we deliver education in Scotland.

All targeting has to be done in the context of a strengthened universal offer. There are pros and cons with all forms of targeting and the danger with any form of targeting, if done in isolation, is that we miss our target—we miss the point. Getting the right blend of approaches is absolutely crucial.

**Liz Smith:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Angela Constance:** Perhaps later.

The bigger prize is about how we ensure that the universal service—that £4.8 billion investment in education—provides more for all children in order to maximise the impact of additional, more targeted measures. What we do and how we do it is important as well as what we invest.

Our approach is to target additional funding at local authorities and individual schools with the highest concentration of children who are growing up in areas of deprivation through the Scottish attainment challenge and the attainment Scotland fund, which is £100 million over four years—as I indicated earlier at question time. Those schools and those local authorities reach out to 54,000 children—two thirds of Scotland's poorest children.

Of course we accept that the poorest children do not always live in the poorest areas; we also know that if we target children and young people in accordance with free school meals—although there are many cases where we do that and where we should do that—there will be other children in struggling families who will just miss out. The right blend of targeting and universality is absolutely imperative and we must, throughout our education system, get the right approach through collaboration.

As regards the attainment challenge approach, we have attainment advisers in every local authority who will knit together and spread the invaluable experience and learning that is being pioneered in the attainment challenge areas to ensure that it is spread throughout the country. That is an approach that is not new to Scotland because we have the raising attainment for all programme; the early years collaborative; and the schools improvement partnership programme.

Many authorities—the authorities that are most successful in tackling deprivation in their schools—have been at the vanguard of a clustered approach, where schools work with each other and local authorities work with each other.

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

**Angela Constance:** No—Mr Gray would not take an intervention earlier. I do not want to seem churlish, but no thanks.



We have made it clear through the Scottish attainment challenge that we are encouraging schools with shared campuses—the two schools may serve two different catchment areas, as was the case with the school that I went to when I was growing up—to share resources and approaches because we know that not all children live in areas that are identified as poor.

The Government's interest, which motivates me, the team of education ministers and the First Minister, is in what works. I am not interested in lazy ideology or in what has aye been—I am interested in what works, and the evidence on the pupil premium is mixed at best.

I had to wonder, listening to Liam McArthur's speech, whether he was talking about the same National Audit Office report that I read, which stated clearly that some schools in England with very poor pupils actually had less money per pupil now, whereas in Scotland we continue to have higher spending per head. There is a spend of £4,899 per head per primary school pupil in comparison with £4,500 per pupil in England. Similarly, in secondary schools, the spend is more than £6,600 per head in comparison with £6,000 south of the border. The same National Audit Office report pointedly remarked that real-terms funding per pupil had decreased in almost half of the schools between 2011 and 2014.

John Pentland's rather downbeat contribution gives me an opportunity to talk about Labour's record. His party's time in office, aided and abetted by the Liberals, is littered with examples of Labour not meeting its own targets and then dumping them.

We in this Government are not afraid to be ambitious. We measure the attainment gap in Scotland by comparing the 20 per cent most deprived areas with the 20 per cent least deprived. South of the border, the attainment gap is measured by comparing the 20 per cent most deprived with the remaining 80 per cent. The task that we have set ourselves is far greater.

It was on Labour's watch that we saw a decline in our international standing in accordance with the PISA—programme for international student assessment—rankings. I emphasise to John Pentland that it took action by this Government to halt that decline.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** You must draw to a close, please, cabinet secretary.

**Angela Constance:** We will not take any lessons from Tories and Liberals: the architects of austerity, welfare cuts and rising child poverty.

**Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con):** Dear, dear.

**Angela Constance:** As a final point—

**Mary Scanlon:** Dear, dear.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Angela Constance:** I say to Alex Rowley that 607 schools have been rebuilt or refurbished under this Government. That compares—I say to John Pentland—with 328 on Labour's watch.

15:43

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** I will not argue with Mary Scanlon—it is unwise to argue with such an eloquent member of the chamber—but it is clear that there is almost a consensus across the chamber in favour of targeting support to those children who need it.

I pay tribute to the intellectual gymnastics of the education secretary in trying to explain, and then not explaining, why all kids do not get the support that they absolutely need by saying that we need to concentrate on areas that have the most poor kids. What about all the other kids—in East Renfrewshire, Kilmarnock and Paisley—who are deprived of the funds? I did not hear the members who represent those areas speaking up for the children there. I am sure those children, their parents and the schools are not happy about not getting the funds that they deserve.

I believe—unlike many members on the SNP side of the chamber, it seems—that every child deserves the chance to get up and get on, not just every child who happens to be in the right area that the SNP decides is the appropriate place in which to invest the funds. This is not some bureaucratic exercise: it is about giving kids a chance to get up and get on.

The evidence is clear that we are making progress on the pupil premium in England. The National Audit Office and Ofsted have both said that there is evidence for that, but SNP members prefer to rely on evidence that does not exist at all to support the attainment fund that it has just started.

There is no evidence for the SNP scheme, but there is evidence for the pupil premium and there is support for it from across the chamber. Iain Gray was right that we have learned about the pupil premium process as it has gone on. My colleague in Wales Kirsty Williams was at the forefront of arguing that it should be introduced in Wales. Lessons were learned from England to ensure that the scheme that was developed in Wales was even better. Equally, in England, lessons are being learned about the process. We cannot deny that, between 2011 and 2014, the gap in attainment in primary schools closed by 4.7 per cent—that is pretty clear. Liz Smith highlighted well some of the evidence from a trust in England

that has been looking at evidence that supports the pupil premium.

The SNP, rather than adopt a scheme that is working, preferred to adopt a brand-new scheme so that it could call it its own. That is disappointing, because that new scheme misses out 36 per cent of the kids who deserve support.

I was amused by Stewart Maxwell. I do not think that he meant to say, "Crisis? What crisis?"—the words that brought down the Callaghan Government in 1979—but that was in effect what he said. He ignored the widening attainment gap in Scotland as highlighted by the OECD report. That report also highlighted that Scotland, which in the past had one of the world's best education systems, is now slipping down the league tables.

**Angela Constance:** Will the member give way?

**Willie Rennie:** No—not just now.

Mr Maxwell also ignored the fact that the education secretary said that 27 per cent of two-year-olds would get nursery education but now only 7 per cent are getting it. He also ignored the colossal, whopping, massive cut that is about to be imposed on councils of £500 million. Half of what councils do is education.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Willie Rennie:** If Stewart Maxwell is saying that that is not a crisis, I am afraid that I completely disagree with him. That shows that the SNP is increasingly complacent about the education system in Scotland. That is why we have proposed today an urgent investment in education with a penny on tax—we say where the money will come from.

There will be a £475 million investment for a transformational change in education in Scotland. SNP members can sit on their hands, but we are going to make the investment in education that pupils deserve. The money will be invested in the pupil premium, which has been shown to work in England.

**Stewart Maxwell:** Nonsense.

**Willie Rennie:** On colleges, the SNP Government has cut 152,000 places over the past few years, which has deprived many people of part-time and full-time courses. Older people have been deprived of places. We will repair some of the damage on that, too. We will stop the cuts to education in our schools. We will make sure that the SNP does not get its way on cutting the budget.

**Stewart Maxwell:** What about the UK Government cuts?

**Willie Rennie:** Mr Maxwell has an awful lot to say but, when it comes to it, he does not deliver.

We also need to invest in nursery education, because that has been shown to be the best educational investment that we can make. Experts across the globe have said that, if we invest in children before the age of three, we can actually change their life chances for the rest of their lives.

The reason why we need to invest in the pupil premium, in nursery education and in our colleges is not just to give kids the chance to get up and get on in the world but to provide skills for industry, because there is a massive skills gap in this country. Just last week I was in Aberdeen, where people were saying that there is still a skills gap, despite the fall in the oil price. We need to invest to fill the skills gap to make a difference for the future.

Our proposal is about giving everybody the opportunity to get up and get on and it is about improving the economy. That is why we propose putting a penny on tax for education. Some say that it is not progressive and it hits the poorest the hardest, but that is complete and utter nonsense. Somebody who is earning £100,000 will pay 30 times more than somebody on the median wage in Scotland. That is progressive.

What we have seen from SNP members is that, despite the grand words from the cabinet secretary and her deputy about excellence and bold measures, they actually often talk left but walk right. They never actually follow through on the rhetoric, and that is why the challenge has now been laid down to members of the SNP Administration.

If the SNP members really believed in changing the life chances of the people in their constituencies and in mine, they would adopt that bold, progressive measure to invest in education, to change life chances and to improve the economy. Instead they are just hiding behind the constitutional argument so that they do not have to take any action to change people's life chances. They can adopt that approach if they wish, but we will not follow them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Draw to a close please, Mr Rennie.

**Willie Rennie:** Thank you for reminding me, Presiding Officer. I am almost concluding.

The most important aspect that we must look at is investment in education. We have seen from the SNP Administration an enormous assault on the education system. SNP members may say that it is not a crisis, they may pooh-pooh the idea of a pupil premium, and they may fail to deliver on nursery education, but Liberal Democrats will not. We will put forward the proposals and we will fund them.

## Fuel Poverty

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

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-15432, in the name of Jim Hume, on fuel poverty. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible, and I invite Mr Hume to speak for up to 10 minutes. We are tight for time.

15:51

**Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):** As we speak, there are approximately 1.8 million people in Scotland—that is 35 per cent of all Scottish households—who are in fuel poverty this winter. Of those households, 9.5 per cent are in extreme fuel poverty, requiring more than 20 per cent of their income to pay for fuel. Some even have to make the tough choice between paying for tomorrow's breakfast and turning the heating on for another hour, because they cannot afford to have both. No one should have to face that trade-off in this day and age in Scotland. It is a trade-off that has not improved in the past two years and which the Scottish Government has a duty to remove from every household, yet what the Administration has done has led to no real change to the fuel poverty level in 2014 from the year before. Instead, the Scottish Government again blames others, points the finger and states that it has little control over fuel price changes, while failing to recognise that its own target will not be met.

The Government's argument that it does not have power over fuel prices and its contentment with pointing the finger of blame for the rise of fuel poverty at everything but its inaction are like saying that if people did not get sick the health system would be able to reach all its targets. Any Government should be working flat out to contain an imminent threat to public health, so why is the Government not working flat out to contain the threat to public health that is fuel poverty? It is a deeply disappointing stance, and the denial of the facts on the ground can only cause more problems and provides no solutions.

Some of the most recent fuel price increases have been mitigated by increased incomes, but what about those whose incomes remain below the income poverty line and those who are over the income poverty line but are still in fuel poverty? It raises the question of whether the definition of fuel poverty needs to be updated, as recommended by the independent adviser on poverty and inequality in her report to the First Minister last week. That report stated that

"over half of all 'fuel poor' households probably wouldn't be classified as 'income poor' ... the fuel poverty definition

needs to be looked at again—so that future programmes focus more specifically on helping those in fuel poverty who are also in income poverty."

Apart from differences in income, there are also major regional differences that we need to address. As the Labour amendment rightly points out, rural areas and island communities across Scotland are suffering because of cold homes. The latest figures clearly show the disproportionate impact of fuel poverty on rural areas. That is a shameful reminder to the Government of its record on the issue.

Some 43 per cent of households in Scottish Borders, 45 per cent of households in Dumfries and Galloway, 58 per cent of households in Orkney and 62 per cent of households in the Western Isles were in fuel poverty in 2013. When people's incomes, health and comfort are in danger, we should all put aside our political differences and work to address the problems.

**Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Jim Hume:** I hope that we will have some cross-party support from the member.

**Mike MacKenzie:** I am glad that the member said that to a large extent the matter is beyond the Scottish Government's control, given that the Government has no control over energy prices. Does he agree that the United Kingdom Government's curtailment of the energy company obligation and abandonment of the green deal also have a huge bearing on the problem?

**Jim Hume:** I disagree with the member, in that the Scottish Government is proposing a 13 per cent cut in its spending on fuel poverty. I will come on to that in due course.

The Scottish Lib Dems want to build cross-party support such as we have never seen before—although with comments like Mr MacKenzie's we probably never will see such support. The Scottish Government amendment deviates from cross-party support for tackling fuel poverty decisively and is complacent about an issue that leads to suffering, stress and poor health. However, the issue should cross party lines, and I am almost certain that there will be support for any initiative or measure that addresses it.

The minister's amendment talks up installing energy efficiency measures in 14,000 homes, but at a time when 845,000 households are experiencing fuel poverty the Government should explain to the other 831,000 households why that represents such a great improvement.

In June, the Scottish Government announced that energy efficiency would be a national infrastructure priority. Eight months on, we have heard close to nothing on the details of the plan. I

expect that the information will be eagerly received by everyone who suffers from fuel poverty. I invite the minister to address the matter and provide more detail in her speech.

I support other schemes, such as ensuring that new-built homes, as well as social landlords' properties, adhere to and are supported by strong energy efficiency standards. However, there is a lot more that we could do. For the Scottish Government to acknowledge that it is set to miss its fuel poverty target by November would be a starting point. As recently as last week, the Minister for Housing and Welfare told my colleague Liam McArthur:

"The Scottish Government has no current plans to reassess the fuel poverty target."—[*Written Answers*, 8 January 2016, S4W-28962.]

In October last year, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights, Alex Neil MSP, reassured himself that he had another year to reach the target.

Meanwhile, after the successful Paris climate change talks, my colleague Tavish Scott asked the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform to provide details. The minister has not yet written to Mr Scott. I invite her—in her absence—to write to him as soon as possible.

The Scottish Government's constant denial adds insult to injury for the millions of people in cold homes and its proposed 13 per cent cut in fuel poverty spending is simply counterproductive. The minister might protest on that, but just two days ago she said:

"The Scottish Government has not proposed to reduce the domestic energy efficiency budget by 13% ... We have allocated £103 million to tackle fuel poverty and climate change in 2016-17".—[*Written Answers*, 25 January 2016, S4W-29241.]

I remind the minister of an answer that the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights gave to the Parliament three months ago. He said:

"this year we are spending £119 million on dealing with fuel poverty".—[*Official Report*, 28 October 2015; c 19.]

The environment minister, in answer to a topical question from Tavish Scott last month, also referred to

"a budget of £119 million"—[*Official Report*, 15 December 2015; c 5.]

The budget is £119 million this year and £103 million next year: there has been a £16 million slash, which is a 13 per cent cut. That is disproportionate and regressive.

Fuel poverty is bad, not just for people's pockets but for their health, and it leads to further pressure on our precious national health service. The Commission on Housing and Wellbeing said:

"a cold home is neither conducive to good health nor a satisfactory learning environment for children".

The director of the Royal College of Nursing Scotland said:

"It's indefensible that cold, hard-to-heat homes continue to leave the most vulnerable in our society at the mercy of cold weather each winter",

and WWF points to the worst figures for winter deaths in more than a decade.

When nearly half of pensioner couples live in fuel poverty, as Age Scotland warns, it is pivotal that we rethink our approach. When senior citizens are hospitalised with aggravated heart diseases, strokes and flu, we must look at the preventable causes and prevent them from happening. When people old and young alike are facing increased risk of mental health problems because they are unable to live in a warm, comfortable environment, we should be more proactive in our prevention strategy.

Edison once said:

"The doctor of the future will give no medicine but will interest his patients in the care of the human frame, in diet and in the cause and prevention of disease."

How true and appropriate that is—100 years later—to tackle fuel poverty and cold homes today.

Last year, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence published its recommendations for dealing with the health risks associated with cold homes. I look forward to hearing from the minister about whether the Scottish intercollegiate guidelines network is taking on any of those recommendations and what progress has been made.

This Scottish Liberal Democrat debate requires us to look realistically at the ugly truth of the condition of our homes. Fuel poverty is not just a matter of infrastructure, energy or technology, but a matter of providing people across Scotland—old and young, and in rural and urban settings—with the security that they need to have a fulfilling and comfortable life. A brighter, healthier life for Scots and a reduction of the burden on the hard-pressed national health service: all that can be achieved by tackling fuel poverty.

The Government needs to think outside the box. It needs to spend to save—it must spend to reduce fuel poverty and the financial burden on the NHS. We urge all parties to commit their efforts in easing the burden of those families on the lowest incomes that pay the biggest share on heating. I call on the Scottish Government to reverse the fuel poverty spending cut, join the other parties in reassessing the 2016 fuel poverty target set by this Parliament, and commit to additional measures that will enjoy cross-party

support to achieve a warmer, healthier home for every person in Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that there is cross-party recognition of the social, economic and environmental damage that is caused by fuel poverty and energy-inefficient homes; is deeply concerned that national statistics published in December 2015 stated there had been “no real change” in the level of fuel poverty in 2014, with more than one-in-three households in fuel poverty and one-in-10 in extreme fuel poverty; believes that, with 845,000 households currently affected, the Scottish Government will miss its statutory target to eradicate fuel poverty by November 2016; considers that this will be even harder to achieve should, as proposed in the draft budget, spending on fuel poverty programmes be reduced in 2016-17, and demands that the Scottish Government reverse this cut, revise its 2016 fuel poverty target, examine whether its definition of fuel poverty needs to be updated and commit to additional measures to lift people out of fuel poverty in order to lead to warmer homes, lower energy bills, improved health and reduced carbon emissions.

16:02

**The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess):** I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. I agree with some of Jim Hume’s comments, including that Scotland is an energy-rich country and that there is no room for fuel poverty.

Tackling inequality is at the heart of this Scottish Government’s commitment to create a fairer country for all. Nothing is more important to me or this Government than responding to the pressures that individuals and families face across Scotland. There is no complacency about the issue whatsoever.

We know that fuel poverty is an issue for the thousands of households that are struggling to pay fuel bills and to keep their homes warm. We have seen more and more people being pushed into fuel poverty as they have tried to cope with unaffordable and rising fuel prices over the past few years. Powers over the regulation of the energy market remain reserved to the UK Government, but I assure members that the Scottish Government is doing all that we can by taking action on the one contributing factor to fuel poverty that we have control over: energy efficiency.

**Jim Hume:** The minister said that this Government is doing everything that it can. The cabinet secretary and another minister stated that £119 million was going into tackling fuel poverty, but within just over a month, that figure has been reduced to £103 million. Will the minister explain that 13 per cent disproportionate cut?

**Margaret Burgess:** I will. As I have explained before, in the current year, we set aside and are spending £119 million on fuel poverty. The £119

million figure included £15 million of consequentials that we received from the UK Government for the green deal home improvement scheme. With no warning to or consultation with the Scottish Government, the UK Government stopped the scheme, which meant that we did not get that £15 million. We have also had our overall budget cut by the UK Government.

We have asked this before, but if Jim Hume or anyone else in this chamber can tell us where to get that £15 million from our existing budgets, we are willing to listen. I have explained why the £15 million is no longer available, but we have maintained the rest of the budget—the £103 million—as we said that we would. No one has yet come across and said where to find the £15 million that has been taken from the Scottish Government budget.

Since 2009, we have allocated more than half a billion pounds to make Scotland’s homes more energy efficient, and more than 700,000 households have received assistance to help them heat their homes affordably. Most of those are our most vulnerable households.

I have already mentioned the £119 million budget allocation for 2015-16. Around 80 per cent of that is grant funding, which is targeted at the poorest households in Scotland to make their homes warmer and cheaper to heat.

**Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con):** Since the draft budget was published in December, on how many occasions has the minister formally requested more money for fuel poverty from the Deputy First Minister?

**Margaret Burgess:** The overall budget of Scotland has been cut. We got the same allocation this year as we got last year. There are pressures on all the budgets. [*Interruption.*]

I heard what the member asked. His Government, in the UK, cut our overall budget, taking £15 million away from our fuel poverty budget. Gavin Brown now asks us to find that money again. I ask him and others to show us where in the budget we can find that £15 million.

**Gavin Brown rose—**

**Margaret Burgess:** I will take no more interventions.

When I came in here, I heard the Liberals shouting for more money for education. I now hear them shouting for more money for fuel poverty. I ask them to show us where to get that money in a fixed budget. If they can do that, we will consider it in detail. We continue to demonstrate our commitment to tackle fuel poverty head-on by maintaining the expenditure that is available in the budgets that are under our control. It has been a very tough financial climate.

The increase in fuel poverty, since the target was introduced, can be explained by above-inflation energy price increases. Our figures indicate that, if fuel prices had risen only in line with inflation between 2002 and 2014, the fuel poverty rate for 2014 would have been around 9.5 per cent, instead of 35 per cent. The latest statistics show that, without our sustained and long-term commitment of funding, that figure would be much higher. We are also looking very closely at the recommendation of the poverty adviser referred to by Jim Hume in his opening remarks. We said that we would look carefully at all the recommendations and respond to each and every one of them.

Our long-term investment is helping to improve the energy efficiency of Scotland's homes. The share of homes rated with an energy performance certificate of band C and above has increased by 71 per cent since 2010, and by 11 per cent in the last year. That helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while also helping people heat their homes.

Our record on energy efficiency demonstrates that it has always been a priority for this Government. We know that it is the most sustainable way to keep energy bills affordable and cut greenhouse gas emissions. That is why we have designated energy efficiency a national infrastructure priority and committed to the development of Scotland's energy efficiency programme—SEEP for short.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** Will the minister give way?

**Margaret Burgess:** I cannot take an intervention; I am in my last minute.

Work is under way to develop SEEP, and we continue to engage with stakeholders including the fuel poverty strategic working group. We believe that this is a real opportunity to transform our approach to retrofitting existing buildings across Scotland. SEEP will integrate action on domestic and non-domestic energy efficiency for the first time, and it will look for opportunities to develop district heat networks.

Through the new Scottish energy efficiency programme we are committed to continuing our support for vulnerable households. We want the norm to be that every household and business across Scotland invests in energy efficiency improvements. To help us achieve that, we will seek to leverage private investment to support the development of loan schemes to help households and businesses.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please bring your remarks to a close.

**Margaret Burgess:** To conclude, in my remarks I have set out what the Scottish Government has done, is doing and plans to do in the future to tackle fuel poverty. I believe that that demonstrates our firm commitment to improving energy efficiency and eradicating fuel poverty in Scotland.

I move amendment S4M-15432.3, to leave out from "is deeply concerned" to end and insert:

"recognises the Scottish Government's commitment to eradicate fuel poverty as far as reasonably practicable through support and funding within the powers available to the Scottish Ministers, but notes that the Scottish Government has no control over the above-inflation price increases by energy companies that have pushed up fuel bills; notes the latest fuel poverty statistics published in the Scottish House Condition Survey, which show that the efforts of the Scottish Government have helped to contain fuel poverty levels in Scotland that would have been around 9.5%, instead of 35%, if fuel prices had only risen in line with inflation between 2002 and 2014; calls on energy companies to pass on wholesale cost savings to customers at the earliest opportunity and to the fullest extent possible for both gas and electricity customers; welcomes the Scottish Government's continued investment in energy efficiency and fuel poverty and the contrast with the UK Government's withdrawal of any taxpayer-funded support for fuel poverty in England since 2013; recognises that the Scottish Government has allocated over half a billion pounds since 2009 to fuel poverty and energy efficiency programmes, helping the most vulnerable people in society heat their homes affordably, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and supporting jobs; welcomes that the Scottish Government has maintained current budgets in 2016-17 by allocating more than £103 million to tackle fuel poverty and climate change next year in the face of ongoing spending pressures and UK Government cuts; welcomes that this funding will be used to help install energy efficiency measures in 14,000 homes, building on the more than 900,000 measures delivered since 2008 and that this record investment is reflected in the big improvements in the energy efficiency of Scotland's housing, with the share of homes rated EPC band C and above having increased by 71% since 2010; further welcomes that the Scottish Government has designated energy efficiency as a National Infrastructure Priority, supported by a commitment to multiyear funding and new powers to design and implement Energy Company Obligations in Scotland, and is therefore providing a long-term commitment to tackling fuel poverty head on."

16:09

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** Last year, the number of excess winter deaths in Scotland was the highest in more than a decade—a staggering 4,060. "Excess winter deaths" is an uncomfortable phrase. It means the number of people who die during the winter months, compared to the average throughout the rest of the year. The World Health Organization suggests that at least 30 per cent of those 4,000 extra deaths can be attributed to cold, damp housing.

I say that simply to highlight how much fuel poverty matters. For some people, high bills are a source of annoyance; for others, they mean a real

struggle to balance competing financial demands; for others still, they lead to choices that can prove fatal. The Existing Homes Alliance Scotland highlights that

“Spending time in a cold, damp house can aggravate conditions such as heart disease, strokes and flu and increase the risk of mental health problems.”

It also increases the risk

“of illness and death among older people, young children and those with a disability.”

As the Liberal Democrat motion before us this afternoon highlights, more than a third of Scottish households live in fuel poverty—that is, they need to spend more than 10 per cent of their income on gas, electricity or fuel bills. One in 10 is in extreme poverty—having to spend 20 per cent of their income just to keep warm. Those are damning figures.

When we look at the statistics in more detail, they are even more worrying. More than half of people affected are pensioners. More than 70 per cent live in social or private rented accommodation. As always, it is the most vulnerable in our society who suffer the most.

It was all so different 15 years ago. In 2001, the Liberal Democrat-Labour Administration led the way—while apparently winning support from the Scottish National Party—in saying that we could abolish that blight on our society and setting the target to end fuel poverty entirely by November this year. We were united in our expectation that our political commitment could make a real difference. How many of us could have predicted that, after nine years of SNP government, we would have gone into reverse and not abolished fuel poverty but increased it?

Nine years after coming to power, the SNP’s record is that a third of all Scots come home to a cold, damp house.

**Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Ken Macintosh:** I will, for Mr Don.

**Nigel Don:** I wonder what fraction of those whom Mr Macintosh has just mentioned, when they drew up that target, expected fuel prices to increase quite disproportionately over the period.

**Ken Macintosh:** Either you sign up to the targets and claim credit, as you constantly do, for the work that you are doing, or not at all. I expected better from Mr Don than the pathetic excuses that we are hearing from the SNP today.

The amendment from the Scottish Government, which is trying to excuse any responsibility or culpability, is one of the most feeble and apologetic that we have ever witnessed. Yet again, it is all either the UK Government’s fault or

the power companies’ fault; it is “nothing to do with us, gov. We’ve done all we could.” I point out to Mr Don, however, that we discovered—it was sneaked out in the budget, in fact—that the SNP is not doing all it could. Far from it. As Alan Ferguson, chair of the Existing Homes Alliance, said:

“Just a day after we learnt that there has been no progress in reducing the 35 per cent of Scottish households living in fuel poverty, the draft budget for ending cold homes is less than was available this year.”

We unearthed that fact, despite the Scottish Government trying to cover its tracks by comparing two sets of draft figures rather than using the final, or outturn, figures for the year. The SNP published figures that suggested an increase in the fuel poverty budget of £14 million. However, as the Scottish Parliament information centre—the Parliament’s own entirely independent researchers—revealed, using the final budget figures, the truth is that Scotland faces a reduction of around £15 million in that budget.

Those in the sector who have to deal with the day-to-day problems that are caused by inadequate housing have not been fooled by the SNP’s inadequate response.

**Mike MacKenzie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Ken Macintosh:** I will in a second.

John Swinney’s budget decision not only came out the day after those terrible fuel poverty figures did, it came out a week after the First Minister flew back from the international climate change conference in Paris claiming to have embedded climate change in the SNP draft budget. I would be delighted to hear Mr MacKenzie explain that one away.

**Mike MacKenzie:** I am grateful to Mr Macintosh for taking an intervention. The SNP Government has spent over £500 million on fuel poverty measures since 2009. I am very interested to hear from Mr Macintosh how much Labour would have spent over that period, how much he suggests we spend within this budget and what he would cut in order to achieve the spending that is necessary to eradicate fuel poverty.

**Ken Macintosh:** I thought that the amendment was feeble, but that intervention was even worse. As part of the Government that, along with the Liberal Democrats, set this target, I believe that our record on fuel poverty, with the commitment to the central heating programme and the winter fuel allowance, is absolutely there for all to see.

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

**Ken Macintosh:** It bears comparison with the SNP's record. This is not just a social problem or about poverty—it is about the environment, too.

I will end on this note. It is very fitting that we are having this debate in January, which is named after Janus, the two-faced god of Roman times. I hope that Mr MacKenzie goes away and reads his Roman history to learn a lesson there, too.

I move amendment S4M-15432.2, to insert at end:

“; recognises the particular fuel poverty challenges faced by rural communities, and commits to delivering a Scottish warm homes bill that will create jobs, tackle fuel poverty and mean that Scotland lives up to its aspirations to be a world leader in tackling climate change”.

16:15

**Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con):** I congratulate the Liberal Democrats on bringing forward this extremely important debate on a subject that, I think, has become a bit of an Achilles' heel for the Scottish Government. Its amendment and its contributions so far have been pathetic and have told a feeble and lame tale of a Government whose record in this area is genuinely poor. That is not just political speak; objectively speaking, its record has been poor.

It is absolutely clear to anyone who can count that we will miss this target; it is absolutely clear that we will miss it by a considerable distance; and it is absolutely clear that this Government has no plan for rectifying that failure. It is simply business as usual, with no hint of regret from the Scottish Government. It wants us to “recognise” its “commitment”; it wants to blame the UK Government and the energy companies; and it makes it clear in its amendment—this is my favourite bit—that

“if fuel prices had only risen in line with inflation”

in every single year

“between 2002 and 2014”

the target would still have been missed, just by not as much as we are going to miss it.

The Government also has the audacity to refer, at the end of its amendment, to

“a long-term commitment to tackling fuel poverty head on.”

If this is the Scottish Government tackling the matter head on for the long term, I would genuinely hate to see what it is not tackling head on. We will probably hear Nicola Sturgeon at First Minister's question time either tomorrow or next week say that the Government is not going to fail to meet the target; it is simply going to reprofile it and, by doing so, meet it quite carefully.

It is perfectly fair to say, as Mr MacKenzie has said, that the Scottish Government does not have direct control over certain areas of the target; for example, it does not control energy prices or wages. However, when this Government came to power in 2007, it accepted the target in its entirety. It did not make any excuses; it did not say, for example, “We'll accept the target as long as energy prices do not rise and as long as wages rise in line with inflation.” It accepted the target, and it has accepted it in every year since coming into Government. It has taken responsibility for it, and it is therefore ultimately accountable for failing to meet it. With only a few months to go, it cannot blame its failure to meet the target on the increase in prices, when it has been apparent for some time now that it was not going to meet it.

**Mike MacKenzie:** I have a great deal of respect for Mr Brown's financial literacy. Can he lay out the Conservative's plans for eradicating fuel poverty and tell me how much they will cost and what part of the Scottish budget he would cut to achieve their aims?

**Gavin Brown:** Mr MacKenzie's approach seems to be: if two bad interventions do not make the point, try three.

I sat on a cross-party committee with some of Mr MacKenzie's colleagues, some of whom are in the chamber this afternoon, and it was apparent to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee in 2009 that we needed a sea change. Having listened to experts such as Energy Action Scotland, we produced a report to that effect, and we all signed up to that sea change. We were told by the then minister that the Scottish Government had made that sea change and was going to put in place measures that would create it over time. That was in 2009, and it clearly and quite simply has not happened.

We have heard about the number of households in fuel poverty, but the fact is that not only are we failing to meet the target but we have gone backwards. When this Government came to power, 26.5 per cent of households were in fuel poverty; today, the figure is 34.9 per cent. In 2007, 7.6 per cent of households were in extreme fuel poverty; today, the figure is 9.5 per cent. It is therefore pretty obvious that we have not been on track for quite some time, and what the Government has failed to do is put the money behind this.

In 2009-10, it put in £68.3 million. It was obvious then that we were not moving towards the target, so the Government increased the amount to £68.5 million. It then cut it to £58 million, then it went to £67 million and then £66 million. It remained broadly static for five years when it was obvious that we were failing to meet the targets. The Government increased the amount in 2014-15 and



last year, but now that it is blatantly obvious that we are not going to hit the target, what is the Government doing? It is cutting the amount once again.

I was genuinely disappointed when I asked the minister quite simply how many times she had asked the Deputy First Minister for more money and tried to champion the cause to make sure that she is fighting for the space and the resources that it deserves, and the answer, which was heard by all who were listening, was none.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, please.

**Gavin Brown:** It is pretty obvious that the minister has not asked a single time since the draft budget was published for more resources for this, even though she claimed in her speech that nothing is more important. That is a huge disappointment from the Scottish Government.

I move amendment S4M-15432.1, to leave out from “demands” to end and insert:

“calls on the Scottish Government to publish as soon as possible a comprehensive and credible action plan for tackling fuel poverty.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move on to the open debate. I ask for speeches of up to four minutes from the four open debate speakers, please.

16:21

**Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** If we left the fuel poor to the Tories’ care, they would not get anything to help see them through the winter. As for listening to the economical-with-the-truth Liberal Democrats, I found it sickening. The realities are very different from the picture that they paint. There is no one-size-fits-all solution and in no sense, for not one minute, can the problem be solved in a simple way; it is much more complex than they say.

**Jim Hume:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Rob Gibson:** I assure members that I am going to talk about some of the effects in my constituency—without intervention.

My constituency in Sutherland has some of the most fuel-poor people in the country, and one of the areas with the lowest income quartile. They have to buy off-grid gas from tanks, they have to pay 2p more for electricity from the grid, until recently they had to pay more for petrol and diesel, and they have to pay extra charges for parcel delivery. All those things affect people’s ability to decide to invest in improving their homes and that must be taken into account in this debate. Members may cry about the fact that there is one

particular measure that they disagree with, but that does not take into account many of the factors that I mentioned, over which we have absolutely no control.

In the UK Parliament, my colleague Mike Weir, the MP for Angus, got cross-party support for bringing forward the winter fuel payment so that people who are off the grid could get the money earlier and it could help to pay for their fuel, but it was talked out. Now, thankfully, the winter fuel payment is to become part of the Scottish Parliament’s powers. The rural fuel poverty task force, which will meet next month, will be looking at welfare reform and resources including the winter fuel payment. During the year, it might be possible for the Scottish Government to bring forward winter fuel payments in areas where the climate is wettest—

**Ken Macintosh:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Rob Gibson:** I do not have enough time, and I have heard enough from people who use words like the member did. I will certainly not give him any more space to use evil language.

The situation is that we will try to do practical things. We need to recognise that the improvement measures that have been taken since 2009 have been introduced in conditions where our overall budgets have been cut. That is not taken into account in the Liberal Democrat motion, which is sanctimonious, as usual, and cut off from the reality.

We have excellent examples in our constituencies of district heating systems. How many have been set up in other constituencies? The one in Wick, related to the distillery there, is excellent. However, we have a situation where in Thurso, Wick and various other places we rely on gas from tanks, which comes by road.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close soon, please, Mr Gibson.

**Rob Gibson:** That provision is under threat because the gas will come not from Liverpool but—I believe—Canvey Island. That is just one of the things that affect the cost of fuel in my area.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, please.

**Rob Gibson:** None of those details has come out from the speeches by the unionist politicians so far, and therefore that makes this debate a farce.

16:25

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** I certainly think that this debate is far from being “a farce”. If the Scottish Government were to address

the issues and the levers that are in its control, we would not be quite so seriously in fuel poverty or missing our targets this year, as we are.

This debate, which has been brought to Parliament by the Liberal Democrats, is important because the Scottish fuel poverty statistics are a scandal, with 34.9 per cent of households affected in 2014. As we have heard from members, those households include families on low incomes with small children, older people and people with disabilities or health problems. It is appalling to learn that there were in 2014-15—as Ken Macintosh highlighted—4,060 excess winter deaths. If we compare that with the lower figures for such deaths in significantly colder countries like Germany and Sweden, we can see that it is undeniable that more must be done.

**Mike MacKenzie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Claudia Beamish:** No. I am sorry. I do not have time for interventions.

As we have heard, the Scottish Government will not meet its 2016 target. I would be very interested to hear from the minister in her closing speech what the Scottish Government is going to be doing for the infrastructure project that we hear so much about. I look forward to hearing that.

As our amendment points out, and as Jim Hume stressed, the rural fuel poverty situation is more grave. Rob Gibson also highlighted that situation. The UK fuel poverty monitor showed that rural households are more than twice as likely as urban households to be in extreme fuel poverty, and the fuel poverty decline is less pronounced in rural areas. For remote communities that are off-grid, more expensive fuels are their only option. Older dwellings are hard to heat and insulate, and there are higher fuel costs as we all know, higher refurbishment costs, higher living costs and, often, lower incomes—as in the Borders, in my region—which can be a slippery slope into fuel poverty and the ruthless choices that many families have to make.

As Rob Gibson said about Wick and the distillery there, district heating is a good system for communities. However, there is not at the moment the option for low-income families to have biomass boilers or ground-source or air-source heat pumps. That could be addressed by the Scottish Government very quickly.

I also have concerns about the problem of energy efficiency in the private rented sector. That problem is widespread, particularly in old tenement buildings in large cities, and has a significant effect on the risk of fuel poverty. There is currently a huge gap in that regard between the private rented sector and the public rented sector due to the lack of standards in the private rented

sector. In 2014, I lodged an amendment to the Housing (Scotland) Bill to face that issue head on and to require landlords to ensure that their properties adhere to a minimum energy efficiency standard, with penalties for failure to meet that standard. However, the amendment was labelled “unnecessary” by the minister, and we heard that the issue would be considered by the regulation of energy efficiency in private sector homes working group. The postponement of the REEPS consultation is deeply disappointing. Can the minister explain the reason for that delay?

To change the current situation, we need to fill the funding gap. We have heard from members in the debate what that gap is.

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

**Claudia Beamish:** Again, it is in the power of the Scottish Government to do something about that. It needs to prioritise energy efficiency and renewable energy issues, and support low-income families in order to address fuel poverty.

Scottish Labour will develop a warm homes bill. Given that 80 per cent of our homes will still exist in 2050, our bill will aim to develop, among other initiatives, a retrofitting programme that will address fuel poverty, bring jobs to communities and tackle climate change.

16:29

**Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** As the member for Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch, I know only too well the effects of fuel poverty. The rural and remote nature of the Highlands and Islands means that we have the highest risk of fuel poverty in the country. We have suffered from that for a considerable time, although the SNP Government has made inroads into that.

It has already been said that, since 2013, the Scottish Government has spent a quarter of a billion pounds on dealing with fuel poverty, and that it intends to allocate £103 million for fuel poverty programmes for 2016-17. It remains firmly committed to eradication of fuel poverty.

The issue is very local for me: fuel poverty affects twice as many Skye residents and west Highlanders in my constituency as are affected anywhere else in Scotland. The phrase “to eat or heat” has been used many times in the debate over the years, but that is the harsh truth for many people.

It is therefore clear to me that the north-west Highlands needs to be treated as a priority. We are currently in a restricted financial state, which has been caused by the austerity that is being driven by the Westminster Government. The

Tories, the Liberals and Labour need to recognise that fact. Would it not be nice if just once they accepted that the cuts are driven by the Tories in London and that that has had a knock-on effect on our budgets in Scotland?

I am arguing for priority for the north and the west in Scotland. The new regional approach under the warmer homes Scotland scheme is welcome, but more needs to be done for off-gas-grid areas.

**Gavin Brown:** On the knock-on effect, does Dave Thompson accept that the percentage cut to the fuel poverty budget is greater than the change to the overall Scottish budget next year?

**Dave Thompson:** Gavin Brown is incorrect. As the minister explained earlier, the budget is going down from £119 million in the current year to £103 million, which is a £16 million reduction, because of the cut to the home energy efficiency programmes for Scotland. That was a Tory decision that was made in London. Does Mr Brown accept that? There is no answer. Okay: he does not accept it. The Tories do not accept any responsibility whatsoever.

**Gavin Brown:** My point was that, in percentage terms, the cut in the fuel poverty budget is far greater than the change to the Scottish Government's budget. Does the member accept that that is the case?

**Dave Thompson:** I do not accept that that is the case. Gavin Brown did not answer the question and did not accept that the cuts are being driven by the austerity agenda of his party in London, which is ably supported by Labour and the Lib Dems in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have one minute, Mr Thompson.

**Dave Thompson:** Those parties never criticise the Tories—which does not surprise me in the least.

I will go back to the main point. Energy Action Scotland advises that remote, rural and off-gas-grid areas need to be better served by the main programmes—in particular, with supported measures for hard-to-heat homes and houses that use liquefied petroleum gas and oil. I support that.

Next year's energy efficiency budget needs to take into account the problems in the north and the west.

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

**Dave Thompson:** Those areas need to be targeted—specifically the rural areas, and particularly those that are not on the gas grid, because people on the gas grid have a huge advantage over those who are not on it.

16:33

**Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP):** Fuel poverty is certainly a complex issue that is full of misconceptions. It does not affect just pensioners or individuals who rely on benefits: a fuel-poor home is the result of a combination of the household income being below the poverty line and the property having higher-than-typical energy costs.

We received a briefing from Scottish Gas for the debate, which highlights that it recognises that affordability is a significant concern for customers and understands that energy costs can be a major component of a business's expenditure. Energy costs are certainly not just about business; they are also a huge concern for domestic customers. That point has been brought up in the debate but, unfortunately, Gavin Brown refused to accept that in his comments and just tried to put all the blame on the Scottish Government. It is clear that the Scottish Government does not have responsibility for or power over energy costs.

**Jim Hume:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Stuart McMillan:** I only have four minutes, so I cannot take an intervention today.

The Scottish Government does not have power over energy costs. Scottish Gas clearly recognises that above-inflation rises are an issue but, unfortunately, Gavin Brown and the Conservatives do not.

Fuel poverty is often more acute in off-gas-grid rural areas, as my colleagues Rob Gibson and Dave Thompson highlighted. Household energy bills in such areas are, on average, 27 per cent higher. Again, energy-inefficient homes play a big role.

Important drivers of fuel poverty are outwith the Scottish Government's control, but the Scottish Government is determined to do all that it can to tackle fuel poverty. In a constrained financial climate—because of cuts from Westminster—the Scottish Government has preserved the resources that are available for energy efficiency. The draft budget figures that were published in December show an increase of £14 million on the fuel poverty budget in the draft budget last year—an increase from £89 million to £103 million to tackle fuel poverty and climate change and to improve the condition of Scotland's homes.

**Ken Macintosh:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Stuart McMillan:** I only have four minutes. I am sorry. I usually take interventions, but not today.

Since 2009, the SNP Government has allocated more than half a billion pounds to a raft of fuel

poverty and energy efficiency programmes to help the most vulnerable people in our society to heat their homes affordably. Many Opposition members seem to have missed the point that more than 900,000 energy efficiency measures have been taken since 2008.

Clearly there is still more work to be done, but the Opposition parties have to acknowledge the work that has been undertaken. The Scottish Government has spent more than £500 million, and the spending on domestic energy efficiency has already made hundreds of thousands of homes warmer and cheaper to heat, and has helped to mitigate the rise in fuel poverty.

In September, the Scottish Government launched a new fuel poverty scheme, which aims to help up to 28,000 more households to stay warm over the next seven years. I could talk about so much more, but my time is curtailed so I will leave it at that.

16:37

**Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con):** I welcome this opportunity to discuss fuel poverty because it is so important for everyone to have affordable access to the energy that we all need, especially in the depths of winter. Fuel poverty affects in particular older people, people with disabilities that keep them at home and families on low incomes.

Although the exact situations might differ, it is right to say that the three main factors in fuel poverty are relatively low disposable incomes, high prices for energy and poor levels of energy efficiency in homes. Colleagues from across the chamber have made many points in addressing the issues, and several options are worth considering in detail. However, I will take a slightly different tack in order to broaden the debate further.

When it comes to addressing the problems that are caused by low disposable incomes, the solution obviously lies in measures that lead to increased levels of income and more of it being disposable. We must therefore direct help accurately to those who need it most at the same time as we create the conditions for economic growth that will sustainably increase employment opportunities and raise incomes in the long term. As for the disposable element of income, it is clear that we should help people to keep more of the money that they earn by increasing the personal allowance and keeping taxes low, when possible.

As for the problems that are associated with high prices for energy, there is certainly work to be done, but we have to ensure that it involves more than just demands that prices be lowered and that Government task forces be set up. As we all know,

the energy market is complex and people can be reluctant to switch providers because there is a lot of confusion around the relationships between costs, tariffs, customers and end prices. Many vulnerable energy consumers who end up in fuel poverty can be stuck overpaying for their energy when a better deal could be had if only one was easier to find and secure. For example, customers might pay over the odds when they are stuck on prepayment meters with higher tariffs than direct debit customers pay.

The point that I am getting at is that we need to explore ways to open up and harness consumer power by making switching providers easier.

**Mike MacKenzie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Cameron Buchanan:** Thank you—but I think that we have heard enough of Mike MacKenzie's interventions.

Such pressure being put on energy providers can play an important role in reducing prices across the board so that the demand on peoples' incomes can be reduced.

Many of my fellow MSPs have rightly pointed out that the energy efficiency of homes is a crucial factor in fuel poverty and an important target if we are to tackle the issue. There are a few worthwhile programmes, but it is worth our while to broaden the debate to see a wider view of the problems.

It is right that newly built homes should be as well insulated as possible so that their occupants do not waste money on expensive fuel bills for heat that is simply lost. For that to have a meaningful impact, though, the new homes need to be built in the first place. As I have said before, we need actively to encourage more housebuilding. At the moment, the system is simply too cumbersome to deliver the level of house building that we need, with the outcome that we are making slow progress on energy efficiency and, therefore, on fuel poverty.

Accordingly, I would like to underline my agreement that we need a comprehensive plan for tackling fuel poverty, and I support the amendment in Gavin Brown's name. Preventing fuel poverty is an ambition that we must all set our minds to so that the best solutions can be found. However, we must be clear that that should involve more than setting targets. To make lasting progress, we must create the conditions that allow the three primary issues of disposable income, fuel prices and energy efficiency to be tackled for the long term. To do that, we must focus on the causes as well as the symptoms.

16:40

**Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab):** Over the past few months, I have taken part in a few debates on housing in which it has been exasperating, to say the least, to hear the minister and her backbenchers go through linguistic contortions in order to defend their record. Time after time, I have listened to them either simply deny the crisis or try semantic gymnastics in order to pat themselves on the back, despite their continued failure to address the crisis that they have presided over.

This afternoon, they have surpassed themselves in their verbal dexterity with their attempts to deflect attention from the SNP's responsibility for the current fuel poverty situation. Stuart McMillan and Dave Thompson did extremely well in that regard, but the gold medal must go to Mike MacKenzie. However, I think that we have to put Rob Gibson down as a DNF—did not finish.

There is so much to refute in the SNP's amendment that it would take the whole time for the debate to debunk it all and I only have four minutes, so I will concentrate on asking a simple question: what purpose does the Scottish Government think is served by trying to deflect attention away from the situation here and towards the situation south of the border? Does the Scottish Government really think that people freezing in their homes in Scotland will be warmed up by the thought of less money being spent in England? I am pretty sure that most people who are affected by fuel poverty in Scotland will recognise that that section in the Government's amendment is an utter red herring. That might warm the nationalists' cockles, but it does nothing to address the reality of fuel poverty in Scotland.

**Mike MacKenzie:** Will the member give way?

**Michael McMahon:** I will let Mr MacKenzie in later, if I have a chance.

To hear the minister's explanation beggars belief. To explain that a consequential did not emerge and that the SNP has done nothing to address that but has simply passed on that reduction clearly shows that the SNP is much happier managing austerity than trying to tackle it.

**Margaret Burgess:** I will ask again the question that Mike MacKenzie asked. The UK cut our budget by £15 million and people criticise us for passing on that cut. Can Michael McMahon tell us where we can find that £15 million in our budget?

**Michael McMahon:** Given the budget that the Scottish Government has and the priorities that it sets, it is its responsibility to ensure that it meets the targets that it sets. We will make the argument that the Scottish Government has decided to pass

on the cut rather than meet its target. That is its responsibility. The simple fact is that Scotland has the highest rates of fuel poverty in the UK, but the budget that the Scottish Government has set does nothing to address that.

Almost 60 per cent of single-pensioner households and more than 40 per cent of pensioner couples live in fuel poverty. Fuel poverty among older people can be particularly acute in rural areas, with more than 70 per cent of households in the Western Isles living in fuel poverty. Disabled people are twice as likely to live in poverty as non-disabled people, which makes it more likely that they will experience fuel poverty.

Living in a cold home has negative impacts on children's health and wellbeing, and children who live in private rented accommodation are more commonly affected by fuel poverty than children in other tenures. The private rented sector has a greater proportion of energy-inefficient homes than other tenures, but we have heard nothing from the Government this afternoon about what it would do to address that problem. It simply says, "Who cares? We spend more money on the problem than they do in England." What a disgraceful and narrow nationalist attitude to a problem that is the Scottish Government's responsibility and which must be addressed by the Scottish Government.

16:44

**Margaret Burgess:** This has certainly been an afternoon of "SNP bad", with members on all sides of the chamber suggesting that the SNP Government has done nothing to tackle fuel poverty. That is simply not the case. We have done more than any previous Government in the Parliament to tackle fuel poverty. We are not complacent about fuel poverty. It is a real issue and it is a real concern for our constituents—for my constituents as well as for those of many other members.

**Michael McMahon:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Margaret Burgess:** I will take only one intervention, because I have things to say.

**Michael McMahon:** Will the minister go to the Deputy First Minister and ask him to find the £15 million from within the budget so that she can do her job?

**Margaret Burgess:** Oh, here we go. Gavin Brown suggested something, and—

**Michael McMahon:** No answer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Let us hear the answer.

**Margaret Burgess:** The Labour Party has picked it up, so that is Labour's question of the afternoon.

What I would say to Gavin Brown is that we know what the Tories' answer to fuel poverty is. Yes, I will say what they are doing at the UK level: the Tories' answer to fuel poverty is—

**Michael McMahon:** Was that a no?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order, Mr McMahon.

**Margaret Burgess:** Their answer is to make everyone pay, including the fuel poor. They have no answer either. None of the other parties represented in the chamber has come forward with a budget. I can say to them that people in low-income groups—with whom I have worked all my life—understand what a budget is, and they understand competing priorities. They know, when they are competing with high priorities all over, how they have to set up their budgets.

**Jim Hume:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Margaret Burgess:** No—I am taking no more interventions.

We have asked the Opposition to tell us where we should adjust our budget. What are we spending too much money on? Is it housing? Is it health? Is it education? What are we spending the money on that Opposition members are telling us we should not be spending it on?

The Government is listening to stakeholders in the sector, and we are investing in fuel poverty measures. We are providing a long-term commitment to tackling fuel poverty—and, yes, we will tackle it head on. We are investing unprecedented levels of funding.

**Gavin Brown:** Will the minister give way?

**Margaret Burgess:** No—I am taking no more interventions.

We are investing unprecedented levels of funding, significantly more than any previous Government in Scotland. We have invested more than £500 million since 2009 on a raft of fuel poverty and energy efficiency programmes. This year we made available a record £119 million.

That investment not only supports those in fuel poverty; it is supporting about 1,300 full-time jobs across the Scottish economy next year. We know that there are hundreds more people employed in the industry now than there were in 2009. We also know that the industry welcomes the investment that has been made by the Scottish Government and that it values its role in supporting jobs.

Our efforts are paying off, with nearly one in every three households having received measures to make their homes more energy efficient since 2008. The variety of schemes under the HEEPS banner today gives households a wider range of support than ever before.

Rob Gibson and Dave Thompson spoke about the particular difficulties in rural areas, and we are looking very closely at that. Rural areas do get more per head of population than other areas, because the issues there are recognised.

**Ken Macintosh:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Margaret Burgess:** I will take one further intervention.

**Ken Macintosh:** In taking credit for all the achievements over the years, including the credit that he tried to claim for the £119 million that was spent last year, did Alex Neil thank the UK Government for the money, or does he only mention the UK Government when he is blaming it for cuts?

**Margaret Burgess:** That is an absolutely ridiculous question to ask when we are talking about something as serious as fuel poverty in rural areas and how we are trying to tackle it.

**Members:** Oh, come on!

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Margaret Burgess:** We are trying to tackle fuel poverty, and we know that we need to do more. That is why we are still working with the rural fuel poverty task force. As well as that task force, we have the Scottish fuel poverty forum. We are working with all of those organisations to come together and develop our national scheme.

Only last week Alex Neil announced a £14 million fund that will allow councils across Scotland to make homes, public buildings and businesses more energy efficient. That is part of Scotland's national energy efficiency programme—SEEP. That funding will be used to pilot new and innovative approaches to energy efficiency with community groups and businesses. It will help to improve warmth in buildings and homes; it will drive down energy bills; and it will work towards reaching climate change targets. Those initiatives can then be taken forward when SEEP is rolled out fully in 2018.

The development of energy efficiency as a national infrastructure priority will create transformational change in improving the energy efficiency and heating of homes, businesses and public buildings in Scotland, reducing fuel bills and greenhouse gas emissions.

Through SEEP, we will introduce multiyear funding that will give our delivery partners the

certainty that they need to deliver ambitious energy efficiency projects. That demonstrates our long-term commitment to tackling fuel poverty.

We have had successes to date, which have been hampered by many challenges. Above inflation price rises can explain the rises in fuel poverty.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can you draw to a close, please, minister?

**Margaret Burgess:** Alongside that, the UK Government's changes to the energy company obligation and the withdrawal of green deal support caused uncertainty and impacted on the delivery of many measures.

The only funding that was announced for fuel poverty and energy efficiency in the UK Government's spending review—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, please.

**Margaret Burgess:** —and autumn statement, as I said to Gavin Brown, was through energy supplier obligations in a regressive form of taxation.

We have achieved a great deal, despite the lack of support from the UK Government and despite rising fuel prices.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, please.

**Margaret Burgess:** This Government remains passionately committed to ending fuel poverty in Scotland. We will continue to push the boundaries and encourage innovative solutions to ensure that everyone in Scotland lives in a warm home that they can afford to heat.

16:51

**Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):** Fuel poverty is often mentioned in passing in debates on health and housing, for example, but the full Parliament has not had a dedicated fuel poverty debate outside members' business since April 2014. That is why we allocated time to debate it today.

Just as the Parliament came together to set a fuel poverty target in 2001, the Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that it now needs to come together to have a constructive, honest debate about how we are progressing against the Parliament's laudable and continuing ambition to eradicate fuel poverty.

The debate has been largely worth while, although—I have to say—there have been some interesting contributions. I welcome the support and commitment of other Opposition parties and

indeed the minister, who said that we are all still committed to the eradication of fuel poverty.

Ken Macintosh was right to highlight the excess winter deaths, and Claudia Beamish was right to point out the problems facing rural areas and off-grid customers. Gavin Brown was right when he said that its genuinely poor record on tackling fuel poverty is the Achilles' heel of the Scottish Government.

Rob Gibson said that fuel poverty is a complex problem and I agree; it is a complex problem. However, he then went on to give a very intemperate speech, which it would be best to gloss over. Dave Thompson seems to think that it is all Westminster's fault. I am happy to acknowledge, as Stuart McMillan said, that there are three key drivers of fuel poverty: fuel cost, low income and energy efficiency. However, contrary to Dave Thompson's assertion, all the Opposition members stated that in their speeches this afternoon. They then went on to focus on what we can affect here in our devolved Parliament.

Like Michael McMahon, I did not hear anything from the SNP about taking responsibility for the levers that it does control. I must take the minister to task—no one said that the SNP had done nothing for fuel poverty. However, I say to Margaret Burgess, "Have you done enough?" The answer is no, she has not. That is not just my verdict; it is the verdict of Energy Action Scotland, WWF and many other campaigners.

There has of course been general agreement that fuel poverty is an anathema. I said that we needed to have a constructive and honest debate but—truth be told—it has not been as frank as it could have been. It does not surprise me, although it always disappoints me, that the Government sticks true to form. The amendment in the minister's name calls for everyone else to do more while being overly self-congratulatory of the Government's own achievements.

It is a lengthy amendment that plays around with stats, deploys smoke and mirrors over the budget and of course resorts to the usual "if only" moan that we hear every day. We were elected by our constituents to apply ourselves assiduously and imaginatively to solving the problems that we face within the powers of this Parliament, but it seems that the SNP prefers to apply its imagination to drafting amendments.

Spending in 2016-17 is set to be lower than it has been in 2015-16; there is just no getting away from that fact. There is projected to be a reduction in funding next year in comparison with funding this year. Whether or not it was budgeted for in advance, that is a cut.

The minister asked how we should fund a reinstatement. There is a simple answer: it would

be preventative spend. It costs the health service £80 million a year to deal with the impact of cold homes. To quote Joe Biden,

“don’t tell me what you value, show me your budget, and I will tell you what you value.”

The Scottish Government has so far refused to acknowledge that it is set to miss its targets to ensure that, by November 2016, people are not living in fuel poverty. If we are to end the misery that is caused by fuel poverty, we need to start with a frank assessment of progress to date. The SNP’s refusal to admit that it is going to miss the target does not help us to move forward. The minister’s claim that the Government is tackling fuel poverty head-on prevents a new course of action from being taken now. I urge the SNP to agree that we can and must do more in Scotland, using our existing devolved powers, to tackle the scourge of fuel poverty.

I support the calls from the director of Energy Action Scotland, Norman Kerr, who has urged the Scottish ministers to acknowledge that the 2016 target will not be met and to start discussions on producing a new fuel poverty strategy for Scotland. We entirely support the eradication of fuel poverty, but ministers need to face up to the reality of what is happening and reconsider how best to address the problem.

Jim Hume, in opening the debate, set out the scale of the problem that still faces us in Scotland. In 2014 the level of fuel poverty was 34.9 per cent, which is 845,000 households, with 9.5 per cent in extreme fuel poverty. In 2013 the level was 35.8 per cent, so there has not been much progress. Well over three quarters of a million people are struggling each day to heat their homes.

Unaffordable fuel bills force households to restrict heating and live in a miserably cold home, with consequences for their physical and mental health and social wellbeing. High fuel bills force people to sacrifice spending on other essentials, including food, thereby compounding hardship with additional health implications.

Scotland has the highest rates of fuel poverty in the UK, and the wider social and economic impact of fuel poverty makes that a serious cause for concern. As Age Scotland outlined in its briefing, fuel poverty, while it affects us all, has a disproportionate impact on older people. More than half—58 per cent—of single-pensioner households and nearly half—44 per cent—of pensioner couples live in fuel poverty.

The World Health Organization attributes 30 per cent of preventable deaths to cold and poorly insulated housing. As Ken Macintosh noted, the excess mortality rates in Scotland reached a record high of 22,000 deaths last winter. Ill health caused by cold housing costs the NHS in Scotland

up to £80 million a year—that is where the money should come from, minister.

We support Labour’s amendment, as a warm homes bill could provide the necessary impetus. However, we do not need to wait for a bill to be introduced in the next session of Parliament. The Government has designated energy efficiency as a national infrastructure priority, and yet beyond that grand-sounding name there is no detail of what that means in reality, and no overall objective.

The Existing Homes Alliance Scotland points out that improving the energy performance of Scotland’s poor-quality housing stock is a fundamental solution to tackling fuel poverty. Poor-quality housing is one cause of fuel poverty over which the Scottish Government has the most powers, and addressing that should surely be the objective of the national infrastructure priority, although there are other things that can be done to help too.

I am looking at the time, Presiding Officer—I will move to close. There is no doubt that the health, economic, social and environmental impacts of fuel poverty are significant. There have been plenty of warm words today, but we need concerted action and a renewed sense of urgency to ensure that everyone in Scotland lives in a warm home.



## Business Motions

16:59

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-15437, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 2 February 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Education (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee: Code of Conduct Revisions

*followed by* Scottish Parliamentary Nomination: Scottish Human Rights Commissioner

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 3 February 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights;  
Fair Work, Skills and Training

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Budget (Scotland) (No. 5) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 4 February 2016

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Stage 3 Proceedings: Carers (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Alcohol (Licensing, Public Health and Criminal Justice) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 9 February 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 10 February 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions  
Finance, Constitution and Economy

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 11 February 2016

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Stage 3 Proceedings: Community Justice (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-15436, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a stage 2 timetable for the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 12 February 2016.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-15438, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S4M-15439, on substitution on committees.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Microchipping of Dogs (Scotland) Regulations 2016 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Gil Paterson be appointed to replace James Dornan as the SNP substitute on the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee.—  
[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

## Bankruptcy (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S4M-15415, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Bill.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Bill.—[*Fergus Ewing.*]

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

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** There are up to 11 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 Angela Constance is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Iain Gray and Liz Smith fall.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-15430.3, in the name of Angela Constance, which seeks to amend motion S4M-15430, in the name of Liam McArthur, on 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, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)

(SNP)

McLeod, 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)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

### Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brennan, Lesley (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

### Abstentions

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

Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 60, Against 39, Abstentions 14.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The amendments in the name of Iain Gray and Liz Smith therefore fall.

The next question is, that motion S4M-15430, in the name of Liam McArthur, on education, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

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

#### Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brennan, Lesley (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

#### Abstentions

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

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 60, Against 39, Abstentions 14.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament believes that the £100 million Attainment Scotland Fund, which is additional to the almost £5 billion invested in education every year through local authorities, is rightly targeted at the primary schools that serve the most deprived communities in Scotland, with over 300 primary schools, which together support 54,399 pupils from deprived backgrounds, 64% of the total number of such pupils, benefitting from the funding; notes that this funding is providing a wide range of support to close the attainment gap including additional teaching and other specialist staff, support for parents to engage in their children's learning, literacy and numeracy tools and extra training for teachers; further believes that the package of universal support that has been drawn together through the Scottish Attainment Challenge, including the appointment of attainment advisors for every local authority, the introduction of the Attainment Challenge Innovation Fund and the continued progress of the Raising Attainment for All programme will help ensure that there is support for every local authority to close the poverty-related attainment gap; recognises that the Scottish Government will continue to work with key stakeholders to explore and consider further approaches that will support schools to close the attainment gap, and acknowledges that the OECD's review of Scottish education recognised the Scottish Government's determination to focus on achieving both excellence and equity in the education system and that the national improvement framework has the potential to be a key means of driving work to close the attainment gap and strengthen formative assessment approaches.

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, in relation to the debate on fuel poverty, if the amendment in the name of Margaret Burgess is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Gavin Brown falls.

The next question is, that amendment S4M-15432.3, in the name of Margaret Burgess, which seeks to amend motion S4M-15432, in the name of Jim Hume, on fuel poverty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**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, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)

Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, 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)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**Against**

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brennan, Lesley (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (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)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)

Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 60, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The amendment in the name of Gavin Brown therefore falls.

The next question is, that amendment S4M-15432.2, in the name of Ken Macintosh, which seeks to amend motion S4M-15432, in the name of Jim Hume, on fuel poverty, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brennan, Lesley (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)

McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 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, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)

Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 40, Against 73, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-15432, in the name of Jim Hume, on fuel poverty, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

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

MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, 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)  
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

#### Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brennan, Lesley (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (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)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)

Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 60, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament believes that there is cross-party recognition of the social, economic and environmental damage that is caused by fuel poverty and energy-inefficient homes; recognises the Scottish Government's commitment to eradicate fuel poverty as far as reasonably practicable through support and funding within the powers available to the Scottish Ministers, but notes that the Scottish Government has no control over the above-inflation price increases by energy companies that have pushed up fuel bills; notes the latest fuel poverty statistics published in the *Scottish House Condition Survey*, which show that the efforts of the Scottish Government have helped to contain fuel poverty levels in Scotland that would have been around 9.5%, instead of 35%, if fuel prices had only risen in line with inflation between 2002 and 2014; calls on energy companies to pass on wholesale cost savings to customers at the earliest opportunity and to the fullest extent possible for both gas and electricity customers; welcomes the Scottish Government's continued investment in energy efficiency and fuel poverty and the contrast with the UK Government's withdrawal of any taxpayer-funded support for fuel poverty in England since 2013; recognises that the Scottish Government has allocated over half a billion pounds since 2009 to fuel poverty and energy efficiency programmes, helping the most vulnerable people in society heat their homes affordably, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and supporting jobs; welcomes that the Scottish Government has maintained current budgets in 2016-17 by allocating more than £103 million to tackle fuel poverty and climate change next year in the face of ongoing spending pressures and UK Government cuts; welcomes that this funding will be used to help install energy efficiency measures in 14,000 homes, building on the more than 900,000 measures delivered since 2008 and that this record investment is reflected in the big improvements in the energy efficiency of Scotland's housing, with the share of homes rated EPC band C and above having increased by 71% since 2010; further welcomes that the Scottish Government has designated energy efficiency as a National Infrastructure Priority, supported by a commitment to multiyear funding and new powers to design and implement Energy Company Obligations in Scotland, and is therefore providing a long-term commitment to tackling fuel poverty head on.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-15415, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Bill.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-15438, in the name of Joe

FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Microchipping of Dogs (Scotland) Regulations 2016 [draft] be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-15439, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on substitution on committees, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that Gil Paterson be appointed to replace James Dornan as the SNP substitute on the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.



## Missing Voters

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-15307, in the name of Claire Baker, on 10 million missing voters. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

#### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes with concern the report by the Smith Institute, *10 million missing voters!: a briefing report on the failings of the new electoral registration system*, which claims that as many as 10 million people may not be registered to vote across the UK; understands that recent changes to voter registration toward a system of individual electoral registration could have seen as many as 230,000 voters in Scotland, including in Mid Scotland and Fife, lost from the electoral register, making it one of the worst affected regions in the UK; believes that this will have an adverse impact and will create a democratic deficit in the lead up to the 2016 Scottish election and the referendum on EU membership; understands also that the Boundary Commission for Scotland is due to begin reviewing constituency boundaries in 2016; believes that such a large number of unregistered voters will result in distorted electoral maps and underrepresentation of urban areas and young people, renters, certain ethnic minorities and students, and notes the view that the number of unregistered voters in Scotland and throughout the UK is something that all political parties should work to address.

17:10

### **Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):**

I thank the members who signed my motion, enabling this debate to take place. We are fewer than 100 days away from the Scottish Parliament election, and thoughts are focusing on how we secure votes. As the motion highlights, we face a significant challenge with electoral registration.

Electoral registration underpins our democratic system. The accuracy, comprehensiveness and integrity of the register is vital to a healthy democracy. That is why the Smith Institute's report "10 million missing voters! A briefing report on the failings of the new electoral registration system", and Hope not Hate's report "Britain's missing voters: Individual Electoral Registration and the Boundary Review" are so concerning.

It is feared that hundreds of thousands of voters in Scotland will be lost from the electoral register as a result of the rush to a new electoral registration system. The new register was originally due to be finalised in December 2016, but the United Kingdom Government shortened the transition period so that it ended in December 2015. During the transition period, details of voters on the existing register had to be verified; voters whose details could not be verified in the shortened timescale were removed from the register.

Scotland is one of the areas in the UK that is most affected by the change. The level of unregistered citizens risks undermining our democracy as we approach this year's election, next year's local authority elections and the European Union referendum. It will also have a profound impact on the Boundary Commission's upcoming review of Westminster constituency seats in the UK and will potentially lead to distorted electoral maps and underrepresentation of minorities, students, renters and young people. All members of this Parliament should be concerned by the situation and should work together to address it. We have a responsibility not to ignore the situation.

The Smith Institute's headline figure of 10 million voters includes 7.5 million people across the UK who decide not to register to vote. The rushed changes to the electoral system, which the Conservative Government pushed through a year early, against the Electoral Commission's advice, will increase the number by 2.5 million. Some 2.5 million people are expected to fall off the electoral register. As the Smith Institute said in its report,

"what is at stake here is not just the prospect of party political advantage but the integrity and value of the democratic process."

This is not about the merits of household registration versus individual registration. However, household registration was introduced by the Representation of the People Act 1918 and changed very little in the intervening century, so the change is significant needed to be properly managed. The Electoral Commission has been calling for individual registration since 2003, and the approach is broadly supported, but the pace of change, the lack of piloting and the impact of the strain on public finances on the ability to manage the change are creating a situation in which people who previously were registered have been removed from the register.

One of the Government's main reasons for the rush was voter fraud, but electoral fraud, although serious, is difficult to quantify and is rare. The argument does not justify the disenfranchisement of so many voters.

There is evidence that the changes will have the highest impact in urban areas, among private sector renters, young people, especially attainees, students and people who were not born in the UK. People who are more likely to move home frequently are at a high risk of removal from the register. I was pleased that, this week, Shelter Scotland and the Electoral Commission launched a voter registration campaign to target potential voters who live in rented, homeless or temporary accommodation.

Electoral Commission research found that only 63 per cent of people who were renting from a

private landlord were registered to vote in 2014, compared with 93 per cent of people who owned their home and 89 per cent of people who owned their home with a mortgage. The rush to introduce individual voter registration is expected to have a negative effect on the figures and to widen the gap between home owners and renters.

According to Hope not Hate, Scotland stands to see a 5.5 per cent drop in the number of people who are registered to vote compared with the 2015 general election. That equates to just over 231,000 voters; the drop is the second biggest in the UK, behind only London, which stands to lose 6.9 per cent of its voters. A breakdown of the Scottish figures shows that Glasgow will be the worst affected area, losing a staggering 67,000 voters. Edinburgh is due to lose 24,000 voters and my region, Fife, is due to lose more than 15,000 voters.

Those are not people who have never registered; rather, they are people who were registered under the previous system but who will be removed from the new register. They had a vote at the general election, but they have been taken off the register. That is just wrong. No political party should introduce a system that will lead to 1.9 million people falling off the electoral register across the UK—a figure that is likely to increase to 2.5 million due to changes to the student registration system and people in the private rented sector moving home. That undermines our democracy.

In addition, we have a Boundary Commission review due in the year ahead. As a result of the coalition Government's Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011, there will be a reduction in the number of Westminster constituencies from 650 to 600, and Scotland is set to have a reduction of seven seats. All constituencies are to be set within 5 per cent of the UK electoral quota. Therefore, no seat will have fewer than 73,000 voters and more than 81,000 voters—but those numbers refer to registered voters not population. That change could have a significant impact across the UK. The new boundaries will be drawn up based on the new register, which was compiled on 1 December 2015. It could be argued that that was the weakest point in terms of the completeness, the validity and the integrity of the electoral register on which to base a boundary review.

There are huge disparities by registration. During the verification process, some authorities were able to verify 100 per cent of their registered voters. However, in Hackney, for example, 23 per cent of the register was unverified, so Hackney lost that percentage of its registered voters. In Glasgow, 67,000 unverified voters equates to almost one whole seat for the city. The rushed

process of verification and transition to a new system means that it will be difficult for the Boundary Commission to avoid generating distorted electoral maps and constituencies.

What can we do about this? The opportunity to annul the UK Government's decision to introduce individual electoral registration within a year has passed. However, there are ways in which we can make progress. As I said, I was pleased to see Shelter's campaign, and we must encourage universities to work with the Electoral Commission to promote registration to new students. We must ensure that local valuation joint boards are funded, and that they actively support registration. More could be done to promote online registration and to raise awareness through schools and colleges.

There is also action that we as a Parliament can take. Credit must go to Anne McTaggart for promoting the Holyrood rocks campaign to encourage voter registration among young people. I hope that we can do more as a Parliament between now and April to increase voter registration and to regain some of the lost voters. I hope that we can all join together and agree in principle for a cross-party and Parliament-led voter registration drive ahead of the Scottish Parliament elections in May to demonstrate how much we value voter participation and our democratic structures.

17:17

**Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):**

First, I thank Claire Baker for bringing this important motion to Parliament. It is a very good motion, and it is important to talk about it today. I will maybe take a different tone—I will perhaps be a bit stronger about the issue, because let us remember that the right to vote is part of our human rights. We should not only cherish but safeguard that right.

I have signed the motion. I noticed that it had something missing in its title—the exclamation mark. The title of the report is “10 million missing voters! A briefing report on the failings of the new electoral registration system”.

The report was written by Jane Thomas from the Smith Institute. I did not realise that there are different Smith institutes. For example, there is the Adam Smith Institute and the Smith Institute that wrote the report on missing voters. The latter refers to the former MP, John Smith; it says that it is independent. I get a bit confused about all the think tanks, some of which are based in London and are very right-wing. In any case, I just needed a little clarification on the source of the report.

I was also surprised to see that the report said little about Scotland. A word search showed that “Scotland” is mentioned five times and “Scottish” is

mentioned twice—and most of those references were on a little footnote at the bottom of page 4, which reads:

“According to the Herald Scotland’s poll of local councils in early 2015 some 22 per cent of residents in Glasgow had so far failed to switch over to the new system of individual voter registration. The paper warned that as many as 800,000 people who signed up for the Scottish Referendum may not be eligible to vote at the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections.”

The numbers are huge, so maybe we should make a big deal of it. We are talking about people who have registered previously who are suddenly being asked to register again. We all have busy lives—some people have busier lives than we have and might not realise how important it is to register. We know what happened in that case and why. The report also said—as did Claire Baker—that as many as 230,000 voters could be missing in Scotland.

As I said, we are talking about a human rights issue, and I was surprised that the Smith Institute did not say that the fact that so many people in the UK are going to be denied the right to vote is a human rights issue.

I encourage every MSP to meet their assessor and electoral registration officer. I met Ian Milton, who is the assessor and electoral registration officer for Grampian, a few years ago, and I thank him for the numbers that he gave me. An important number that he gave me was 18,991, which is the number of European Union citizens with G or K markers on the registers for Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray. Those 18,990 people plus this French MSP for North East Scotland will be able to vote on 5 May, just as we have been allowed to vote in Scottish and local elections for years, as well as the constitutional referendums in 1997 and 2014.

Despite the progressive attitude that has been evident since devolution, I have missed many votes, and I will miss the EU referendum vote unless the courts decide otherwise. I was very disappointed that many MPs, including 198 Labour members, voted against me being able to vote in the EU referendum. It is not only about me. The outrage is that more than 2 million constituents of Westminster MPs are being denied their human right to vote in the upcoming referendum.

We must be careful to respect the human rights of those constituents, who are living in the UK—and I am not even talking about 16 and 17-year-olds, some 100,000 of whom will be able to vote on 5 May but who were not able to vote in the Westminster election in 2015 and who will not be able to vote in the EU referendum.

Democracy is not a tap that can be turned on and off by virtue of people registering to vote in some elections but not in others. People have a

human right to go and vote. The Parliament must be strong in its view on the human right to vote.

I conclude by thanking Claire Baker for mentioning the fantastic campaign by Shelter Scotland and the Electoral Commission, because the right to vote does not apply only to people who live in a house; it applies to homeless people, too. Anybody who lives in this country should have the right to vote, and we should fight very hard for it. This is another democratic deficit that we need to address.

Britain is definitely a shrinking democracy, as the Smith Institute has said. Let us remind the UK Government and people who live here that, for democracy to work, we need people to vote.

17:23

**John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** It is my pleasure to be able to take part in the debate. I start by making it clear that I absolutely share the desire to move towards an electoral register that is as complete and as accurate as possible.

I commend Claire Baker for bringing the issue to the Parliament, and I agree that all political parties need to work towards increasing the percentage of Scots who are registered to vote, but I am concerned that the motion conflates the transition to individual electoral registration with the broader issue of underregistration.

It is important to bear in mind that the purpose of individual electoral registration, or IER, is to reduce electoral fraud. The election court judgment in Tower Hamlets was a wake-up call on the vulnerability of our democratic system, and it would be naive of us to presume that Scotland was immune from electoral fraud.

The former system required a “head of household” to submit an application on behalf of all those who were resident at an address. That sounds like something from the 19th century; indeed, it was—the system was introduced around 1832. We can all recognise that the system was outdated and in need of reform.

The new system gives each individual control over their own registration and introduces a new online application process. It is also worth bearing in mind that IER has increased the number of registered overseas voters and has resulted in an increase in the overall number of people on the register.

It is my view that people cannot and should not be forced to register and that everything was done to support people in the transition to the new system. The transition took place over several months. The vast majority of voters were automatically transferred, and those electors who

could not be verified were contacted on nine separate occasions.

I would also urge caution over taking the Smith Institute's report out of context. Its central conclusion that up to 10 million people are missing from the electoral register is certainly alarming, but the figure is based on an estimation from the Electoral Commission from May 2015—a figure that has since fallen—of the number of people who were left on the register under the transitional arrangement but who have not been verified or contacted.

It is wrong to claim that those people have been disenfranchised. What is happening is that electors who have moved or died, or who do not exist, are being removed from the register. The Smith Institute inflated that estimated number to 2.5 million, but failed to explain why, and to that it added 7.5 million who were estimated to not have registered under the old system.

I agree that underregistration is a major problem, but it clearly has little to do with the new system. Underregistration is a different issue from cleaning up the electoral register, and the answer to underregistered groups is not to stuff the electoral roll with the names of people who simply do not exist.

We should all encourage take-up of the new system. In Scotland, we have an opportunity to capitalise on the increase in political engagement that followed the independence referendum.

**Claire Baker:** Will the member take an intervention?

**John Lamont:** I will give way.

**Claire Baker:** I know that John Lamont is a reasonable man. The Electoral Commission said that it had concerns about the shortening of the timescale for the transition. It felt that another year would have been helpful in making sure that we had an accurate register.

It is difficult to explain away the fact—which looks evidence based—that, of the people who are no longer on the register, a high proportion lived in private rented accommodation. It is difficult to explain that away as being people who have died or left the country or using those other explanations. I think that the Government should have followed the Electoral Commission's advice on that point.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** John Lamont, you can have time back.

**John Lamont:** We should be equally aware of the election court's ruling in Tower Hamlets, the risk of fraud and the fact that the vast majority of voters were automatically transferred on to the new system. Attempt to contact each of those

whose identities could not be verified were made on nine separate occasions.

There has been a changeover to a new system, but procedures have been put in place to ensure that the robustness of the system that we now have is as secure as it possibly can be.

As I said earlier, given the increase in political engagement that has followed the independence referendum, we have an opportunity to re-engage with voters. Residents who are not on the register can still apply by post, and for the first time they can also do so online. We should be doing all we can—we should be doing our bit—to encourage our constituents to do just that.

17:28

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** I thank Claire Baker for lodging the motion. I also thank the Smith Institute for laying bare a situation that I think the majority of people may not be aware of. It is important for us to debate it today.

The particular Scottish context is the massive referendum turnout that was based on a very high level of registration. It would be a tragedy if all that good work were to be undone because of the speed of the transition to a new system. Another problem, as Claire Baker and the motion highlight, is that that is happening at the same time as new boundaries are being formed for Westminster. As I shall go on to explain, and as others have explained, that will also have a very big impact.

Of course, 10 million people is the headline figure, and various people have disaggregated it into its different parts. For example, 2.5 million people being missing purely because of the transition to a new system seem to be a very high number, but that figure is borne out by other reports. The motion refers to Hope not Hate's figure of 230,000 people being at risk of disappearing from the register in Scotland. Although that would be a 5.5 per cent drop-off since the general election, I think that the percentages are much higher for Glasgow and even for Edinburgh. On 20 January, *The Herald* ran an article on a poll that it had done of local councils which came up with the figure of 22 per cent of Glasgow residents not having registered. The article said that, were that to be repeated across Scotland, it would amount to 800,000 people.

Of course, as Claire Baker emphasised, the situation has a particular effect on certain demographics. People living in private rented accommodation have been highlighted, but we could also mention students. The Smith Institute report includes an example from England of 3,500 students—related, I presume, to the University of

Sussex—who had registered in East Sussex. That number has now fallen to 377, because universities were previously able to register whole halls of residence but now cannot. There is no doubt that there is plenty of evidence of a problem.

A related issue is that the registers that are being formulated now will be used as the basis for redrawing the Westminster map: 50 seats are going to disappear. The stated intention is to have more equal constituencies but, perversely, the new constituencies could be exactly the opposite, because many seats will have many more missing voters than others. That is already an issue, but it will, of course, be accentuated with the new registers. Indeed, the psephologist and academic Lewis Baston has said that

“The result could be a fiasco that would also be extremely vulnerable to the charge of being a gerrymander.”

We need to act together to deal with the situation. I congratulate Anne McTaggart on her work with Holyrood rocks and younger voters, who are particularly important in this matter. I also pay tribute to Jeremy Corbyn, who has appointed Gloria De Piero as the dedicated shadow minister for young people and voter registration.

Fundamentally, though, taking action on the issue is not a party-political priority but a democratic priority, and it would be tragic if young people and many others—especially those who most need political change—were to be increasingly disenfranchised and left out of the political process. It is therefore important that we come together and take whatever action we can to deal with the issue. It is probably too late to change the UK Government’s mind, but we must certainly campaign to minimise the risk to democracy that is posed by what has been put into law.

17:32

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** I thank Claire Baker for giving us the opportunity to debate the topic this evening.

Political parties tend to focus on the number of votes that they might get, and we pay too little attention to the number of votes that could be cast but which are not cast, even by people who are registered. Of course, there are recognised barriers to voting, including literacy problems, lack of access to information technology, ill health, homelessness and work and family commitments.

However, given the importance of people voting in any democracy that is worthy of the name, we have to push that lack of engagement up the agenda and acknowledge that although we here enjoy a fairly advanced level of democracy, there is much that can be done to progress it. For example, we have to ask how democratic we actually are when large numbers of our population

are not taking part in the operation of our democracy. What are we doing—or failing to do—to get the missing millions back? The changes to voter registration on which the motion focuses are clearly having a negative impact on the number of voters who are registered in Scotland, and that negative impact must be addressed.

Some of us in the chamber might well have experienced—or know someone who has experienced—a problem with the new system. I know people who, after completing the verification process, have received a letter demanding that they do so and telling them that they are not yet registered. Some of those people were concerned individuals who wanted to know that they were registered and therefore insisted on written confirmation that they were on the register, which, although understandable, resulted in time-consuming and expensive work.

I want to use the short time that remains to cover some broader issues relating to non-participation in our democratic process. Perhaps in his closing speech the minister might tell us more about why some companies are given access to the register for marketing purposes—I know that that is a concern for many people—how much money is raised through such practices and where that money goes. It might be helpful if some of that money were to be ring fenced to increase voter turnout or to improve registration, because we have to start to bring down the numbers who are not registered and the numbers who are registered but who simply choose not to vote. Why do people feel that voting is a waste of time? Is it because they become disillusioned when they have taken part in umpteen consultations and their views have been rejected out of hand?

The turnout in the 2011 elections to the Scottish Parliament was just over 50 per cent, so almost 2 million Scots who could have voted chose not to. That is right: they chose not to. We take the freedom to vote for granted, but it has been very hard won by many people. How might Scotland change if those non-voters were to exercise their democratic right—if we could do more to convince them that voting is worth while? We need to look at sharing power downwards and outwards. The size of areas and the population numbers that are considered local in Scotland would be regarded as regional and would be a level above local government in most other European nations.

Perhaps our winner-takes-all political culture is an unappealing turn-off for many people. It is a system that values conflict. We have roaring and cheering in this very chamber, and an adversarial Punch and Judy show. In no other walk of life would that be even considered.

The German constitution forbids national Government interference in regional government

matters; Angela Merkel could not suggest a council tax freeze, for example. Regardless of what we think about the impact of that freeze, it means that power is taken away from local people.

We have an unelected House of Lords and an outdated and divisive electoral system that forces politicians to ignore huge parts of the population. We need a democracy that encourages a culture in which we collaborate with people and include everyone. To a great extent, the referendum demonstrated that the millions who do not vote in local, national and UK elections are interested and are more than engaged when they believe that they have the power to change things.

It is important that we as a Parliament take all the action that we can take to ensure that individual registration is properly resourced and administered, and that no one loses their right to vote. Let us do all that we can. This is not a party-political issue. We have to encourage everyone in Scotland to participate in our democratic process.

17:37

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick):** I thank Claire Baker for bringing this important and timely debate to the chamber. I welcome the consensus across the Parliament today.

The transition to individual electoral registration in Scotland began on 19 September 2014, immediately after the independence referendum. As Malcolm Chisholm said, the referendum saw an unprecedented engagement in the electoral process, and it is one that we all have a responsibility to foster for future elections, whatever side we were on in the referendum.

The Government shares Claire Baker's concerns that the UK Government's actions around IER undermine all our efforts and risk thousands of people being disenfranchised. IER replaces the system in which one person in each household completed the annual canvas form with requirements for each person to apply individually to register and for their identity to be checked against other records. As Claire Baker and John Lamont said, the UK Government's rationale is that moving to individual electoral registration will reduce the risk of electoral fraud.

During the transition period, all existing registered electors whose names and addresses matched data held by the Department for Work and Pensions or local authorities were transferred to the new IER registration system as confirmed electors. Since 19 September 2014, the identity of all new registration applicants has been verified before they are added to the new register. If they cannot be verified, the individual has to provide other evidence of their identity.

As members will be aware, this Government was absolutely opposed, as were colleagues on

other benches, to the Westminster Government's decision to bring forward the end of the IER transition period to 1 December 2015. We welcomed the opposition to that in both houses at Westminster, but unfortunately neither of the motions to annul was successful. The Westminster Government's decision to end the transition period a year early therefore stands, and our electoral registration officers have been left to minimise the loss of franchise.

The figure of 230,000 voters in Scotland being removed from the register, as quoted in the Smith Institute report, is indeed a concerning figure. It came initially from an Electoral Commission report that was based on the register as at May 2015, as I think John Lamont said. That figure was the number of electors who were registered at that point but who had not had their identity confirmed or verified and were therefore on the register only because of the transitional arrangements. Had those arrangements been continued, that would have allowed those electors to remain on the register, but they were only temporarily on the register.

At the time, the commission acknowledged that the canvass activity that would be undertaken between July and November 2015 would reduce that figure significantly. Unfortunately, Scotland-wide statistics on the size of the register post the end of the transition period and the autumn canvass activity are not yet available. However, if we take one area as an example, I hope that that will give us an indication of how the numbers have changed and how successful our EROs have been—although I preface these comments by saying that there might be regional variations, which we would need to look at.

In Grampian, the number of unconfirmed electors reduced from 19,222 on 27 February to 10,636 on 9 October, which is still a significant figure. By 30 November, the number remaining had fallen further to 3,893. Clearly, those represent people who would want to be verified, but our EROs have done a considerable job in reducing the number. The decline happened because either unconfirmed electors updated their details as part of the process, which allowed their identities to be verified, or the electoral registration officers established that they were no longer resident and so they were removed from the register. There was therefore a reduction of 80 per cent in the number of electors who were on the register but who had not been data matched, and our EROs should be congratulated for their efforts on that. However, as I said, I recognise that there might be regional variations to which we need to be very alert.

**Claire Baker:** The minister will acknowledge that the Smith Institute also talks about the potential for growth in the numbers from new

students at university, but there is no longer the system, as Malcolm Chisholm highlighted, whereby the university can register the students. Has the Government any views on how it can encourage universities in that regard?

**Joe FitzPatrick:** Yes. It is a point that I was going to come to later, but I will deal with it now.

The issue has been recognised by EROs and the Electoral Commission, who are working with universities to tackle it. If we think back to the referendum, the engagement of young people, whether they voted yes or no, was the big, exciting thing that happened during the campaign. There is a risk of losing the engagement of such young people from the next election, which would be a disaster. As I said, our EROs and the Electoral Commission are working with universities and colleges to ensure that we can increase the number of student registrations in spite of the difficulties that have been recognised.

Putting aside our opposition to the UK Government's policy, I think that what we have heard across the chamber shows that this Parliament agrees that it is important that we have as complete and accurate an electoral register as possible. I therefore hope that members will find it helpful if I give a brief summary of the new IER canvass and indicate how it compares with the old one that we are more used to.

Under the old household registration system, the annual canvass form was completed by one person in each family and, once returned, the ERO used that information to add any new voters and remove any who were no longer resident at a particular address. That meant that all changes could be made before the register was published on 1 December.

The annual canvass in that form no longer exists, and it has been replaced by the household enquiry form. Those forms were issued in August last year and, like the annual canvass, they requested information on those resident in a property who were eligible to vote. The difference is that, unlike with the annual canvass, that is no longer the end of the process and there now has to be a second stage.

That means that, when a name is deleted on a returned household enquiry form, EROs have to find another piece of evidence to support the removal of the name from the register. They can normally find that through co-operation with local authorities, which provide them with data. Similarly, before adding a name to the register, EROs need an application to register from the individual.

Every potential elector who was identified on a household inquiry form during the recent canvass has now been sent an invitation to register. In

addition, every invitation that is issued is subject to a follow-up procedure that involves two reminders and a physical visit to the address. That is the process that is currently under way, and we should all congratulate our EROs on how thoroughly they are following that process, which has brought the numbers down significantly. Every potential voter who was identified on a household inquiry form will receive at least three letters and a visit to encourage them to register.

Since the transition to IER started 16 months ago, anyone who was on the register at that time and who has not yet been data matched will have received, as John Lamont said, at least nine letters and a personal visit to encourage them to register for their vote. In addition, the EROs and the Electoral Commission are continuing their efforts to encourage voter registration. That goes further than the 2.5 million and into the 7.5 million whom the report covered. Some folk have never registered and want to get on to the register in time for the Scottish Parliament elections.

The commission is planning to run a mass media public awareness campaign across a mixture of television, digital and social media in the run-up to our elections in May, and it will provide resources that can be used as part of EROs' and returning officers' local public engagement work. The main campaign is scheduled to launch on Monday 14 March, with advertising appearing on digital channels from next Monday. I think that Claire Baker mentioned that some work has already been done. We saw Shelter's work on the telly just last night.

The commission's national campaign will target the sorts of groups that Alison Johnstone mentioned. There will be a real focus on groups that research has identified as being less likely to be registered to vote, such as people who have recently moved home, homeless people, people who rent their home, students—whom we have talked about already—young people, and people from some black and minority ethnic communities.

There has been absolutely no sitting on our laurels, and there has been huge progress. It would have been better if EROs had had another year for the process, but they have done a great job, and they are working really hard to go even further to get more people on to the register.

I hope that that information reassures members that the electoral community right across Scotland is working together to ensure that the electoral registers are as complete and accurate as possible in time for the Scottish Parliament elections in May.

Again, I thank Claire Baker for bringing this timely debate to the chamber.

*Meeting closed at 17:47.*





This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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