



OFFICIAL REPORT
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Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 5 September 2017

Session 5



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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 5 September 2017

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is Rabbi Mark Solomon, Sukkat Shalom Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community.

Rabbi Mark L Solomon: Last week, I had the privilege of being at the Usher hall when the First Minister unveiled a plaque that honoured the Jewish contribution to the Edinburgh International Festival, which is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. Sir Rudolph Bing, who founded the festival in 1947, was an Austrian Jewish refugee from Nazism. I was especially moved to learn that the great conductor Bruno Walter was reunited during that inaugural festival with his former orchestra, the Vienna Philharmonic, which he had not conducted since fleeing Nazi persecution. The festival, in the wake of the second world war, was to

“provide a platform for the flowering of the human spirit.”

Like so many people then and—sadly—today, those founders knew how humans could be crushed by bigotry and oppression, but they also had faith that the human spirit could revive and flourish in an atmosphere of freedom and enlightenment, such as that which Scotland had, and still has, to offer.

The plaque also celebrates 200 years of Jewish life in Edinburgh since the first congregation was established in 1817. Earlier that afternoon, I joined an Edinburgh Jewish history walk and visited the site of that long-vanished synagogue as well as the locations of the last kosher butcher and baker in the city. The Jewish community in Scotland may have dwindled in numbers, but it continues to be a vibrant part of the mosaic of faiths and communities that flourish here.

The event last week did not just look backward; it looked forward as well. With the First Minister, we saw a presentation of the proposed new Scottish Jewish cultural centre that would bring under one roof both the venerable Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation and my, much newer, Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community, and many other cultural and social activities.

Two weeks tomorrow, we Jews will celebrate our Jewish new year, Rosh Hashanah, which also looks both back and forward, not just back to the

old year with all its deep problems and forward to a new year that we pray will bring better things, but much further back to the story of our shared human origins and forward to a time of universal fellowship and peace.

I am deeply honoured to offer this short reflection as you begin a new parliamentary term. You are used to diverse views coexisting under one roof and all striving to achieve a better future for the people of Scotland. As members seek the flowering of the human spirit in Scotland through debate and dialogue, I wish you the Hebrew greeting of “shanah tovah”—a happy new parliamentary year.

Business Motions

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-07384, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 5 September 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by First Minister Statement: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2017-18

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2017-18

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 6 September 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Finance and Constitution;
Economy, Jobs and Fair Work

followed by Continuation of Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2017-18

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 7 September 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Continuation of Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2017-18

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 12 September 2017

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 13 September 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform;
Rural Economy and Connectivity

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 14 September 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-07378, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on variation of the standing orders in relation to First Minister's question time.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, in relation to First Minister's Questions on 7 September, in rule 13.6.2, insert at end "and may provide an opportunity for Party Leaders to question the First Minister".—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:05

Teacher Vacancies

1. **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how many teacher vacancies there are. (S5T-00637)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): In 2016, the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities worked together to develop a teacher vacancy survey to seek to provide high-quality data from local authorities. The information was fed into the 2017-18 teacher workforce planning process. A further exercise is currently under way as part of the 2018-19 workforce planning process.

We recognise that some local authorities are experiencing challenges in filling vacancies, which is why we have taken decisive action to recruit and retain teachers. We have increased the student teacher intake targets for the sixth year in a row; we are setting targets to train teachers in the subjects for which they are needed most; and we are investing over £1 million from the Scottish attainment fund to develop new routes into the profession.

Daniel Johnson: It has come out in recent days that the number of teacher vacancies days is 500—the cabinet secretary failed to put that in his answer. The reality is that excellent education starts with excellent teachers, so that number of vacancies is of concern to us all, but it can be no surprise, given the falling pay in real terms and the increasing workload, which have led to retention issues.

In recent days, there has been much talk about the lifting of the public sector pay cap. What steps is the cabinet secretary taking to ensure that teachers are among the first to benefit in order to stop the spiralling situation in pay and conditions?

John Swinney: As I did in my earlier answer, I recognise that there are challenges in teacher recruitment around the country but, even if we take Mr Johnson's figure at face value, that represents 1 per cent of the teaching profession. We must have a sense of perspective on the issues. I was pleased that, when some of the survey information came out, local authorities made it clear that they were optimistic that they would be able to close those vacancies in the course of the school term.

Part of the issue is that we have seen a dramatic change in the employment of post-probationers. When the Government came to

office, only 66 per cent of post-probationers were in permanent or temporary employment; that figure is 87 per cent in the current period.

On the questions about public sector pay, I assure Mr Johnson that the dialogue is under way in the Scottish negotiating committee for teachers process to agree the teachers pay round for the current school year. It would be premature of me to make any judgments about that process, but I assure Mr Johnson that the Government is participating in it along with the teaching trade unions and the local authorities.

Daniel Johnson: The cabinet secretary did much to try to downplay the numbers, but the Government's own papers show that it will take three years to fill the shortfall, and we know that we have 4,000 fewer teachers than we had in 2010. On 31 May, John Swinney came to the Education and Skills Committee and admitted with hindsight that too many teacher training places had been cut. With the benefit of hindsight and the knowledge that 500 teachers are missing from our classrooms, what mistakes does the cabinet secretary think that the Scottish Government has made in its stewardship of the teaching profession and workforce in Scotland?

John Swinney: I return to my point about post-probationers, because Mr Johnson's question makes my point for me. In 2007, 66 per cent of post-probationers were in permanent or temporary employment, and Opposition parties in the Parliament demanded that the Government do something about that level of probationer employment. So we did that, and we now have 87 per cent of post-probationers in permanent or temporary employment. Therefore, we addressed the issue that members were concerned about. At that time, there were more teachers than there were places for them to be employed in, so in 2010-11 the initial teacher education intake was reduced to comparatively low levels. In 2010-11, 2,282 teachers were recruited into initial teacher education. For this academic year, that figure stands at 4,058.

That is what the Government is doing. We are responding to the need to create opportunities for teachers to gain employment and training sufficient teachers to enter the profession. The reforms that I set out in June are designed to strengthen the profession and the attractiveness of the occupation of education to more individuals in our country.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): The cabinet secretary will know from committee evidence that concerns have been raised about the accuracy of data on teacher numbers and that, specifically, data on supply teacher numbers is patchy across local authorities. What is he going to do about that problem?

John Swinney: Fundamentally, it is for individual local authorities to manage their resources and to employ the teachers that they require to deliver education.

Yesterday, I was in Mr Mundell's constituency and visited Dumfries high school, where I was pleased to see the strength of educational provision. I was also pleased to hear from Dumfries and Galloway Council that it has started this school year with a full complement of teachers in its schools. I warmly congratulate the council on achieving that.

Of course, the supply pool needs to be managed. I am taking steps to ensure that we have a strong supply pool, so that when the inevitabilities of illness and other factors take their course during the year, we have adequate supply cover in our schools.

I encourage members of Parliament to see the progress that is being made following the significant increase in the initial teacher education intake that we have delivered, which has strengthened the recruitment into the teaching profession. It has ensured that, in some parts of country, we have a sufficient supply of teachers. In other parts of the country, we are working with others to ensure that the issues are addressed.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): To address teacher shortages, the Scottish Government has opened the door to fast-track training for teachers, including, potentially, the highly controversial teach first course. What evidence has the Scottish Government gathered that the length of traditional initial teacher education course, which is highly regarded, is the issue?

John Swinney: The Government has insisted that the high standards that are expected for the recruitment of teachers into the profession are maintained. I give Parliament an absolute commitment on that point. All the new routes into teaching that have been validated have not been validated by me; rather, they have been validated by the guardians of the process—the General Teaching Council for Scotland. Any course that comes forward—Mr Greer is speculating about possible courses—must be validated by the GTCS and have an academic partner as part of that process.

I have met some of the students at the University of Strathclyde. They are people who have had a career in other areas of activity and have an interest in teaching STEM—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—subjects. Because of the refinements that the University of Strathclyde has made to the course, which have been validated by the GTCS, those individuals have been prepared to change from

other careers into teaching. I welcome their doing that. They will still be put through rigorous training and education, but that approach guarantees a stronger flow of teachers into the classroom and addresses the areas of shortage that we have in the STEM subjects.

National Health Service Radiologists

2. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle the reported shortage of NHS radiologists. (S5T-00631)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Under this Government, the number of consultants with a specialty of radiology working in NHS Scotland has increased by 41.9 per cent to 317.2 full-time equivalents.

We have enhanced the supply of doctors to fill radiology training posts, with 26 new training places over the past four years, which is an increase of 20 per cent. That will be augmented by a further increase of 10 radiology training places for 2018, which was agreed by the shape of training transition group on 24 August. Supply will improve from 2018 onwards as our increased investment in radiology training numbers begins to produce an increased output.

The Scottish Government is working with the board of NHS Highland to support improved performance by the radiology service, and the board is taking action as part of that work. The chief executive of NHS Scotland, the chief medical officer for Scotland and the director of health workforce recently met radiologists from NHS Highland. Later this month, I will meet the Royal College of Radiologists to discuss its concerns.

Edward Mountain: I thank the cabinet secretary for those figures. Let me give her some figures in return. According to letters that I have received from the department of medicine and general surgery at Raigmore hospital—signed by more than 50 people—the situation is critical. NHS Highland undertakes about 167,000 imaging examinations annually. That is a 250 per cent increase on the situation 10 years ago, but there are four fewer full-time radiologists than there were then, and there are 50 per cent fewer staff than in NHS Lothian. NHS Highland is sitting on some 8,000 unreported films.

It has proved impossible to recruit more radiologists, despite the board's direct input over the past three years. There has been one resignation this year. Doctors say that as a result there are unacceptable delays to elective and emergency surgery and to reporting.

Does the cabinet secretary think that those figures are acceptable?

Shona Robison: No, I do not. That is why a review of radiology services was commissioned by the Scottish Government, along with NHS Highland. The report was produced last month and will form the basis of an action plan to address the problems. I will be happy to provide Edward Mountain with a copy of the report if he has not seen it.

In his question, Edward Mountain touched on the problem, which is the ability to recruit to radiology in NHS Highland. It is clear that it is extremely hard to recruit to some specialties in some parts of Scotland. Therefore, a number of actions are under way, including the work that is set out in the review. Action is being taken, for example to ensure that NHS Highland puts forward radiology posts as part of the international medical training initiative. In addition, the board is working with NHS Education for Scotland to consider where radiology trainees might be located, including through joint appointments with other boards and teaching hospitals, to ensure that trainees receive the required educational experience and to make posts more attractive.

Everything that can be done will be done, but I reiterate to Edward Mountain that across Scotland there are additional radiology consultant posts—nearly 40 per cent more—and more than 20 per cent more training posts. However, there are certain parts of the country and certain specialties in relation to which more work must be done to fill posts, and such work is under way in Highland.

Edward Mountain: NHS Highland said that it has made

“significant investment in time, energy and commitment”

over the past three years, and I think that some two and a half years ago the cabinet secretary had a personal visit from radiologists from the Highlands to alert her to the problem.

The cabinet secretary has had two and a half years to solve the problem; the board has had more than three. It appears that neither the cabinet secretary nor the board of NHS Highland can solve the problem. Will the cabinet secretary step down and make way for those who can? Will she do the honourable thing, so that people in the Highlands can get good service?

Shona Robison: I say to Edward Mountain that that is not really worthy of him. He and I have had very constructive engagement in the Parliament, which I hope will continue.

I set out in my initial answer and in my follow-up answer all the work that is going on to address the problem. There is no magic wand—or magic bullet or however else we might describe it—to sort the issue. It is difficult to recruit to radiology in Highland and other areas; the specialty is difficult

to recruit to generally and recruitment is particularly difficult in remote and rural areas.

That is why the action in the review report is under way, as is the other action that I described, such as action in relation to international recruitment, to ensure that Highland has posts as part of the medical training initiative. I think that the approach will help to bring people into Highland, because it is a new initiative, which has worked in other areas. Also, joint appointments with other boards are an approach that has worked for other specialties, and NHS Highland is looking at the approach, which will make posts more attractive.

I will be happy to work in a constructive way to ensure that Edward Mountain is kept abreast of such developments, if he would find that helpful.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I remind members to keep their questions and answers tight, please.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

Last week, the *Financial Times* revealed that doctors have been leaving NHS England at a rate of more than 400 a month. With the vote to leave the European Union exacerbating shortages, does the cabinet secretary agree that the Tory approach to Brexit is hindering efforts to ensure that the NHS is staffed for the future?

The Presiding Officer: On radiologists please, cabinet secretary.

Shona Robison: Clare Haughey makes an important point. Whether it is in radiology or in other specialties, we can ill afford to lose any opportunity to recruit from the EU to those posts. It is interesting that Edward Mountain did not mention that in his question. Every health board, including NHS Highland, has raised the issue with me as a deep concern. That is why it is important that the message goes out that EU nationals—those we have here already and those who want to come and make their home in Scotland—are very welcome.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): The truth is that the problem is not just with radiologists and not just in the Highlands; it is part of a wider recruitment crisis in our NHS. Figures published today show that the number of consultant vacancies is up to 500 and that the number of nursing and midwifery vacancies is up to 3,200. The situation is now impacting directly on patient care. We were promised a comprehensive workforce plan before the summer recess; instead, we got part 1 of a three-part plan. Is it not time that we had a comprehensive plan and a demonstration that the cabinet secretary

understands the concerns of the NHS workforce, that she understands the concerns of patients who are waiting for treatment and that she has some idea of the problems in our NHS?

The Presiding Officer: That is a wide question. I would like a tighter answer please, cabinet secretary.

Shona Robison: The workforce plan is in three parts because the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities asked for publication of the second part to be delayed until after the elections so that it could publish its own workforce plan jointly. It would have been silly to publish the third part, which deals with primary care and the general practitioner workforce, when we were in the midst of negotiating with the British Medical Association a contract that the workforce was part of. That part of the workforce plan will be published at the end of the negotiation. That makes sense: everybody knows that it makes sense, and perhaps Anas Sarwar agrees that it makes sense. A comprehensive workforce plan has already been published and will be followed up by the rest of the plan as we take forward those issues.

Programme for Government 2017-18

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Our next item of business is a statement by the First Minister on the Scottish Government's programme for government. I remind members that, as we will move to three days of debate after the statement, there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:22

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Over the past 10 years, this Government has expanded free childcare, removed university tuition fees for students and abolished business rates for 100,000 small businesses. We have invested in the national health service, scrapped prescription charges and protected free personal care. We have built social housing at a faster rate than any other part of the United Kingdom and we have placed Scotland firmly at the forefront of the global fight against climate change. Today, our unemployment rate is close to a record low, youth unemployment is half what it was 10 years ago, our hospital accident and emergency departments are the best performing anywhere in the UK and crime is now at a 42-year low. In addition, as was illustrated by yesterday's official opening of the new Queensferry crossing, the nation's infrastructure has been transformed.

That is good progress, but it is time to take stock of our achievements, refocus our efforts and refresh our agenda. We live in a time of unprecedented global challenge and change, with rapid advances in technology, a moral obligation to tackle climate change, an ageing population, the impact of continued austerity and deep-seated challenges of poverty and inequality, and an apparent rise in the forces of intolerance and protectionism. Those challenges are considerable, but in each of them we must find opportunity. This programme for government is our plan to seize those opportunities and to build the kind of Scotland that we all seek—an inclusive, fair, prosperous, innovative country that is ready and willing to embrace the future. It is a programme to invest in our future and shape Scotland's destiny.

Ensuring that we have a highly educated and skilled population that is able to adapt to the needs of a rapidly changing economy is vital to our future prosperity and our wellbeing. That is why improving education—including by closing the attainment gap—is our number 1 priority.

As of this summer, parents of all newborn children now receive a baby box. The box encapsulates an important principle, which is that all children, regardless of their parents' circumstances, deserve the best possible start in

life. That principle is one that will follow the baby box generation as they grow up. They will be the first to benefit from our next transformation in childcare. We have already expanded early years education and childcare, but by the time the baby box generation reach nursery, we will have almost doubled the amount of free nursery education that children receive.

Over the next year, to lock in that expansion, we will guarantee a multiyear package of funding for local authorities to support the recruitment and training of staff and the delivery of new premises, and to support private and third sector providers of childcare, we will introduce rates relief for day nurseries.

The massive expansion of nursery education is the first strand of our transformation of Scotland's education system. The second is school reform. A new education bill will deliver the biggest and most radical change to how our schools are run that we have seen in the lifetime of devolution. It will give headteachers significant new powers, influence and responsibilities, formally establishing them as leaders of learning and teaching. Our premise is simple but very powerful: the best people to make decisions about a child's education are the people who know them best—their teachers and their parents.

Our reforms will be matched by resources. We will build on the early success of the new pupil equity funding so that, over time, more of the money that funds our schools will go directly to those in our classrooms.

Of course, we know that the whole education system must work together if we are to see the kind of improvement in schools that we all want to see, so new regional improvement collaboratives will be established to provide support to teachers, including access to teams of attainment experts and subject specialists. We will also reform the way in which teachers are recruited and educated throughout their professional careers. We will introduce new routes into teaching to attract the highest quality graduates into priority areas and subjects, and to broaden the pool of talent that is available to our schools.

Those changes will be underpinned by the new standardised assessments that will be taken by pupils in primaries 1, 4 and 7 and secondary 3 from this autumn. Those assessments will not raise standards in and of themselves, but they will help to ensure that parents, teachers, policy makers and the wider public have access to high-quality and reliable information about the performance of our schools.

The third strand of the transformation in education comes beyond the school years. We are determined to open up university to all who have

the talent to attend. We will therefore take forward the recommendations of the commission on widening access to ensure that young people, regardless of their background, have an equal chance of going to university. To make sure that they get the help that they need, we will set out plans to reform student support based on the findings of the independent review that is due to report in the autumn.

We will also ensure that those who take vocational qualifications have the opportunities that they need. In particular, we will continue to increase the number of modern apprenticeships to meet our objective of 30,000 a year by 2020.

Across all three strands of reform—in our nurseries, in our schools and in our colleges and universities—we are driving change. Our clear purpose is to ensure a first-class education for all young people, no matter the disadvantages that they might face. That is my top priority, and I recommit to it today.

A good education is important for its own sake—it contributes to the health, the happiness and the fulfilment of all of us as individuals—but it is also vital to building a modern, successful, dynamic economy. Last week, I set out our vision for the economy that we want to build. To succeed, Scotland must lead change, not trail in its wake. We must aspire to be the inventor and the manufacturer of the digital, high-tech and low-carbon innovations that will shape the future, not just a consumer of those innovations.

To support innovation, we will increase Government investment in business research and development by 70 per cent, which it is estimated will generate £300 million of additional R and D spending overall over the next three years.

To help businesses to increase their exports, we will appoint, this autumn, a network of trade envoys to champion our businesses' interests in key markets overseas. Our network of investment hubs, currently confirmed in London, Dublin, Brussels and Berlin, will be expanded to include Paris, maximising opportunities in France, our third biggest export market.

The support that we provide for innovation and internationalisation will be backed up by help for key growth sectors. Scotland has the potential to be a world leader in advanced manufacturing. Right now, we are investing £9 million in a new lightweight manufacturing centre in Renfrewshire to help companies develop a global competitive advantage in the manufacture of lightweight, environmentally friendlier materials such as titanium and carbon fibre. That centre is just the first step. Later this year, we will take the next step by confirming the location and key partners for the new national manufacturing institute for Scotland,

with work starting on site in 2018. That is a clear demonstration of our conviction that advanced manufacturing will be central to our modern economy.

We will also support financial technology—or fintech—as a key growth sector. Our ambition is for this city of Edinburgh to become one of the top 10 global fintech centres, so we will invest in the establishment of fintech Scotland, an industry-led body that will champion, nurture and grow our fintech community.

We will continue to champion clean energy. The North Sea is potentially the largest carbon storage resource anywhere in Europe, but the UK Government's withdrawal of support for key carbon capture and storage initiatives risks that potential. As Westminster holds the key levers, we will continue to press for the right policy and financial framework to be put in place, but we will do more than that. I can announce today that we will provide direct Scottish Government funding for the feasibility stage of the proposed acorn project at St Fergus in Aberdeenshire.

Today's programme sets out the range of actions that we will take to support other highly successful growth sectors from food and drink to tourism and life sciences that through their determination and innovation are securing jobs now and for the future. However, I want to make specific mention of creative industries, which is a sector that is important both for our economy and our cultural wellbeing. We live today in a golden age of film and television production, and over the next decade, the opportunities for attracting investment to Scotland will be considerable. We have already increased support for the screen sector, and last month I was delighted to announce that the National Film and Television School is setting up a base in Glasgow, the first of its kind outside London. I can announce today that we will go further and do what those working in the sector have asked of us: in next year's budget, we will provide an additional £10 million to bring screen development, production and growth funding to £20 million a year.

As well as supporting key sectors, we must support those whose ideas and ingenuity create new products, services, jobs and wealth. The entrepreneurial spirit that forged Scotland's reputation in the past must drive our success in the future. That means not just helping young innovators start their businesses, but helping those businesses scale up, and organisations such as Entrepreneurial Scotland, Elevator and CodeBase are building the innovative culture and leadership ambitions of our people and entrepreneurs. To complement that work, we will establish and fund a new unlocking ambition challenge. Each year, we will offer intensive

support for up to 40 of the most talented and ambitious entrepreneurs to help them bring their ideas to market and create jobs. Candidates will be chosen and supported by established entrepreneurs who will give their time and commitment.

Across the economy, we are determined to have a supportive business environment. To promote that, we have reformed our enterprise and skills agencies. Next month, we will establish the new strategic board; it will be led by Nora Senior, former chair of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, and its task will be to ensure that the £2 billion each year that we invest in enterprise and skills delivers exactly what our economy needs to grow and succeed. Highlands and Islands Enterprise has been successful in taking account of the needs of the north of Scotland, and we will establish a new South of Scotland enterprise agency to champion the needs of that area, too.

To ensure competitive taxes for business, we will quickly take forward the Barclay review of business rates. Initial steps are included in this programme and an implementation plan will be published by the end of this year. We will also introduce a new planning bill to support the efficient delivery of the development our communities need, including vital infrastructure.

Of course, a significant—often very significant—constraint faced by many businesses with growth potential is access to long-term, patient capital. The Council of Economic Advisers has made clear the importance to our future economic success of continued infrastructure development, adequate finance for high-growth businesses and strategic investments in innovation. We have already taken steps to improve access to finance through, for example, the establishment of the Scottish growth scheme.

However, if we are to succeed in raising our ambition even further, this is a challenge that we must do more to address. We believe that the time is now right to take a new approach on capital investment. I can therefore announce today that we will begin work to establish a Scottish national investment bank. Benny Higgins, the chief executive officer of Tesco Bank, has agreed to lead work on developing the bank's precise remit, governance, operating model and approach to managing financial risk—vital steps that will see the new bank up and running and providing the patient capital investment that the Scottish economy needs for the future.

Alongside that commitment, we will provide the infrastructure that is needed for Scotland to be a world-leading economy. We will complete the Aberdeen western peripheral route, deliver the electrification of the railway between Edinburgh

and Glasgow, bring on stream new and refurbished trains and continue to push ScotRail to meet the highest standards of performance. We will also do what Conservative and Labour Governments have failed to do over so many years: we will identify a public body that will be able to make a robust, public sector bid for the next ScotRail franchise. Those and many more transport plans across the country will benefit our people and our economy.

They will be matched by infrastructure investment for the digital age. Later this year, we will procure the latest phase of our project to deliver, by 2021, next-generation broadband to 100 per cent of residential and business premises—an investment that will be transformational for our economy in general, and for rural Scotland in particular. That is a significant step, but we are determined to do even more.

To encourage others to see Scotland as the place to research, design and manufacture their innovations—for us to become a laboratory for the rest of the world in the digital and low-carbon technologies that we want to champion—we must also become early adopters of them. We must be bold in our ambitions, just as we have been in renewable energy. Let me set out today one area in which we intend to do just that.

The transition from petrol and diesel cars and vans to electric and other ultra-low-emission vehicles is under way and gathering pace. We intend to put Scotland at the forefront of that transition. I am announcing today an ambitious new target. Our aim is for new petrol and diesel cars and vans to be phased out in Scotland by 2032—the end of the period that is covered by our new climate change plan and eight years ahead of the target that was set by the UK Government.

As members are aware, we do not currently hold powers over vehicle standards and taxation. However, we can and will take action. Over the next few months, we will set out detailed plans to massively expand the number of electric charging points in rural, urban and domestic settings; plans to extend the green bus fund and accelerate the procurement of electric or ultra-low-emission vehicles in both the public and the private sectors; plans for pilot demonstrator projects that encourage uptake of electric vehicles among private motorists; and plans for a new innovation fund to encourage business and academia to develop solutions to some of our particular challenges, for example charging vehicles in areas with a high proportion of tenements. We will also make the A9—already a major infrastructure project—Scotland's first fully electric-enabled highway.

That is an exciting challenge, which I hope that all members and the whole country will get behind.

It sends a message to the world: we look to the future with excitement, we welcome innovation and we want to lead that innovation. That ambition will help stimulate economic activity, but it is also part of our plans to improve our environment and the quality of the air that we breathe. In the coming year, we will introduce a new climate change bill that will set even more ambitious targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and ensure that we meet our obligations under the Paris accord.

Air pollution is a significant risk to public health. It is particularly harmful to vulnerable groups, such as the very young and the very old. We have already committed to the introduction of a low emissions zone in one of our cities by the end of next year and we will confirm its location shortly. However, I can announce today that we will go further. We will work with local authorities to introduce low emission zones in each of our four biggest cities by 2020 and in all other air quality management areas where necessary by 2023.

We will also do more to support the circular economy and reduce waste. I can confirm today that we will design and introduce a deposit return scheme for drinks containers as an important part of our determination to tackle litter and clean up our streets.

For the sake of our environment and our health, we will also take further steps to support walking and cycling—active travel—by doubling the amount spent on it in Transport Scotland's budget from £40 million to £80 million a year. We will also introduce a new transport bill, which will include measures to improve public transport, from provisions on smart ticketing to giving local authorities a range of options to improve local bus services.

I have spoken a lot today about measures to support the economy. A successful economy also needs strong public services. The quality of our schools and hospitals, the safety of our streets and communities, the supply of skills, and good housing and infrastructure are just as important as rates of tax in growing our economy and attracting investment to Scotland.

Our most cherished public service is the national health service. In the past 10 years, the budget of our NHS has increased by £3 billion and its workforce by about 12,000. To equip the NHS for the challenges that are ahead, we will ensure that its budget continues to grow. We will deliver at least a real-terms increase in the revenue budget next year as part of our commitment to increase funding by a further £2 billion by the end of this parliamentary session. We will continue to develop the NHS workforce plan and we will introduce a safe staffing bill to make sure that we have the right staff in the right places.

Increasing funding for the NHS is vital, but it is not enough on its own; we must also reform how the NHS delivers care. We have integrated health and social care and, during the next year, we will take forward our health and social care delivery plan and continue to support a shift in the balance of care and resources towards primary, community and social services. That will not always be easy, but it is right and necessary.

We will expand our focus on the prevention of ill health. During the next year, we will deliver a refreshed framework that sets out the next steps in our work to tackle alcohol misuse. We must also match our actions on smoking and alcohol with bold initiatives in other areas. In addition to our plans to tackle air pollution and boost active travel, we will take forward a new strategy to tackle obesity, including measures to restrict the marketing of foods that are high in fat, sugar or salt.

In the year ahead, we will progress the implementation of our new mental health strategy, with its focus on prevention, early intervention and access to services.

Part of the challenge for health services the world over is to reduce unnecessary admissions to hospital. Providing more of the care that people need in their own homes or in a homely setting is key to meeting that challenge. One of the Parliament's flagship policies—free personal care for over-65s—was designed with precisely that purpose in mind. However, some people under the age of 65 also need personal care, such as those who have early-onset dementia or conditions such as motor neurone disease.

The campaign for what has become known as Frank's law—named after Frank Kopel—advocates the extension of free personal care to under-65s. The Scottish Government undertook to carry out a study into the feasibility of making that change. That study was published today and I am pleased to announce that we will now begin work to fully implement Frank's law.

We will introduce one further piece of health legislation in the next year. The organ and tissue donation bill will establish—with appropriate safeguards—a soft opt-out system for the authorisation of organ and tissue donation, to allow even more lives to be saved by the precious gift of organ donation.

Keeping people and communities safe is one of the most important responsibilities of any Government. In Scotland today, crime is at a 42-year low, but the nature of crime and people's expectations of the police are changing. We will continue to ensure that our police and fire services are equipped for the challenges of the future. In particular, we will protect the front-line police

budget and support the police as they modernise the way in which they work. During the next year, we will also create a new criminal offence of drug driving, which will come into force in 2019.

For some people, a period in prison—sometimes a lengthy period—is the only appropriate sentence. However, we also know that community sentences, where appropriate, are much more effective in reducing reoffending. As a result of decisions that we took 10 years ago to reform our justice system and as a result of more community-based alternatives to prison being available, the reconviction rate is now at an 18-year low.

However, we must be even bolder in our efforts to keep people out of prison and reduce reoffending further. Although sentencing is always a matter for the judiciary, I can announce today that we will extend the presumption against short-term sentences from sentences of under three months to sentences of under 12 months. We will commence that change once the relevant provisions of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill are in force, to ensure proper protection for those who are victims of domestic abuse.

We will introduce a new management of offenders bill to extend the use of electronic monitoring in the community and to enable the use of new technology where appropriate. In the coming year, the vulnerable witnesses and pre-recorded evidence bill will be introduced to reduce further the need for children and other vulnerable witnesses to give evidence live in a courtroom.

A further piece of justice legislation that we will introduce this year is the sexual offences (pardons and disregards) bill. I confirm that it will ensure that people who were convicted of offences that related to same-sex sexual activity that is now legal will receive an automatic pardon. The bill will also enable those who have been pardoned to apply to have such convictions removed from criminal records. Above all, the bill will right a historic wrong and give justice to those who found themselves unjustly criminalised simply because of who they loved.

Ensuring justice for the victims of crime is an essential element of a fair society, and so too is delivering social justice for everyone. Our aim is to make Scotland fairer and more equal. Over the next year, we will continue our work to build a Scottish social security system that is based on dignity and respect. The Social Security (Scotland) Bill will complete its passage this parliamentary year; in the next few weeks, we will confirm where the new social security agency will be based. Next summer, we will deliver the first of the new devolved benefits—an increased carers allowance, with the increase backdated to April 2018. We will also prepare for the delivery of the

new funeral expense allowance and the new best start grant by summer 2019. The best start grant is particularly important, as it will provide additional help for low-income families at key transitions in their children's lives and help to tackle child poverty.

Our Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill, which sets statutory targets to tackle child poverty, will complete its parliamentary passage later this year. We recently established the Poverty and Inequality Commission to advise and challenge the Government on further actions to reduce poverty. We will now consider options to place the commission on a statutory footing.

Among other things, we will seek the commission's advice as we establish a new tackling child poverty fund. The fund will be worth £50 million over the next five years and will enable new approaches to be piloted or scaled up in the short term. Over the next year, we will also introduce a financial health check for low-income families and bring forward a new package of support for young carers.

Tackling poverty involves many different approaches. I am extremely proud that Scotland is one of the first countries in the world to tackle so-called period poverty through the current pilot scheme in Aberdeen and I welcome the cross-party support for that approach. We will consider further action to help women on low incomes across Scotland in the light of our learning from the pilot, but I confirm today that we will provide free access to sanitary products for students in schools, colleges and universities. Some local authorities have already made that commitment for schools, so we will work through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and with other partners to consider the options for delivery. The Parliament is providing global leadership on the issue and we should all be proud of that.

Although we must take a range of actions now to tackle poverty, we should also consider options for more fundamental reform in the longer term. One idea that is attracting interest, not just here but internationally, is that of a citizens basic income. Contemplating such a scheme inevitably raises a number of practical issues and questions, not least around the Parliament's current powers, and undoubtedly there are arguments for and against. However, as we look ahead to the next decade and beyond, it is an idea that merits deeper consideration. I therefore confirm that the Scottish Government will work with interested local authorities to fund research into the concept and the feasibility of a citizens basic income, to help to inform Parliament's thinking for the future.

One of the most important contributors to a good quality of life is housing. Good-quality, warm and affordable housing is vital to ensuring a

Scotland that is fair for this and future generations. Over the next year, we will make further progress towards our target of delivering 50,000 affordable homes by the end of this parliamentary session. Our new planning bill will also help to secure the housing development that the country needs.

We will continue work to improve the quality of our housing stock. A new warm homes bill will set a statutory target for reducing fuel poverty, and we will introduce new energy efficiency standards for the private rented sector to improve the quality of accommodation and help to lower fuel bills for those who rely on privately rented accommodation, many of whom are young people.

Scotland has a good record on housing. We are building social housing at a faster rate than any other part of the UK and we have protected social housing by removing the right to buy. However, as Westminster austerity and welfare cuts take their toll, we are seeing worrying signs of an increase in homelessness and rough sleeping. We are not prepared to tolerate that. I restate today a conviction that I hope will unite us all: it is not acceptable for anyone to have to sleep rough on our streets. We must eradicate rough sleeping.

However, in setting that national objective, we must recognise that it requires more than just housing. Every individual has unique needs and challenges. We will therefore establish a short-life expert group to make urgent recommendations on the actions, services and legislative changes that are required to end rough sleeping and transform the use of temporary accommodation. To support the group's recommendations, we will establish a new £10 million a year ending homelessness together fund, and we will invest an additional £20 million a year in alcohol and drug services to help to tackle some of the underlying problems that so often drive homelessness.

In tackling the challenges of building a fairer Scotland, national Government can do a great deal, but often the best solutions are found by communities. That is why we will continue work to empower communities across the country. Next year, we will launch a comprehensive review of local governance ahead of a local democracy bill later in this session of Parliament. We will continue to work with local authorities to ensure that at least 1 per cent of council budgets is controlled by communities. We will introduce a Crown estate bill to establish a framework for the management of assets and ensure that local communities benefit from the devolution of the powers.

We will continue to implement the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 and will shortly approve the first strategic plan of the new Scottish Land Commission, which will outline a programme of research to inform options for future change, such as possible measures to tackle constraints on the

supply and cost of land for housing and possible tax and fiscal reforms, including the potential for some form of land-value-based tax.

Scotland has a well-earned reputation as a leader in human rights, including economic, social and environmental rights. We will therefore oppose any attempt by the UK Government to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998 or to withdraw from the European convention on human rights. I intend to seek independent advice to help us to ensure that all existing and, where appropriate, future rights that are guaranteed by European Union law are protected in Scotland after Brexit.

We will take forward the actions in our strategy “A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People”; publish a new race equality action plan; progress the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Bill; work with the time for inclusive education campaign to tackle lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer bullying in schools; and consult on reforming the gender recognition laws.

Next year is our year of young people. Scotland has always taken a progressive approach to the welfare of children and young people in the criminal justice system. The children’s hearings system remains a jewel in the crown. However, in the year of young people, we will go further. We will introduce a minimum age of criminal responsibility bill to increase the minimum age of responsibility from eight to 12, in line with international norms.

I also confirm today that, although it is not our proposal and parties might give their members a free vote on the issue, the Scottish Government will not oppose John Finnie’s proposal to prohibit the physical punishment of children. It is worth noting that approximately 50 countries around the world—including France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the Republic of Ireland, to name a few—have already successfully made that change.

Over the next year, we will consider how to further embed the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into policy and legislation, including the option of full incorporation into domestic law.

Brexit will provide the backdrop to much of what we do over the next year. We are determined not to allow it to stand in the way of the ambitious programme that I am outlining today. However, we are equally determined to protect Scotland’s interests.

The UK Government’s European Union (Withdrawal) Bill represents a power grab. It seeks to replace EU law in devolved areas with unilateral Westminster decision making. That is simply unacceptable. The Scottish Government will not

recommend to this Parliament that we approve the bill as it stands. We will continue to seek the UK Government’s agreement to amendments that will address our concerns. However, in case that proves impossible, we are also considering the option of legislation in this Parliament to secure the necessary continuity of laws in Scotland.

We will continue to argue the case for continued UK membership of the single market and customs union. Leaving either will have deeply damaging consequences for our economy and wider society.

As I said in June, we will consider again the issue of a referendum on independence when the terms of Brexit are clear. In the coming months, we will publish a series of evidence-based papers that set out how enhanced powers for this Parliament in some key policy areas will allow us to better protect our interests and fulfil our ambitions for the country. Those papers will cover immigration and its importance to our economy; welfare; employment and employability; and trade. We will seek to work with other parties and with civic Scotland to build a consensus on the powers that the Parliament needs.

Later this year, we will publish our draft budget bill. The detail of our spending plans for next year will be set out then. However, I will address two issues today.

First, I confirm that we will lift the 1 per cent public sector pay cap. The pay cap, although never desirable, was necessary to protect jobs and services. However, with inflation on the rise, it is not sustainable. Our nurses, teachers, police officers and firefighters deserve a fairer deal for the future. The need to recruit the staff on whom our public services depend also demands a new approach. We will therefore aim to secure from next year pay rises that are affordable but which reflect the real-life circumstances that our public servants face and the contribution that our public services make to our country’s overall prosperity.

The budget bill process will set income tax rates for next year. We will always exercise the utmost responsibility in setting tax rates and will not simply transfer the burden of austerity to the shoulders of those who can least afford it. However, I am mindful that, as a minority Government, we must build alliances across Parliament in support of our budget. For all of us, the interests of our public services, households and economy must drive our decisions. We know that continued Westminster austerity, the consequences of Brexit and the impact of demographic change will put increasing pressure on our public services and our ability to provide the infrastructure and support that our businesses need to thrive. The time is therefore right to open a discussion about how responsible and progressive use of our tax powers could help to build the kind

of country that we want to be—one with the highest-quality public services, well-rewarded public servants, good support for business, a strong social contract and effective policies to tackle poverty and inequality.

Ahead of the budget, we will publish a paper that sets out the current distribution of income tax liabilities in Scotland; analyse a variety of options, including the proposals of the other parties across Parliament; explain the interaction between tax policy and the fiscal framework; and provide international comparisons. The purpose of that paper will be to inform the discussions that we have with other parties ahead of the budget. I give an assurance that the Scottish Government will go into those discussions with an open mind and with the best interests of the country as a whole as our guiding principle, and I invite other parties to do likewise.

Three bills of a more technical nature—the damages bill, the land and buildings transaction tax bill and the prescription bill—will complete the 16 bills that make up our legislative programme for the year ahead.

The programme that I have set out today—the policies and the legislation—is fresh, bold and ambitious. Because of that, aspects of it undoubtedly will be controversial. That is inevitable—indeed, it is necessary. No one has ever built a better country by always taking the easy option.

As we debate the programme in the days, weeks and months ahead, members will focus on and scrutinise individual aspects of it. That is right and proper, but I invite Parliament—and the public—also to see the programme in the round. It is about equipping Scotland not just for the next year but for the next decade and beyond. At its heart is the ambition to make our country the best place in the world in which to grow up and be educated; the best place to live in, work in, visit and do business in; the best place in which to be cared for in times of sickness, need or vulnerability; and the best place in which to grow old.

I commend the programme for government to Parliament.

Programme for Government 2017-18

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We now move to the open debate. I invite members who wish to speak to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

15:00

Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): I thank the First Minister for early sight of her speech.

Last week, in a speech in Edinburgh, I set out some of my priorities for the parliamentary year ahead. I began by pointing out that next week marks the 20th anniversary of the devolution referendum of 1997. Famously, after that referendum, Donald Dewar declared that devolution is a process, not an event; it sometimes feels as though we have spent the two decades since then determined to prove him right. The political structures that surround us have often been the central focus of our politics. I hope that we can, as we mark 20 years of devolution, move on to a wider debate about political substance, as well.

To that end, I and my Conservative colleagues are committed to challenging the Government and scrutinising its decisions, but also to proposing our own alternative way forward, in what I hope will be a spirit of respectful debate. We do that with the clear aim of using the powers of this Parliament to make a difference to the lives of the people who live here. At least, that is the plan.

Therefore, in response to the First Minister, I begin by seeking to find what common ground exists, and to find whatever I can to welcome in her speech today. For all that the Scottish National Party might pretend otherwise, that common ground exists: indeed, given how much the SNP has poached from Scottish Conservative manifestoes over recent months, I am tempted to suggest that the programme for government should be called “Something borrowed, something blue.”

Today, I am happy to welcome the Government’s proposal for an education reform bill. That is because the principle of reform has consistently been put forward by the Scottish Conservatives during the past five years. However, our support for the detail of the bill is limited because there is growing concern that the Government is, far from delivering real independence to schools, attempting to centralise control through its governance reforms. That would be unacceptable. To borrow from the SNP’s dictionary for a moment, I say that although we

support reform, we will not support a schools power grab by the Scottish Government.

I am genuinely pleased to see the inclusion of a “Frank’s law” in today’s programme for government. It is absolutely a policy whose time has come. Scots who need care should not be divided by an arbitrary line of age. I pay tribute to Amanda Kopel, who has, on behalf of her late husband Frank, campaigned for such a law for years, and has done so with amazing dignity and strength. If the First Minister wishes to expedite the process so that we can get the law working on the ground as soon as possible, I believe that she will have the whole Parliament’s support. She will certainly have mine.

I am pleased that the campaign for a new offence of drug driving that was proposed by my erstwhile colleague Douglas Ross has found favour with the Scottish Government, as has John Lamont’s long-standing call for a south of Scotland enterprise agency.

On public sector pay, the Scottish Conservatives have supported the Governments here and across the rest of the United Kingdom in choosing pay restraint for public sector workers instead of redundancies, as they sought to stabilise the economy following the financial crash. Having righted the ship, it is time to revisit that restraint. Depending on what part of the public sector Scots work in, their salaries can be set either by Holyrood or by Westminster. Although we await the details on timing, levels of increase and the rest, we believe that it is right to revisit that restraint today, and we expect to see movement in the area from the UK Government in the period ahead.

On homelessness, we urge the Government to commit also to a new national homelessness strategy for Scotland. All parties are committed to contributing to one.

We also welcome the announcement of a bill to pardon gay and bisexual men. That is an important and necessary step that will allow us to turn the page on the past and ensure that we no longer label consensual behaviour as criminal.

However much we welcome the tone and some of the content of today’s statement, we are entitled to be sceptical, too. We have just had 12 months in which, it is fair to say, delivery has not been topmost on the Government’s list of priorities. Today, the First Minister has come to Parliament with 16 bills. Last year, she came with 15 bills, but got only four of them through. The public are entitled to ask whether today’s 16 bills will come in front of or behind last year’s leftovers in the queue.

There are also areas in which the Scottish Conservatives will not offer their support—areas in which we will fight every step of the way because

the SNP Government has simply got it wrong. It has brought forward a programme to raise taxes and to keep robbers out of the jail.

In her speech, Nicola Sturgeon played down sentences of 12 months or less. However, 17 per cent of all offenders who are done for attempted murder or serious assault received sentences of less than 12 months, and more than a quarter of all sex offenders are given jail terms of less than 12 months.

In many areas, we see the need for criminals to be taken off the streets. That need is greater nowhere than it is in domestic violence and domestic abuse cases, in which keeping the offender in the home environment means that others there can never break free. I remind the First Minister that domestic abuse takes many forms—it can be violent abuse, but it can also be financial or psychological abuse, or intimidation. I see that the First Minister has linked two bills. We will fight to ensure that the option of jail exists. Otherwise, the SNP’s soft-touch Scotland just got a whole lot softer.

On the citizens basic income scheme, we would be concerned if we thought that anything would ever come of it beyond the SNP trying to write today’s headline and the scheme being a bone that the First Minister is throwing to the Green Party. The First Minister’s commitment extends only to working

“with interested local authorities to fund research into the concept and feasibility of a citizens’ basic income”,

So we Conservative members can sleep pretty easily tonight.

It is clear from the First Minister’s words today that the SNP has realised that the absence of domestic legislative activity over the past year was a mistake and that it is now trying to change tack. However, for all the warm words, I am afraid that the evidence suggests that the SNP has still not quite got the message.

On Brexit, the First Minister is right that new powers will come here after we leave the European Union. Conservative members will support that process. However, the First Minister must recognise that the country has had enough of constitutional squabbling; Brexit must not be used by the SNP as another opportunity to retreat to its comfort zone of talking process. If the First Minister really wants to find consensus on that matter, she must instead approach the issue pragmatically. We cannot just talk about where powers lie: we all need to start talking about what to do with the powers that we have, because time is pressing.

Let us just look at some of the enormous challenges that we face in Scotland, including

those that have come to light since last we met in this chamber. A survey of more than 3,000 nurses found that half of them believe that patient care is being compromised because of insufficient staffing. Audit Scotland concluded that the Scottish Government has failed to plan adequate staffing for the national health service in the long term, and an ISD Scotland report that has been published today shows a record number of vacancies for NHS consultants and, currently, 3,200 nursing and midwifery posts unfilled. Figures show that the number of drugs-related deaths in 2016 rose by 23 per cent on the previous year.

Further, the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee warned that there is a risk of the shortage of headteachers increasing in the future. As I said when I stood here this time last year, the in-tray is bulging and we need action.

It is clear that if the Scottish Government is to re-earn the trust and respect of the people of Scotland, it will need to take a new approach that shuns the overpromising and underdelivering of the past, which was compounded by trying to cover things up when inconvenient facts emerged.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Will Ruth Davidson tell members whether she thinks that filling of vacancies in the national health service will be helped or hindered by Brexit?

Ruth Davidson: For years, we have talked about workforce planning, but it has not worked in 10 years of SNP Government. Government ministers might now choose to hide behind the fig leaf of Brexit, but what were they saying a year, two years, five years or 10 years ago, when Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Green members brought the issue of workforce planning to Parliament? They said absolutely nothing.

Let us look again at the Scottish Government's record over the summer. This time last year, the SNP Government's big announcement was a new £500 million Scottish growth deal, but last week we learned that the new deal has yet to provide a penny to any Scottish firm. Why the delay?

Last year, the SNP staged major announcements in which general practitioners were told that the Scottish Government was committed to increasing the proportion of NHS funding that was going into primary care. However, over the summer, GP leaders have warned that that cast-iron promise was being watered down.

There have been grand promises that are, in reality, less than the sum of their parts. People want a Government that is prepared to face up to

the issues, but too often the Scottish Government has tried to hide them away. It is a Government that asked its own independent poverty adviser to tone down a report that criticised cuts to further education, that urges Audit Scotland to water down its warnings about the future of the NHS, and that does not confront its own failings and is more concerned with trying to fool people into not noticing.

People have a right to be wary of a Government that is, for the 10th year on the trot, promising jam tomorrow—a Government that complains about the levers that it does not have, but which seems to be terrified of the ones that are under its control. As the main Opposition party, we will seek to push the Scottish Government towards a bolder path, by pushing for change ourselves.

Last week, I set out some of my initial ideas and focused specifically on ways to solve Scotland's housing crisis. Nobody in this chamber can be satisfied with the current situation, in which young people find themselves shut out of the housing market until their mid-30s and a new generation no longer believes that they will match their parents' living standards, so we must act. If one speaks to people in the sector, one hears that they are utterly frustrated by the drift and delay on planning that they have seen from the Scottish Government—drift that is deterring investment and sending it to Manchester, Liverpool or Birmingham and not to Glasgow, Edinburgh or Aberdeen. We must find new ways to ensure that 25,000 homes a year are built in Scotland, and we will push the Government to deliver.

Furthermore, we need to address the current state of housing, which is why we will continue to push the Scottish Government to use its growing capital budget to ensure that no one has to live in a hard-to-heat home. A transformational investment in home energy efficiency would be a huge win-win for Scotland by creating jobs, reducing carbon emissions, improving health and helping householders with their energy bills, which is why in Government the Conservatives would introduce a new target to ensure that every home is, by the end of the next decade, energy efficiency rated C or above. As the Opposition, we will attempt to write such measures into the bill that the SNP introduces.

I am pleased to say that tomorrow we will unveil our new NHS advisory panel. Made up of practitioners and health professionals, it will examine how best we can sustain our health service and its traditions for the long term. There is plenty of consensus in the chamber that we need to face up to the challenges in the NHS. We want to play our part in that.

On education, we will press the Scottish Government to push real power down to individual

schools and to headteachers, because they are the people who know their schools best. We will set out fresh ways to tackle what is the clear pressing priority of parents, which is to ensure that there are enough teachers in our schools.

We will report back soon with a full review of curriculum for excellence. The warnings that have been given by Professor Lindsay Paterson at the weekend cannot be dismissed out of hand, as the SNP Government has sought to do. The urgent priority must be to address our declining numeracy and literacy standards. We need more investment in teacher numbers, with more flexibility for routes into teaching, and we need root-and-branch reform of our education agencies.

On justice, we will support further prison reforms that focus on rehabilitation. At the same time, we need to give judges the tools to punish the very worst criminals by backing whole-life sentences.

We must also act here to listen to the concerns of rural Scotland and reflect the concerns of people who too often feel left out of Scotland's public debate. We have had enough of hearing about who is to blame for the lack of rural broadband, for example. People just want to see Government—both Governments—get on and sort it out.

On the economy, we will seek to lead a debate in Parliament on the need to put growth first. The time for endless theoretical debate about the state of our economy in a future constitutional position is over. We need to focus on the more pressing issue of how we will grow the economy now, how we will increase productivity and how we will train and retrain our people for the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow, because the new financial powers here mean that Scotland needs to raise closer to what it spends.

We will continue this year to argue that dragging Scotland down with ever more punitive taxes is not the right way. The First Minister is opening the door on greater tax rises today. We say this: stop taking ever more money from the pockets of Scotland's workers. We must instead go for growth. The Scottish Government's own review of business rates last month urged ministers to rethink some of their tax rises. If even its own report is critical of its policy, surely it is time to listen?

The SNP needs, to be blunt, to decide what it believes in. It has tacked left on its new land and buildings transaction tax and has, inevitably, gummed up the market as a result. On the new air passenger duty, however, it has recognized the benefit of competitive taxation. On issues such as APD, we will seek to work with the SNP to deliver something that could be of huge economic benefit

to Scotland. We only wish that the Government would show some consistency.

We all are reading that the SNP is, largely for its own political reasons, preparing to march leftwards this year. I humbly urge the First Minister to remember other people too: the small firms, the employers and the taxpayers of Scotland.

On that note, I say that the Scottish Government has announced a business development bank. I welcome the focus on providing finance for capital investment, and I will not be ideological about it. However, it would be remiss of me to avoid pointing out that, yet again, we have been here before, with the establishment of new banks. The Scottish Government announced a Scottish business development bank as far back as May 2013. It was then re-announced in September 2013 and dropped in May 2014 before resurfacing in the First Minister's first programme for government towards the end of 2014. Since then, it has not only been delayed a few times, but the plan has changed from the setting up of a dedicated bank to being a part of the existing Scottish Investment Bank. And guess what? It still does not operate in full. Overpromising and underdelivering is a theme with the Government.

Given the parliamentary arithmetic of Parliament, I do not seek to downplay the challenge that faces the Government in pushing its agenda through this year. Indeed, we all await with anticipation the great Scottish courting ritual of the winter months—though it may be that Mr Harvie will this year find competition as a suitor from Mr Rennie. Sometimes, I can even muster some sympathy for the First Minister.

However, what all parties will be looking for—from all around the chamber—is a sign of change. If the Government is to earn back the trust and respect of the people of Scotland, which it has squandered in the past year, then it must change, and change fast. It must show that it understands the difference between a genuine complaint and the politics of endless grievance. It must accept responsibility for all of its record and it must fix the mistakes that it has made. It must be frank about the huge challenges that Scotland faces and it must not seek, as its first response, to bury bad news and pretend that it does not exist.

Given what we know of the Government, we will wait to see whether today's warm words are backed up by action, before we make a judgment. The Government should know this: after the past year, it is on probation with the people of Scotland. It is time to change tack. It is time to deliver.

15:16

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome everyone back to Parliament, and I

congratulate all who were involved in the construction and design of the Queensferry crossing—the magnificent new bridge that links the wonderful kingdom of Fife to the Lothians. It was good to be at the official opening yesterday and I hope that more members will take the opportunity to venture across the Forth and enjoy the delights of Fife.

I also congratulate all the workers involved in building the aircraft carriers. The HMS Prince of Wales will have its naming ceremony in Rosyth this Friday—well done to everyone who was involved.

The First Minister has announced an extensive programme for her Government and she will look for support across the chamber. I make it clear that Labour will not oppose for the sake of opposing; we will work constructively with the Government where it is in the best interests of the people of Scotland to do so. Equally, I hope that the Government, for its part, will be more open to working with others and listening to other ideas and opinions.

The First Minister has listened to us and agreed to lift the public sector pay cap—that is welcomed. Her plan to launch a national investment bank to boost our economy is also good news—that was part of Labour's general election manifesto, as was scrapping the pay cap. Unfortunately, without a Labour Government in Westminster, it will not have the £20 billion of lending power to get it started, but nevertheless we welcome the announcement. We look for complete transparency in how it will be set up and who will be put in charge of what should be a vital part of Scotland's economic infrastructure.

It seems that in other areas of Government, ears were closed to advice, ideas and experiences. To carry on with the poor education governance reforms, which have been criticised by all in the sector, is pure dogmatic politics. The First Minister has often said that she wants to be judged on what her Government does to improve our education system. Let us remind ourselves of a few of the facts.

We have more than 4,000 fewer teachers than when the SNP came to power; 1,000 fewer support staff than when the SNP came to power; and class sizes bigger than when the SNP came to power. Spending per pupil across all ages is down. If pupil spend had remained the same as the 2010-11 level, primary schools would be £726 million better off and secondary schools would be £308 million better off. I cannot see how what has been proposed today addresses any of that. Indeed, it seems to me that it is a classic avoidance technique: when in doubt, restructure. That did not work for Police Scotland, the fire and

rescue services or our colleges, and it will not work for our schools.

I used much of the summer recess meeting people and listening to what they had to say. The teachers I spoke to over the summer told me about the impact of the cuts in schools and classrooms, workloads that have them completely run off their feet, class sizes that are far too large, the need for more teaching assistants in our classrooms, and not having the basic materials to be able to provide teaching and learning of the quality that we need.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Does Mr Rowley regret the decision that North Lanarkshire Council made when his party went into coalition with the Tories? The first thing that they did was to sack 100 classroom assistants.

Alex Rowley: What I regret is the £170 million in the local council budget last year, which meant classroom assistants and others being taken out of the education authority. It really is rich for SNP MSPs to come to the Parliament and talk about council cuts, as they voted for those cuts. Most of the concerns that teachers are expressing are the result of a severe shortage of funding in education. I say to the First Minister that that needs to be addressed if we are going to tackle education issues. Taking control of education away from our councils will not address any of those issues.

That brings me to local government. We must recognise that local councils are on the front line of supporting people who are suffering from failed Tory austerity. Local councils lead on planning and economic development, health and social care, protecting our environment, the education of our children, and the health and wellbeing of our communities. The SNP Government's obsession with centralising local government and the willingness to pass on Tory austerity to local public services have got to stop. The Government must change course and build a new partnership with local councils that is built on mutual respect, understanding and joined-up planning to tackle the big issues in our communities.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I appreciate what Mr Rowley is saying about local government, which is very dear to my heart, having served as a councillor in North Lanarkshire. He has just talked about cuts. Why did North Lanarkshire Labour fail to use the flexibility in the council tax to alleviate some of those cuts?

Alex Rowley: In the next budget round, we need to ensure that we do not simply pass on failed Tory austerity to local councils and local public services. I really hope that the First Minister and, indeed, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance

and the Constitution are listening to what others are saying.

It is time to use the Parliament's powers to pay for a fairer and more equal society and to support our public services. It is time to introduce a 50p top rate of income tax, to have an honest discussion with the people of Scotland to show that those who can afford to pay a bit more should do so and to scrap the unfair council tax, as the First Minister once promised she would do, because no amount of tinkering with the bands will make it any fairer. Although the SNP says that it will lift the public sector pay cap, let us be clear that that cannot be done on the back of cutting even more from public services; it must be paid for.

I have listened to hundreds of people this summer—at street stalls and coffee mornings and on the doorsteps. It should be no surprise to the First Minister to hear that people right across Scotland are very concerned about the state of our national health service. We have an NHS workforce crisis, and today new figures show how bad it is. Nursing and midwife vacancies are up; consultant vacancies are up; and, in July, more than 400 operations were cancelled.

I am not sure that anything that the First Minister has said today is going to tackle those major issues in our health service. Will this programme for government bring change for the hundreds queuing outside GP practices, trying to get an appointment; for the people being removed from lists; for those trapped in hospitals, on waiting lists for care packages, operations or to see specialists; or for those seeking mental health support? I am not sure that it will.

It should not be a surprise to hear that people were also raising housing problems. Shelter Scotland says that Scotland has a "housing crisis"; I agree. So, too, do the tens of thousands on council house waiting lists, the homeless and the children who leave school each day with no home to call their own.

I have welcomed the Government's commitment to build 50,000 affordable homes, of which 35,000 will be for social rent, but I say again that we need a national house building strategy to ensure that that happens. We cannot allow this housing crisis to continue.

That brings me to skills, apprenticeships and jobs. In near enough every sector of our economy, we have major skills gaps. Our ambition must surely be to have a high-skill, high-wage economy, but we have 71,000 people on zero-hours contracts. We also have 40,000 agency workers in Scotland with little security of work, a figure that is predicted to rise significantly unless something is done.

We will work with the Government on the measures that it has announced today, but there must be more than warm words. Will the First Minister listen to us and consider Labour's proposals for an industrial strategy for Scotland? Actions speak louder than words, and it is actions that we need.

Talking of actions, we have worked with the Government on its Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill. I hope that it agrees to establish an independent statutory poverty and inequality commission for Scotland. However, setting child poverty targets is one thing, but action is needed to tackle child poverty. Again, First Minister, listen to Labour: use this Parliament's powers to increase child benefit by £5 a week to lift more than 30,000 children out of poverty over the next three years. Actions speak louder than words. Listen to Labour: drop the proposal for the 50 per cent cut in air passenger duty, a measure that will cost Scottish taxpayers about £190 million. Drop that idea and invest the money in tackling the unacceptable poverty levels.

There are positive measures in the Government's programme, but huge challenges that Scotland faces are not addressed. We will work with the Government where we can, we will hold them to account where we can, and we will introduce the ideas to tackle the big challenges facing communities up and down Scotland in 2017.

15:28

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank the First Minister for the advance copy of her statement. I take this moment to offer a word or two about Kezia Dugdale. I have offered her my best wishes in person, but when someone steps down from a role of service not to their own party but to Parliament, it is appropriate to say so on the record. I am sure that I am not alone and that members of all parties will want to wish Kezia Dugdale well for the future. [*Applause.*]

Today's statement allows us to move on somewhat from the rather symbolic stories of the summer silly season to a little substance. We have seen people fawning over a clock in London and a bridge in Scotland. Without taking anything away from the workforce who are working or have worked on those projects, I am not sure that I want to fawn over military infrastructure either.

We now have the opportunity to move on to the issues of substance from a Government that seems to have been proposing the idea that it is ready for a reset. If that is the Government's aim, it is perhaps inevitable that every other political party in the Parliament will say, "Look! They're stealing our policies! Those were our great ideas!"

However, I have to say that it was a little risible that a Conservative who is trying, all of a sudden, to talk about affordable housing and energy efficiency took that line and claimed that others are pinching Conservative policies.

Notwithstanding that, the Greens will, of course, welcome many of the measures that are remarkably familiar from not just our 2016 manifesto but many manifestos that the Greens have published over the years. If such policies are now on the Government's agenda, it is clear that that is because of Green presence in this Parliament. Greens will be necessary to put pressure on the Government to turn paper commitments into real changes.

Let us take the climate change bill for a start. We need to go beyond the track that we are on. The targets that the Government has floated are simply a continuation of our current level of emissions reduction. A commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2040 would be the spur that is needed to ensure investment in the new, low-carbon industries that will create long-lasting jobs for the future.

On clean energy, the Government's main commitment is on carbon capture and storage. At the moment CCS remains a speculative technology that will not help us in the immediate years ahead, even if it has longer-term prospects.

A deposit return scheme will be very welcome, and if the Government cracks on and gets that done quickly, a scheme might even be in place a mere decade after this Parliament passed the enabling legislation.

We welcome the commitment to phase out petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2032, but what is needed alongside it is a commitment to the end of the use of such vehicles, not just to the end of their sale as new vehicles coming on to the market.

For some time we have been calling for more than the one pilot low-emission zone that the Scottish Government has supported, so I welcome the commitment to have four such zones. Having just one pilot was clearly inadequate in the first place; where we are now is where we should have been some time ago.

As for more investment in walking and cycling, there is ground to make up from earlier cuts in that area, and the increase must be sustained for the long term if it is to make a difference.

I had hoped that we might hear advance notice of the decision on fracking that is due by the end of this calendar year. It would have been welcome to hear a commitment today to a full and permanent ban. That is the only decision that not

only the Greens but many people in the First Minister's party will tolerate.

I welcome the commitment to give support—or at least fair wind—to my colleague John Finnie's proposal for a member's bill on giving children equal protection from assault. I am sure that that will be one of many examples of constructive Green ideas that the Government will continue to welcome.

A citizens income is perhaps the most radical of the long-standing Green policies in which the Government today gave a signal of interest. We heard about a fund to help local authority pilots. It is Green councillors on local authorities who have been at the forefront of pushing for such schemes.

The case for a citizens income, or universal basic income, has never been stronger. There has always been a principled case for saying that we all, collectively, create the wealth of our economy and we all have a right to share in that wealth. A citizens income would achieve that, as well as recognising the value to our economy of unpaid labour and, in particular, the deeply gendered imbalance in who does that unpaid and unremunerated labour in our society. As we anticipate another wave of automation, the case for a citizens income grows all the stronger.

It might well be that Ruth Davidson is sleeping cosy in the comforting knowledge that such a basic safeguard for people will never be achieved. I have no doubt that those who are responsible for the near destruction of our social security system are sleeping easy. I have no doubt that those who are responsible for the on-going poverty pay and exploitation in our economy are quite unbothered in their comfortable slumbers. I am sure that Ruth Davidson is more comfortable in that regard than she is with spending time in the company of some of her party's local councillors. However, those among us who want a society that is based on the level of respect to which all human beings are entitled will want more progress on a citizens income.

In education, the responses to the Government's consultation on governance—from teachers, parents, pupils, expert bodies, academics and unions—have been almost universally hostile to the Government's proposals. The Government's rather dismissive and meaningless response seems to have been, "Well, they didn't want any change anyway." Parliament will inevitably challenge the Government on its divisive proposals, and we have a right to expect a more meaningful response than the one that the consultees have received.

We welcome the review of initial teacher education, which was clearly needed. Our particular priority has been to ensure consistently

high-quality education for those with additional support needs. One in four pupils has those identified needs, so it cannot be just specialist staff—and a reducing number of those staff—who know how to meet those needs. However, we cannot countenance the Government using the review of teacher training to force through the Teach First scheme in Scotland. That fast-track scheme risks putting unqualified and unprepared individuals into classrooms, and it has a lower retention rate than traditional routes into teaching. The Government has proved itself rather too willing to facilitate secretive dialogue on the issue via lobbying through the royal household. We will continue to challenge the Government on those issues.

There is a great deal more that I would have liked to see in the statement, including support to fight child poverty with a £5 top-up of child benefit and support for carers through increased allowances. In the programme for government debate last year, the First Minister indicated support for the Green proposal of an additional young carers allowance. This year, that is still a paper commitment. Let us make sure that, by next year, it is a reality and not just words on the page.

Let us also see support from the Government for my colleague Mark Ruskell's member's bill proposal to establish 20mph limits, thereby ensuring safer streets in all our residential communities, and let us see real movement on progressive taxation. The First Minister says that the time is right for a discussion paper—two years after we were made aware that the devolution of income tax powers was coming and a year after we began our first debates on what the Scottish income tax rates and bands should be. It is way past time that we had a discussion. I hope that the discussion is more meaningful than the discussions that we have had on local tax reform, which have, so far, led to nothing except more willingness to debate the options. We need to go further.

I would also have liked to see rather more on the issues on which the Government has had a poor track record, such as animal welfare. Even the UK Government is considering making closed-circuit television mandatory in abattoirs, but the Scottish Government has resisted that. We also need to see action on fox hunting that goes beyond the stated intentions of Lord Bonomy, who said that the goal of his review was to find a way to ensure that hunting could continue. There is much more to do on the animal welfare agenda.

Where we have common ground, we will continue to work with the Government. That includes opposing the UK Government's destructive and incompetent approach on Brexit. This Parliament represents people who voted by a

huge majority to remain European, and we cannot let them down. Where we have constructive work to do with the Government, we will do it, and where it needs to be challenged—either to go beyond its comfort zone or to turn paper commitments into real-world changes—we will be here to push it.

15:38

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): On Saturday afternoon, my colleague Alex Cole-Hamilton and I joined a group of breast cancer survivors called the Port Edgar dragons on their magnificent dragon boat, the *Isla May*, on the river Forth. They are a wonderful group of women who show gutsy human spirit to improve their health. We had an alternative view of the Queensferry crossing to that of the thousands who were able to cross it above us, but we saw the magnificence of the bridge. The engineers and workers should be proud of their achievement. Those who argued that the crossing was not necessary need only cast their minds back to the winter of 2015, when the old bridge was forced to close, or a little further back to the discovery that the main cables were corroding. Let us not revisit history. The bridge was necessary for the east coast artery of this country and I am pleased that it has been built.

The recess should have allowed us all to reflect on one of the most turbulent periods in politics for some time. With nine sets of elections and referendums in the last six years, people have had their fill. People want elected politicians to deliver real improvements in their lives. They are fed up with the endless focus on independence. To give credit to the First Minister, she recognised that in June, when she signalled that she was cooling on independence. I was sceptical at the time and will always be suspicious but, for now, we have a chance to focus on real change, and today's announcement of a presumption against prison sentences of 12 months or less is a start. We have been calling for that for some time. We also support the same-sex activity pardons, and I am pleased that the SNP, after opposing it twice, is now prepared to raise the age of criminal responsibility. We support Frank's law, too.

However, those were a few bright spots in an otherwise rather dull statement. The First Minister has today confirmed what former ministers said in the papers this morning: the SNP has a lack of ideas, the fire has gone out and the leadership is stuck in an ivory tower. The flat reaction of back-bench SNP members to the First Minister's statement shows that the fire has gone out there, too. It was 14 whole minutes before there was a round of applause for anything that the First Minister said. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Willie Rennie: Most of the applause was for the announcement that other parties' ideas that the SNP had previously opposed were to be implemented.

Members: Aw!

Willie Rennie: I loved the fact that Patrick Harvie criticised those parties that claimed credit for policies that were announced in the programme for government before going on to spend the rest of his speech doing exactly that.

Let us look at where we are in Scotland. The waits for mental health treatment are far too long. Today, we hear that more young people are waiting longer for treatment than was the case in the previous period. The situation is getting worse, not better. The international standing of our education system is slipping. The fallout from the botched centralisation of the police service continues. The recruitment of sufficient nurses, doctors and teachers is posing real issues in our schools and our NHS. The expansion of offshore renewable energy is lagging behind.

The First Minister talked about the economy. In its previous programme for government, the Scottish Government said that its flagship policy was a £500 million Scottish growth fund that would pay out guarantees and loans to Scottish business. No loans or guarantees have been paid out. In fact, more than a year later, the promised changes to parliamentary procedures to allow those payments to be made have not even been tabled. The Scottish Government switched some of that scheme to equity funding in June, but Scottish Enterprise has been doing equity funding since it was set up in 1991, so I am not sure why a nine-month delay was necessary to make it happen. The growth fund was supposed to be an urgent response, post-Brexit, to deal with the state of the economy, so we will scrutinise today's proposals to see whether, this time, they amount to much, because last time's proposals did not.

When my party was in government, we implemented the McCrone agreement for teachers. That deal on pay and conditions valued the work of our teachers. We need a new McCrone agreement to address the workload and recruitment issues of today. That is an important step that we could take to reverse the decline in our international education standing.

With the budget ahead, there is a chance to inject investment into education for the nursery education roll-out, for schools and colleges and especially for women and mature students. We have proposed the provision of £500 million, which would be paid for by a modest penny on income tax, using the Parliament's new powers.

It is good that the Government has abandoned its manifesto promise to implement the national

funding formula for schools, and it is good that the pupil equity fund—which ministers opposed for years—is still in place.

On health, we must treat mental health as the answer to the long-term problems with the sustainability of the NHS, but to make the strategy work, funds must follow. Without the resources to make it work, the strategy will be insufficient.

We should value the workforce and offer, in particular, good careers for staff in remote and rural areas. The problems that I highlighted about Caithness general hospital need to be adequately addressed. There is no point in shuffling them off because it is miles away. We need an answer to the problems of the rural NHS.

We need to address the recruitment problems in the NHS too. Today we have heard about nurse shortages, but there are also major problems with GPs. People are waiting for weeks to see their GP and many GPs are handing back their practices to the health board because they cannot cope any more. There is little point in the SNP Government boasting about staff numbers when the NHS is short of what is required.

With the departure of the chairman of the Scottish Police Authority, we believe there is an opportunity to inject democracy back into the police. The appointment of the new chairman should be with the agreement of this Parliament, just like the appointment of the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, the information commissioner and the other commissioners. That would inject democracy back into our struggling police force.

At the general election, we proposed to lift the public sector pay cap. The UK proposal was to boost the pay of teachers, nurses, soldiers and care workers as well as many others by £780 by 2021. This would be a welcome change after years of, in effect, cuts in pay. Of course, we need to work within the recommendations of the public sector pay bodies and within Scottish resources but we believe that the Scottish Government should take the initiative to lift the pay cap.

Our plan is based on using investment to deliver reform, investing in the talents of our people to achieve great things and to lift the economy, decentralising power and bringing back democracy.

I am afraid the Conservatives' reckless gamble on Europe means that the Houses of Parliament will be dominated by that subject for some time. We remain of the view that Brexit will be damaging. You only need to visit the fruit farms of North East Fife to realise the economic impact of losing thousands of seasonal pickers from Europe: a direct result of Brexit, the exchange rate and the perception of greater hostility to foreigners.

When the consequences of Brexit become clear, we believe that there should be an exit chute. Even the most ardent Eurosceptics on the Conservative benches did not vote for Brexit to make us poorer. Conservative MSPs, just like everyone else, should have the right to turn back if it will damage our country.

It should be the British people who decide what is next, which is why I am sceptical of talk of a Holyrood veto on Brexit. This is not a Scottish-English battle. It is about the economic and social wellbeing of the whole of the country. We will talk to the SNP Government about how to handle Brexit in this Parliament but we are not interested in driving a wedge between Scotland and England.

This parliamentary term is a new opportunity to deliver change now that there is a possibility of putting the divisions of independence behind us. We have put forward constructive proposals. The big question is this: will the Scottish Parliament and this Government seize that opportunity.

The Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate. I ask all members who wish to speak to press their buttons.

15:48

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Like others, I have just returned from a busy summer meeting the people who put me here in the first place, who put each of us here in the first place and who expect us to work with courage, creativity and ambition to make Scotland an even better place to work, live, invest and do business.

As I listened to the First Minister set out the programme for government for the coming year, always with a thought as to the impact on the people of my constituency of Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch, I heard a vision for a fairer, more prosperous and innovative country, prepared to embrace the challenges of the future. Two additional aspects struck me. First, the programme for government recognises that there is so much academic, entrepreneurial and creative potential in the people of Scotland. The people of our communities are our greatest resource, with their ideas, their families and their commitment to collaboration. I see it every day as I work with the people of my constituency.

Government's role is to create an environment that enables people to be the best they can be, for example by closing the attainment gap, expanding early years education and childcare, and offering intensive support for up to 40 of the most talented and ambitious entrepreneurs to help bring their ideas to market. All those policies, and many, many more, will directly support the people of

Scotland, who can then themselves shape a better, more prosperous and more equal society.

Secondly, this agenda, with its coherent, ambitious vision for our future, does not forget any community. The programme for government might have been announced today in Edinburgh, but its contents are for every community in this nation. Previous action by the SNP Government has focused on empowering Scotland's communities, but the plans announced today for the coming session go even further, so that our communities can lead the nation with home-grown enterprise that attracts investment and nurtures talent.

I want to see our communities flourish and thrive, particularly those that feel disempowered either geographically or economically, because I believe that the nation flourishes only when every community has a stake in our collective future and is able to contribute to the common good.

Those are nice ideas—I imagine that all of us agree—but in this programme for government there are clear, tangible, doable solutions that deliver precisely that. There is not just talk, but action—actions such as enabling communities to control 1 per cent of council budgets, or providing a framework in the Crown Estate bill that enables local communities to benefit from managing assets and devolving power. That applies in urban and rural areas.

The programme for government connects the most remote or disempowered communities, first to each other and then to the wider world. While all eyes are on the Queensferry crossing, the first phase of the £3 billion A9 dualling project is about to open in my constituency—we have waited years for that. It is great news for the Highlands that the Scottish Government will not rest on its laurels but go even further and make the A9 the first fully electric-enabled highway.

I was already pleased that the Scottish Government intends to roll out superfast broadband to 100 per cent of premises, but it will be immensely welcome that the First Minister has put rural Scotland right at the front of the queue for our digital revolution. That means that the most remote communities will be the very first to reap the benefits of comprehensive fibre broadband coverage.

The programme for government also links those small communities with international market centres through international investment hubs that are now in London, Dublin, Brussels, Berlin and Paris. The significance of international connections in transforming our local communities cannot be overestimated.

Food and drink exports, for example, which are now at a record high of £5.5 billion, are a major contributor to not just Scotland's economy. Many

of those exports are sourced from the shores, farms and distilleries of rural Scotland, thus creating jobs and providing sustainable incomes.

Central to any ambitions for economic growth is the critical urgency of building more homes across Scotland. The programme for government is packed full with bold and innovative policies, among which is one on housing that intends to bring vacant properties back into use. Across this nation, numerous buildings that once served a useful purpose now sit idle, from an abandoned croft house on a Highland hill to derelict buildings in the hearts of our cities.

In short, Presiding Officer, the programme for government does not just empower communities by proposing legislation; it does it by devolving power and investing in communities. At its heart is a belief that we cannot move forward unless every one of our communities is moving forward. It tackles head on the challenges of our future, with creativity, ambition and an absolutely relentless determination to unlock Scotland's potential.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Thank you. There is a little time in hand, so I can make up the time to members who take interventions.

15:54

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): We all know that education plays a key role in contributing to the future prospects of Scotland's children, so let us start with two grim facts. On the SNP's watch, the number of primary 7 pupils from the most deprived communities in Scotland performing well in numeracy has fallen to 54 per cent and the figure for writing has fallen to 56 per cent. That is the reality of the SNP's decade-long record in Government. The attainment gap is getting wider.

The scale of the problem is huge. We are not talking only about the 5 or 10 per cent most deprived communities: we are talking about the bottom third. In Scotland today, a child growing up in the poorest third of households has barely a 50:50 chance of being able to read to the required standard or to count properly by the time they leave primary school.

I am sure that every member of the Parliament thinks that that is completely unacceptable, but the sad truth is that not every member wants to use our law-making powers to address it. We know that there is a direct link between educational underattainment and child poverty. We also know that Parliament has before it the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill. I welcome that bill and I have sought to make it stronger during its passage through Parliament.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Adam Tomkins: No.

We need our law to contain clear, binding and effective requirements on Scottish ministers to take steps to address the consequences of child poverty and to tackle what drives people into poverty in the first place. We tried to amend the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 to address the shocking reality of the Scottish Government's education record as it penalises children who are growing up in our poorest communities, but we were blocked. We shall try again at stage 3.

I agree with the First Minister that we need to tackle the attainment gap, and I support her Government's Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill. However, the idea that we can tackle attainment in this silo over here and child poverty in that silo over there, without addressing the direct link between the two, is for the birds.

Let me turn from something the SNP is not doing but should be to something that it is doing but should not be. In one of the first debates that I took part in, I had the audacity to ask John Swinney a question about named persons. Instead of answering, he screamed across the chamber that I should be ashamed of my intervention. Barely a month after that exchange, the UK Supreme Court unanimously ruled on precisely the same point that I had raised with Mr Swinney, saying that the SNP's named person scheme is illegal.

The scheme is illegal. It is violative of fundamental rights. It is disproportionate. And it is back. Instead of the scheme being consigned to the dustbin of legislative history where it belongs, Mr Swinney is seeking to breathe fresh life into the condemned scheme. However, Mr Swinney's Children and Young People (Information Sharing) (Scotland) Bill is hopeless. In its submission to the Education and Skills Committee, the Faculty of Advocates, no less, makes it clear that a number of the defects with the named person scheme identified by the Supreme Court will still apply if the bill is passed in its current form, which means that more litigation is all but inevitable.

We can avoid that. If the SNP listens to its critics, accepts that its named person scheme is fundamentally flawed, uses the new bill not as a means to fight again a battle it has already lost once but as a way of fixing things for the future, and takes its fingers out of its ears, we can avoid the prospect of yet another nationalist defeat in the UK's highest courts. I suspect that that will not happen. I suspect that the SNP would rather fight the battles of the past than confront the problems of the present.

One problem of the present that clearly needs to be addressed is housing. In 2007—a decade ago—Nicola Sturgeon conceded that “far too many” people in Scotland were unable to satisfy what she called the “basic aspiration” of home ownership.

James Dornan: Will the member give way?

Adam Tomkins: In the intervening years, the SNP’s commitment to build 35,000 new homes a year has dwindled to less than half of that, with key development decisions caught up in the congestion of the planning system.

James Dornan: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please sit down, Mr Dornan. Please sit down. The member does not seem to be taking interventions.

Adam Tomkins: Do I have to sit down?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. Mr Dornan was on his feet at the same time as you, Mr Tomkins.

Adam Tomkins: He can wait his turn.

That is simply not good enough when we are faced with a housing shortage on a scale potentially unseen since the second world war. This is our call to action. It is incumbent on policy makers of all political colours to help people to fulfil their ambition of owning a home. We urgently need to revitalise debate on this issue. That is why we have laid the foundations for a housing strategy that seeks to address that challenge head on by increasing the supply of housing and tackling the reasons why it was depleted to start with.

We want to see a new national housing and infrastructure agency and a housing and infrastructure minister in the Cabinet. We have called for 100,000 new homes to be built in the course of this session of Parliament and for 30,000 empty properties across Scotland to be refurbished and brought back into use. We also want to encourage more self-builds; we want to expand simplified planning zones; and we want to look at building a new generation of new towns. This is ambitious thinking but it is the kind of thinking that we need to overcome a defining challenge of the coming decade.

In Scotland we are not short of challenges and we are not short of new political thinking designed to address and combat them. However, it is from the Conservative benches that that thinking is coming, not from the Government. This is not a programme for government, it is a programme for drift. Scotland deserves better.

16:00

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I thank the First Minister for setting out this bold, ambitious and reformative programme for government. Hubert Humphrey, the lead author of the US Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the creator of the Peace Corps, said that the “moral test” of any Government is how that Government treats those who are

“in the dawn of life”

—the children; those who are

“in the twilight of life”

—the elderly; and those who are

“in the shadows of life”

—the sick, the needy, and those with disabilities.

This programme for government passes that moral test for me. This programme will be transformative; this programme will be outward looking—it already is; this programme will be dignified; and, above all, this programme will be inclusive in its approach, leaving no one behind.

The pursuit of equality is what binds together most of us in this chamber—that as yet elusive equality that places every woman, man and child in parity, regardless of their race, their background or their wealth. Our pursuit of equality before the law—in pay, in conditions and in opportunity—will be at the central core of this Government’s agenda, and I welcome that.

Over the past year, we have seen immense strides in our pursuit of equality, from Diageo becoming the 900th living wage employer, with the Scottish Government on track to deliver the living wage across more than 1,000 employers by the autumn of this year, to our continued work to encourage equal 50:50 gender representation on boards.

Our public sector—the beating heart of our society—has long borne the brunt of Tory austerity. Workers have, for too long, been subject to a cap that was not their doing—a cap that started in Westminster but now ends here in Holyrood. That is not the only thing that this Government has called time upon. The passage of time can bring closure, as we all know. In some instances, time can be a healer. For some, their time has come. Our time has come to right the wrongs of Governments past. In Scotland, we are proud to lead the way in pardoning those whose only supposed crime was to love. With this step, we show Scotland as a nation that celebrates her diversity, her pride, her culture and her colour.

The time has come to celebrate our inclusivity. This Parliament, as representative of our people, has achieved remarkable steps over the past year. The working group on LGBTI inclusive education

is tangible progress. I was speaking to some of the young people in the group yesterday and they are excited about what is to come. It is a symbol that this Government, alongside our partners in Stonewall, LGBT Youth Scotland and the barrier-breaking TIE campaign, will make inclusive education a welcome reality.

This is Government manifest. This is the purpose of and indeed the role of Government—to protect, uphold, implement and progress the rights of all and to integrate equality and understanding across the whole of society. Actions speak louder than words, and this Government will take action. From supporting equal protection from assault, which I greatly welcome and I support John Finnie in his aims, to raising the age of criminal responsibility for children—yes, children; let us never forget that—this Government continues to uphold human rights for all and to understand that they are for all. I am incredibly proud of that.

That understanding that human rights are for all has been criminally lacking from the UK Government. It is a Conservative Government that deliberately discriminates—that routinely reneges in relation to the rights of others. If you are disabled, you are subject to a UK welfare system that systematically violates your human rights; you are at the mercy of Tory austerity that has caused a human catastrophe. The United Nations has accused the UK Government of causing a “human catastrophe”—never, ever forget that. If you are a woman, you have a UK Government that condones a rape clause.

May the grace of God help those who happen to be Gypsy Travellers under the Tories. According to Douglas Ross, the Tories would rather crack down on Gypsy Travellers’ rights than uphold them. That was a disgraceful comment that the Tories should rightly be shamed for.

Our commitment to equality and fairness is transposed into the world of work and, as we have heard, as the world of work changes, so must we. The Government, which is modern and focused in its purpose, maintains its pledge to make work fair and equal. That is why it is no surprise that, in Scotland, the gender pay gap is closing and has fallen to 6.2 per cent, compared with the UK-wide figure of 9.4 per cent. We are not quite there, but the Government continues to transform the structures that uphold the gender pay gap. That is precisely why, in the history of the Parliament, no Government has done more to expand free early learning and childcare and to give all parents available opportunities to return to work, assured and confident. Today, we have heard that we will go further by securing multiyear continuous funding, which I am sure will be more than welcome.

We now have the highest employment level on record. That means jobs and possibility and, above all, it gives hope. Hope can move mountains, and some people need only a little bit of hope. The Government offers exactly that. It offers hope that, if someone finds themselves on the downside of disadvantage, they will not be downtrodden, demonised or sanctioned. I am proud of a Government that will not sanction its people and that designs a social security system that is based on dignity. I am proud of a Government that commits to end child poverty and to tackle the tragedy of rough sleeping. I am proud that this Government will lead by example, with purpose, principle and, above all, humanity.

16:06

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The First Minister described her programme for government as ambitious. That claim has to be judged in the context of what more could be done, much of which was set out in detail by Alex Rowley, and in the context of the bigger picture.

In the previous parliamentary session, I sat on the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee, which debated the outcomes of the Smith commission. We interrogated Scottish and UK ministers and we heard a good deal from civil society. The sense from many of those witnesses was of the transformative potential of the new powers. SNP ministers and committee members lost no opportunity to argue that more devolved powers would enable Scotland’s devolved Government to take more of a lead in meeting the challenges that lie ahead. That was all before the European Union referendum in June last year, which put yet more powers up for grabs and made the need for leadership from ministers all the greater.

The SNP has been in office for more than 10 years, and we are discussing the second programme for government that it has brought forward since its re-election as a minority Government after the Smith commission, and since the EU referendum. However, transformative this programme is not. As in 2016, the Government has brought forward a raft of measures. Some are welcome but, as a package, they fall short of a bold turn away from austerity and do not address some of the key issues that matter most to my constituents.

Twelve months ago, when we debated the previous programme for government, the Scottish economy was flirting with recession, yet the Government had failed to produce any comprehensive response to the downturn in the oil and gas industry. Now we are told that there is to be a new approach to manufacturing, but there is still little sense that the Government has come to

terms with the nature and scale of the impact of the oil downturn on the Scottish economy.

I was of course pleased to hear the First Minister promise funding for feasibility studies for the acorn carbon capture and storage project at St Fergus in the north-east, albeit that the funding is not millions of pounds but £100,000 and will underpin substantial funding that the European Union provided last May. The First Minister was right that the North Sea has great potential as a store for sequestered carbon, but it is disappointing that the existing productive industries in the North Sea did not merit even a mention in her statement, given that she knows that the oil and gas sector has contributed more than any other industry in recent years to maintaining a manufacturing base across the Scottish economy, from Ayrshire to Fife.

The wider impact of the downturn is plain for all to see in the low growth in the Scottish economy over the past two years. It is also visible in the thousands of people who have lost their jobs over the same period as a direct or indirect result, especially in the north-east. The Government's response to that crisis was to set up an energy jobs task force, which—after a slow start—provided help to some of the people who were put out of work but has now been told that it is no longer needed. It is remarkable that the First Minister did not even mention such an important Government decision, which was taken only in the past few days. Tommy Campbell, who is Unite the union's regional industrial officer, expressed many people's disappointment when he said:

"People are still losing their jobs both off and onshore. On that basis the task group still has a job to do."

The Press and Journal described the decision as "premature" from a business perspective and wondered why the Government was in such a hurry to up sticks and move on.

Even the Government's own figures show that support and advice have been provided to only a fraction of the people who have lost their jobs and I know that ministers know that there are more job losses to come. With Offshore Europe delegates gathering in Aberdeen this week, there is already talk of a fourth industrial revolution offshore, which is code for more automation, more remote operations, greater reliance on big data and a future with fewer jobs. If ministers are serious about their high ambition for our industrial future, this is surely the wrong time to end a targeted intervention in a sector of the economy where the existing jobs are still at risk and much of the pain for workers and their families still lies ahead.

The other big risk that we faced a year ago and still face is from Brexit. I hope that there will be a continuing change of emphasis from the First

Minister on that. In the first part of the year, the SNP's response to Theresa May's Brexit strategy was to promote an exit strategy of its own. Leaving Britain to stay in Europe was not a policy that was likely to attract broad support and it cost the SNP many seats at the general election. More important, it distracted attention from the urgent task of protecting the benefits of our relationships with the rest of the European Union.

Indyref 2 was not quite gone from today's script, which is a pity, but we have clearly moved into a new phase in the Brexit process and there is still precious little evidence that ministers in the UK Conservative Government have any rational strategy for achieving their objectives in the short or long term. It is therefore all the more important that Scottish ministers concentrate on the task in hand. I welcome their efforts to work jointly with Labour ministers in Wales to define and protect the scope of devolved powers that arise from the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill at Westminster and I look forward to working with them where we can agree on shared objectives. The priority must be to get the best outcome for all the nations and regions of the United Kingdom within the context of the referendum result. I hope that that can be the focus of our debates on Brexit.

The Parliament is already empowered in ways that go even further than the ambitions of its founders 20 years ago. The return of powers from Brussels means that it will be empowered still further in the next two years. The challenge for ministers is to go beyond today's plans, be bold and use all those powers to deliver for the people of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I understand that the clock that is behind me is not operating to tell members the time. That is being remedied, but the side clocks are telling members the speaking times. If members are not able to catch those, there is always my pen, which I raise when the speaker has one minute to go.

16:13

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Today, the Scottish Government has pledged to deliver changes that will be instrumental in the lives of families and young people. There were also significant announcements that will have a positive impact on women and girls throughout the country.

Little more than a year ago, my friend and colleague Julie Hepburn and I successfully put forward a resolution to the SNP's national council calling for the introduction of an S-card that would allow women and girls to access sanitary products freely from designated locations. Since then, in meetings with the Cabinet Secretary for

Communities, Social Security and Equalities, Angela Constance, I have pushed for more to be done to wipe out period poverty, on which many of us have campaigned for years.

I point to the research into the issue that I did with my friends and colleagues in women for independence to help inform my work and that of the Government. In particular, I thank Julie Hepburn, Victoria Heaney and Margaret Young from the organisation for all their help in the past year and I thank all the women's groups that assembled in May this year in Edinburgh to bring more focus to the issue from their perspectives. I also thank Angela Constance and her officials for their can-do attitude when I sat in her office all those months ago.

I am delighted to say that our determination and that of other colleagues in this place and in civic society has paid off. I acknowledge the determination of my colleague in the Scottish Parliament, Monica Lennon, who has worked hard to draw more attention to the issue through her work on period poverty. I am sure that she will join me today in celebrating the effective hard work across the political spectrum on the issue and will agree that it is now firmly at the top of the Government's agenda. Good things happen when tenacious women work together.

As members have heard, the Scottish Government has agreed to further build on the pilot scheme that was rolled out in Aberdeen in July, which involves working with Community Food Initiatives North East. That pilot will gather the evidence that we need to identify those who are affected. I am delighted that CFINE is also collaborating with Scottish Women's Aid on access to period products—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is rather impolite—*[Interruption.]* Excuse me, gentlemen. It is rather impolite to laugh raucously during a member's speech. I think that you would concur—you would not like it to be done to you.

Gillian Martin: I will get back to the subject of domestic abuse as an issue in relation to period poverty. Period poverty can be an issue for women with controlling partners—women who do not have access to their own money. The issue of coercion and control is a hidden and distressing side of period poverty, and I will visit CFINE in the next couple of weeks to see how its pilot is going. The work that is carried out in that project will help to inform further work by highlighting the additional groups of women who are in need but who might have been missed from initial assessment.

The pilot is in addition to the significant commitment that the Scottish Government has given today to provide free access to sanitary products in schools, colleges and universities. We

all know that many girls miss school because, as they lack access to products, they cannot leave the house during their period. We cannot allow that situation to continue as we try to close the attainment gap.

On that issue, I must say to Mr Tomkins, who would not take an intervention from me, that the biggest issue in relation to closing the attainment gap is the impact of hunger and deprivation, which are not caused by anything other than money being taken away from families who are on the breadline, and I think that we all know who has done that.

Stories about period poverty are horrifying to hear, but they illustrate why such measures are so important. The Scottish Government has shown a willingness to lead the way on this important issue of health equality and social equality in our society. I am proud of the work that many people have done on the issue, and it is good to be able to stand in the chamber to welcome the steps that we are taking rather than articulate once again the reasons for action to be taken. When we say that access to period products is a right and never a luxury, we mean it, and today's announcement proves it. The world is watching us on this, and already we are being hailed as one of the world's most progressive countries on the issue.

However, this is not the only measure that the Scottish Government is taking to help women. New measures have also been announced on childcare provision. Childcare is a family issue and not just a women's issue. I spend a lot of my life railing against the fact that caring responsibilities are still seen by many as the sole preserve of women. They are not, but the fact remains that free childcare will have the greatest immediate economic impact on women, who can, if they wish, rejoin the workforce without the sometimes prohibitive cost or lack of availability of childcare being a determining factor. The impact of that on the income tax take will be significant, and I look forward to the promised reports and debate into income tax structures.

Providing the 1,140 hours of childcare that each child will receive is a huge challenge, and it was good to hear the First Minister address the two practical aspects to meeting that challenge: the multiyear package of funding for local authorities to support the recruitment and training of staff and the delivery of new premises to ensure that communities begin to benefit from this life-changing increase in childcare hours ahead of 2020.

Providing rates relief for childcare businesses will assist those providing childcare and will enable nurseries to be sustainable businesses that attract highly qualified staff with salaries that are worthy

of their experience and which attract talented people into the childcare sector.

The programme for government is bold. It is very busy and in many aspects—many more than I have time to mention—it is leading the way and building on a record of achievement, not just in the 10 years of an SNP Government but in 20 years of devolution, that we should all be proud of.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The irony is that, when I leave time for interventions, members do not make or take them. We still have a little time in hand to liven up the debate, so I look forward to some interventions, although not on me personally.

16:20

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I begin my contribution to the debate about the programme for government with reflections on the recent information about teacher vacancies and the recently published Education and Skills Committee report, which has set in context several key schools issues that Conservative members believe should be at the core of policy making for the foreseeable future. In the first instance, the issues relate to the teacher workforce and the available supply of teachers, to supporting and enhancing the quality of the workforce, to the profession's attractiveness and to retention rates. As such, they lay the basis for taking up the challenge that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development set down when it said that, despite the strong ethos and basic principles of Scottish schooling, the current system does not allow us to reach our potential.

We agree with that statement and we believe that the evidence to support it is incontrovertible. As a result, the stark message in the committee's report is that, if we cannot attract the right people into our classrooms and retain them, we have little hope of achieving all the other crucial elements of policy—especially raising standards in literacy and numeracy, narrowing the stubborn attainment gap and improving the delivery of the curriculum for excellence.

The report notes that those problems are not Scotland's alone, which is true, but that acknowledgment will bring little comfort to parents whose children are in schools without the necessary number of teachers or where it is proving impossible to attract teachers in some key subject areas, or to parents of children whose subject choice might be compromised because vacancies cannot be filled.

That comes on top of the concerns that we heard just before recess about teacher training courses and, specifically, about whether enough attention is paid to learning how to teach literacy

and numeracy, whether there is adequate support for additional support needs and whether the classroom practice aspect of teacher training courses articulates sufficiently well with the more academic and theoretical aspect.

We should acknowledge that teacher workforce planning is not easy—no one should pretend that it is—but, in its evidence taking, the committee found that significant blockages in the system are preventing better recruitment patterns. They include the lack of accuracy in key data, the lack of availability of supply staff, teacher training inadequacies and local authorities that are still trying to tie the hands of headteachers when it comes to recruitment and to a significant number of other aspects of schools policy.

The blockages in the system that stop teachers getting on with the job that they are trained to do are the reason why the Scottish Conservatives have long believed that we need fundamental reform. I do not for a minute doubt that that is also the reason why the cabinet secretary wants reform but, as things stand, we have grave concerns about the proposed SNP reform.

Let me be very clear about the Scottish Conservative position, which has been reinforced during recess following careful consultation with representatives of local authorities, parents' groups, headteachers and elected councillors. The reform that is necessary is to free up schools to make their own decisions about how to run themselves without the straitjacket of a one-size-fits-all approach from central or local government. Schools want rid of the tiresome paperwork—I know that the cabinet secretary acknowledges some of this—that, in many cases, has little meaning and which, in some cases, was not devised by teachers in the first place. They want to know that they are fully supported and trained in the profession, and they want to know that it will be their choice alone about how to spend the pupil equity fund.

As the highly experienced Frank Lennon said, the problems in our schools are not all about money, otherwise the greater spend over the past two decades would have yielded much better results. The issue is the lack of autonomy, which denies heads the ability to do so much more. We agree with him that part of the autonomy should lie in teacher recruitment. For far too long, local authorities have strongly influenced who is recruited in each school and they have often been responsible for moving weak teachers from one school to another.

The cabinet secretary proposes to impose an additional regional structure that will be accountable to him, which I am convinced is the main reason why many councillors and many local authority officials are unhappy. He says that that is

not his intention and that he intends merely to set up formal collaboration to share best practice. However, if that is the case, surely it does not require another board and layer of government that, by definition, would oversee strategic decision making. As I understand it, all that has left local government wondering where it stands and where local democracy really lies. Far from devolving more powers to schools, the measure is more about centralisation.

John Swinney: Liz Smith argues for reform, but her default position is to criticise the reform agenda that is brought forward. I ask her to reflect on that conundrum that she puts in front of Parliament. The object of the reforms that I have put in place for the regional collaboratives is to follow exactly what the OECD asked us to do—to motivate greater collaboration, which the OECD thought was absent from Scottish education. I will have no more power as a consequence of that. I will drive a process of collaboration, which is exactly what the OECD asked us to do, and Liz Smith just said that she believes that that agenda should be pursued.

Liz Smith: If what the cabinet secretary says is true, the professional development that he is so keen to have in the teaching profession should be built from within. It does not need another layer on top of what we already have, which, as I understand it, is imposing a structure in which local authorities will be entirely accountable to the cabinet secretary. The devolution of power to schools, which we all want, is being undermined by the structure that he is imposing.

To be absolutely clear, I am not in any way undermining the principles of the reforms that the cabinet secretary wants to achieve—after all, they are ours.

John Swinney: Listen to what you are saying.

Liz Smith: Cabinet secretary, nobody in the chamber can argue that the Scottish Conservatives have not been making such arguments for a very long time. It is about the structure that we have grave concerns, and on that basis we will challenge the cabinet secretary all the way through the scrutiny of the education bill.

Alex Rowley *rose*—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are too late, Mr Rowley. At least the debate livened up a bit.

16:28

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I am obligated to remind the chamber and Opposition parties, in case they

have forgotten, that I am a parliamentary liaison officer to the First Minister.

I have said several times in the chamber that MSPs, like the people whom we all have the privilege of representing, share a unified hope for a better Scotland. We share the challenges that we all want to overcome, such as poverty in our communities, economic vulnerability as a result of recovering from the financial crash and the challenges that Brexit poses, and climate change. Although some are to blame for those situations, all of us are responsible.

We share hopes: we hope for social justice and a fairer society, for greater productivity and international competition, and for sustainability in our economy and our environment. Given all that shared aspiration, let us collaborate constructively to make the most of this year and collectively see the programme for government as an opportunity for all parties to put the next generation before the next press release, tweet or even election.

This ambitious programme for government, with 16 bills and a range of initiatives, covers so much of what we hope for the future. It includes continued investment in our young people, for example in the pupil equity fund, which, when I visited schools in my constituency over the recess, I saw making a lasting difference and closing not only the attainment gap but the aspiration gap. It includes commitments to expand apprenticeships and other initiatives, putting education as the number 1 priority. A commitment to lift the public sector pay cap is welcome, as is a commitment to take forward Frank's law, which builds on the good work and commitment of many MSPs around the chamber. I am particularly glad to see that the Government is committing to work with the time for inclusive education campaign. I pay tribute to the campaign and everything that it has done.

I also welcome the discussion on how to use our taxation powers responsibly and progressively to strengthen our economy and build a fairer society.

There is so much that I could say about everything that is in the programme for government, but I will focus principally on how it will build a more innovative Scotland, a fairer Scotland and a more sustainable Scotland.

On innovation, investment in business research and development will increase by 70 per cent; £300 million will benefit organisations and businesses such as Nova Innovation, which is based in Leith in my constituency and which is a pioneering tidal wave energy company that is ready to export its tidal technology and expertise across the globe to meet the challenge of climate change.

The initiative to take forward a national manufacturing institute for Scotland will benefit

organisations such as the Blake Group, which is in my constituency and which I visited last week. It has been in engineering for nearly 80 years in Leith, and its steel fabrication helped to build the remarkable Queensferry crossing, which was formally opened yesterday. The establishment of a national investment bank will make a sustainable and lasting difference to the economy, and I welcome the ambition for Edinburgh to become one of the top 10 global fintech centres. The provision of an industry-led body that will champion, nurture and grow a fintech community should be welcomed by all—as an Edinburgh MSP, I welcome it particularly warmly.

Building a fairer Scotland is important, and I welcome the programme for government for a range of reasons. The commitments that are in place—which the Social Security Committee, of which I am a member, is taking forward in the Social Security (Scotland) Bill—are vital if we are to use our powers well and responsibly to make an important difference in our communities. I welcome the openness to the consideration of a citizens basic income, which academics and individuals are looking at practically across the globe, in particular in Europe. There is much innovative thinking to which we should be open in building a fairer Scotland.

I welcome the tackling child poverty fund of £50 million. I know how much difference that will make, having gone through stages 1 and 2 of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill.

I particularly welcome the commitment from the First Minister to do all that the Scottish Government and Parliament can do to eradicate rough sleeping. With the Cyrenians, the Bethany Christian Trust and Street Soccer Scotland, and the potential for a Social Bite village in my constituency, the issue is particularly pertinent to the stakeholders whom I represent and to those who bring cases to my surgery each week. There is no doubt that Westminster austerity and welfare cuts are taking their toll in all our communities. We see worrying signs of increases in homelessness and rough sleeping, and it is great that the Scottish Government, while opposing Westminster austerity, will take forward initiatives to tackle homelessness on the streets of Scotland.

I know that I am running short of time, Presiding Officer, but I want to touch on why the programme for government is so important to building a more sustainable Scotland, with low-emission zones, to which Edinburgh City Council and its SNP group are committed, and a doubling of the active travel spend. I especially welcome the deposit return scheme. In recent months, Boda Bars, which owns bars across Edinburgh and is based in my constituency, has pioneered a deposit return scheme that has made a difference. Boda Bars

will welcome the Government's scheme from the perspective of practical recycling, but, as the First Minister rightly said, tackling litter on the streets and beaches is also important, and Wardie bay beachwatch will welcome the scheme for that reason.

There is so much more that I could say. The programme for government is filled with new initiatives, bold ideas, hopes and aspirations. I hope that we will work together to make the most of this opportunity to improve Scotland for all those whom we serve.

16:34

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Today was an opportunity for the SNP Government to unveil the progressive and radical programme for government that Scotland needs and to show genuine ambition for our country. However, just because the First Minister repeatedly uses the word “ambition”, that does not mean that it is true that the Government is ambitious. She is right: we are a nation with ambition—but we have a Government without ambition.

Today was an opportunity to tackle the crisis in our hospitals, inequality in our classrooms and inactivity in the workplace but, sadly, the SNP has let Scotland down once again. After a decade of SNP incompetence, it is now clearer than ever that we have a Government that is out of original ideas and a First Minister who has taken her eye off the ball and is desperate to play catch-up. She is strong on rhetoric, but weak on delivery.

The First Minister claims that education is her number 1 priority one week and the next week she claims that the NHS is her number 1 priority. In reality, she is driven by only one obsession: trying to fix a way to have another referendum.

In her speech, the First Minister said that she wants to “refresh” and “refocus” her Government. Surely this question has to be asked: can the ministers who created the problems be the ones to fix them? It is now more than a decade since the SNP came into government, so it has to take responsibility for the crisis that we see in our NHS and our workforce.

Nursing and midwifery vacancies are up from 2,500 at this time last year to 3,200. I am pleased that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport finds that amusing; Scotland's patients do not. Consultant vacancies are up to nearly 500, and there are hundreds of cancelled operations because of insufficient capacity. Some 40,000 bed days were lost through delayed discharge in July alone. This is a day of shame for the First Minister and her failing health secretary.

Today's programme for government is not even a highlight in a decade of mediocrity. Indeed, the Government has taken mediocrity to a new level altogether. We can have no confidence in the First Minister delivering what she has announced, because the Government has not delivered what it announced in last year's wafer-thin programme for government. As today's damning health statistics reveal, things in our NHS have gone in reverse from where they were this time last year.

Let there be no mistake: as we have done over the past year, Labour members will again hold the Government to account and make the argument for progressive policies that will make a difference to the lives of Scots. I am delighted that Labour has won the argument on public sector pay, and I pay tribute to all our trade unions right across the country. I am also glad that our arguments on the proposed organ donation legislation have won.

It is interesting that SNP members laugh about the public sector pay cap. Let us not forget that the SNP, aided and abetted—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would like to hear Mr Sarwar, please. Members might want to make interventions.

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Will Mr Sarwar give way?

Anas Sarwar: We can tell from the reaction on the SNP benches that SNP members know that they are in a squeeze. The SNP, aided and abetted by the Tories, presided over seven years of pay restraint for workers.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sit down, Mr Stewart.

Anas Sarwar: Perhaps members should reflect on the impact that that has had on public sector workers right across the country. The value of pay packets has been driven down by a Scottish Government with the wrong priorities.

Labour members made arguments to scrap the pay cap and every single SNP member remained silent. Where were they when the nurses' representatives were outside lobbying Parliament? Where were they when we were proclaiming outside that we wanted to scrap the pay cap? Where were they in the protests? Earlier this year, I lodged a parliamentary motion on scrapping the public sector pay cap for NHS workers, and every single SNP MSP from the First Minister down voted against it. They voted against scrapping the pay cap. The SNP's own submission to the public sector pay review body was to keep the cap in place.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart, your persistence is going unrewarded. Please sit down.

Anas Sarwar: SNP members shout, but they should be hanging their heads in shame, because they have denied workers a pay rise this year. Instead, they are talking about next year—[*Interruption.*] SNP members shout, but I am sure that they must be privately really angry with the First Minister, because they know that she has failed and that she has taken their cause backwards.

Although we recognise their failure to deliver a pay rise this year, I welcome the nationalists' U-turn on the lifting of the public sector pay cap. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry Mr Sarwar, but hold on a minute.

I want to hear—as the public does—what Mr Sarwar has to say. I say to the members directly in front of me that it is no use heckling from a sedentary position.

Please continue, Mr Sarwar.

Anas Sarwar: The education secretary might want to play the classroom bully, but I promise that he cannot bully me.

Members: Oh!

Anas Sarwar: I thank individual staff members and trade unions for their support and tireless campaigning on the pay cap issue. We owe Unison, the Royal College of Nursing Scotland, the GMB and all the trade unions that represent public sector workers a huge debt of gratitude for their campaigning over the past year on that important issue.

We have a chance to go further in our progressive policies. I want to see this Government use its powers to deliver a progressive tax system, scrap the unfair council tax and address child poverty head on by increasing the levels of child benefit and using its powers to tackle Tory austerity, not simply multiplying it and passing it down to local government. I want us to focus on creating a country that fights inequality and injustice wherever we see it, not on flag-waving and creating divisions. That is the kind of country that we want to see here in Scotland; if only the SNP shared that mission.

Members: Hurray! Next leader!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If SNP members will calm down, their next speaker may get a chance to speak. They are eating into Ms McAlpine's time.

16:41

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): It is a pity that Anas Sarwar did not take an intervention, because I was keen to find out why Labour in Wales has not lifted the public sector pay cap when it is in government there.

Members: Oh!

Joan McAlpine: It would also have been interesting to hear why in-patient and day case statistics in Scotland show that 81.4 per cent of patients are treated within 12 weeks under the SNP when the previous Labour Government could not treat that number even within 18 weeks. That perhaps explains why Anas Sarwar was not willing to take any interventions.

I, too, welcome the Government's announcement in the programme for government on the Turing law. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to John Nicolson, the former MP who attempted to correct a great historic injustice with his private member's bill in the House of Commons only to see it talked out by the Tory Government. Needless to say, the UK Government's own proposals are not as comprehensive as those that Mr Nicolson and the campaigners wanted and they are not as far reaching as the changes that are likely to take place in Scotland, as announced today in the programme for government.

I am delighted to hear that the proposed legislation will provide a pardon for those convicted under repealed discriminatory laws and that, unlike under the UK Government's approach, individuals will not have to apply for a pardon. In Scotland, it will be granted automatically and it will apply to those who have died as well as to the living. That is very much in keeping with the SNP's record on equality and tackling discrimination, whether in passing the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill or in passing the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Bill, with the first conviction for revenge porn taking place this week.

The proposed Turing legislation shows that this SNP Scottish Government is building on its record. It is showing itself to be more compassionate, more ambitious and more progressive than its counterpart at Westminster.

Much of what we have heard today can be grouped around those three words: compassion, ambition and progressiveness. We see compassion in the proposal to extend free personal care below the age of 65, or Frank's law, in the vulnerable witnesses and pre-recorded evidence bill, in the delivery of the best start grant and other benefits, in the support for young carers and in the proposed additional work to tackle rough sleeping.

We see ambition in the proposed creation of a national investment bank, in the expansion of childcare and the number of electric vehicles and in the commitment to advance manufacturing and the fintech sector.

We see progressiveness in our commitment to distribute free sanitary products in schools, universities and colleges—another bold example of this Government's widely recognised commitment to gender equality. Other progressive measures include the deposit return scheme and the increase in our rate of social house building.

I return to Frank's law. It has—quite rightly—attracted wide support across the political spectrum. The aim is to extend free personal and nursing care to under 65-year-olds suffering from dementia. However, I understand and hope that today's proposal goes further than that, in that free personal care will be extended to everyone who requires it, regardless of age. I am particularly delighted about that, because last year I campaigned with Learning Disability Alliance Scotland for a reduction in care charges, after some people in my area experienced a hike in their care charges of up to 500 per cent. We are talking about people who need help to feed and wash themselves, and whose charges were increased by the local authority—the authority has since changed, I am pleased to say—even though the cabinet secretary had allocated additional money to reduce charges.

It is totally wrong that the most disabled people in our society should be penalised in that way, with charges increasing according to the level of disability. It is a shame that the Scottish Government has to step in and legislate to force councils to act, but that shows that the SNP is building on its record on fairness for more vulnerable people, just as we were doing when we mitigated the bedroom tax and when we stepped in to make good the UK Government's council tax benefit cut.

The national investment bank for Scotland is a great illustration of our ambition and will help to address the challenge that is faced by many small and medium-sized businesses, particularly in rural areas such as the south of Scotland, where access to finance from private sector banking is challenging, even though the banks are owned by UK taxpayers.

The development of the national investment bank will complement the south of Scotland enterprise agency that the First Minister mentioned. I am pleased that the agency is powering ahead. The need for a bespoke approach to economic development in the South Scotland region that I represent is something that I, along with other stakeholders, raised with ministers repeatedly in the Economy, Energy and

Tourism Committee in the previous parliamentary session. I am pleased that the approach is progressing so well, and I am particularly pleased that the objectives for the new agency include

“Sustaining and growing communities—building and strengthening communities with joined up economic and community support”

and

“Capitalising on people and resources—developing skills, promoting assets and resources and maximising the impact of investment in the area.”

I say for members who do not know South Scotland that the region faces challenges that are similar to those that are faced by the Highlands and Islands, such as an ageing population, the out-migration of young people, issues to do with physical and digital connectivity and a significant number of fragile towns and sectors, where wages are traditionally low and there are fewer high-skilled jobs. I am sure that the new south of Scotland enterprise agency will help to address all those issues and I am delighted that the SNP is delivering it.

We have a strong record of supporting small businesses—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude, please.

Joan McAlpine: For example, we extended to 100,000 the number of such businesses that are supported through the small business bonus.

I could go on; the programme is extensive and ambitious—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you cannot. You are concluding. Thank you.

Joan McAlpine: I will conclude there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You will indeed. Thank you.

16:48

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): Dazzling and futuristic: I refer, of course, to the new chamber lighting and not—I am sad to say—to the programme for government that the First Minister announced this afternoon. It is, I say with reference to last year’s programme, a programme that we might reasonably doubt will ever see completion, given that only three of last year’s 13 proposed bills are in statute.

Of course, there are measures that we welcome, just as was the case in each of the previous Governments that the SNP and others have led. I was on the Public Petitions Committee when Amanda and Frank Kopel proposed Frank’s law, and I am delighted that the Government has embraced the proposal. I have always supported

the measured way in which the Government has approached organ donation, so I look forward to seeing that bill. I say on a perfectly personal basis that I look forward to seeing the substance of John Finnie’s bill, too.

However, with a domestic economy that is failing to lead, an education system that is descending into shambles, a healthcare system that is groaning and struggling to provide, and a unitary police force that is in search of reliable leadership and purpose, the Government can no longer spin rhetoric to mask its failings. It is a Government that has run its course, and which is led by a First Minister who is more polarising in Scotland than any national party leader in 30 years.

The First Minister promised us in June a refresh when she made an apology of sorts in the chamber for her performance. We expected fresh faces, at the very least, but instead—alas, at least so far—it is the same old same old.

Amid a record in Government whose true highlights belong to parliamentary sessions long past, the new Queensferry crossing is a standard bearer for all that modern Scotland can achieve. Joe FitzPatrick, together with former Liberal Democrat MSP Hugh O’Donnell, sat with me on the Forth Crossing Bill Committee in the session of Parliament before last. We saw off those who denied the need for a new crossing. We considered tunnels and all manner of variants for crossing the Forth afresh and we settled on, and recommended to Parliament, the routes to and from and the new crossing itself—which we saw Her Majesty open yesterday. At that time, we remarked that the crossing would lend iconic status to the Forth by symbolising both our industrial past and modern Scotland, with the three bridges representing three centuries of Scottish design, guile and achievement.

I add my tribute to all those who have made those paper visions a reality and—yes—to the Scottish Government ministers. We built in significant contingency just in case, but the crossing was completed within budget and more or less on time.

Throughout the summer, it has seemed that Humza Yousaf has, every time a train managed to run on time, tweeted and demanded the congratulations of Opposition politicians. So, let us namecheck Humza Yousaf as the transport minister who inherited the bridge completion date.

Long after all of us in the chamber are but dust and are forgotten, and our arguments relegated to the sort of dull academic history that only Adam Tomkins reads, the new Queensferry crossing will stand as a proud symbol and reminder of our times. We can all be proud of that.

A programme for government needs an Opposition to challenge it. Today, Ruth Davidson articulated an alternative vision and talked about bold initiatives in housing, as did Adam Tomkins. Liz Smith again advocated the sustained policy responses of nearly a decade that we believe are required to restore the reputation, relevance and success of Scottish education. On Thursday, Miles Briggs will set out our approach to health, as will Liam Kerr on justice and Murdo Fraser and Dean Lockhart on the economy.

Meanwhile, Scottish Labour is to have another of its perennial leadership elections. What a spectacle awaits. Before us now will sit Ms Dugdale, Mr Gray and Ms Lamont, who have all been the leader; Daniel Johnson, who desperately wants to believe that one day he will be the leader; Monica Lennon, who believes that she will be the leader after the next one; Mr Rowley, who was happy to be talked of as the next leader until the opportunity actually arose; Jackie Baillie, who could be the leader if she were not the only UK politician to have been fatally wounded by the nuclear deterrent; Mr Stewart and Mr Macdonald, who are both far too sensible to ever try to be the leader; and others who have tried and failed to be the leader, including Neil Findlay, who we all know can be relied on to campaign actively against the next leader.

The Labour leadership contest is now to be held between two privileged and wealthy former public schoolboys. Indeed, if Mr Sarwar—who has been campaigning for the job since May 2016—were to win and Mr Yousaf were to realise his thinly disguised ambition to succeed the First Minister, we would have the extraordinary triumph of two ex-Hutchie boys competing to be First Minister with Buckhaven's finest—state-educated Ruth Davidson. Progressive politics works in mysterious ways, does it not?

Whatever the published programme for government, we all expect that much of our time will be centred on ensuring that we negotiate the best possible deal for Scotland as we exit the European Union. In the 15 months since the UK voted to leave, I have not yet heard arguments that would persuade me to vote other than to remain, if the referendum on our EU membership still lay ahead. At times, the debate feels like extended discussion to replicate the arrangements that are already in place. I am not inured either to the failings of the EU or the opportunities that we must create if we are to make a success of our departure. However, I have always chosen to respect the decisions of the binary-choice referenda that have been held during my adult lifetime—and I have been on the winning and losing sides of those votes.

The negotiation is not politics as normal. We will leave the EU, the single market and the customs union, so we need to work together to ensure that Scotland and the UK secure a future that is worthy of the name. I am disappointed that, during all this time, Mr Russell's approach has been pejorative and partisan. Regrettably for Scotland, among UK ministers he has earned a reputation not only for lacking authority—having to refer back on any decision—but for rushing to posture before the cameras after every exchange. Scotland must look to the Deputy First Minister—who I am thankful is now directly involved in the process—to help to find the common ground that clearly exists on fishing, farming and our future population in order to influence and secure a deal.

When Mr Barnier says

“There are extremely serious consequences of leaving the single market and it hasn't been explained to the British people”

and that

“we intend to teach people ... what leaving the single market means”,

he is articulating a truth that some people wish to deny, which is that he speaks for the interests of the EU in the negotiations, and that his success will be judged not on how accommodating he is to Scotland and the UK, but on how little he concedes in any negotiation. Kissing our European partners, as Mr Blair did, and genuflecting before those who must secure what is in their interests and not necessarily in ours can only secure a deal that is fool's gold.

Next week, members of this Parliament will meet Mr Barnier in Brussels. We must not allow him to posture or to “teach” us, as he would have it. We must let him clearly understand that however we voted last year, and whatever divides us politically as a country, should not be misunderstood. It does not mean that we will do anything other than stand together in the interests of Scotland and the UK.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude there, Mr Carlaw. Thank you very much.

Jackson Carlaw: I am happy to do so, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Swinney, who will be the last speaker in the debate.

16:55

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): At some stage, I must have offended Adam Tomkins, because he was prompted to make a number of remarks that require

explanation and exploration of how they could be made coherently by a member of the Conservative Party. He attacked the Government because we supposedly do not see a link between child poverty and education. Mr Tomkins, who is a Conservative, has made that accusation against us—after the economic damage that has been done to people's lives by the actions of the Conservative UK Government.

Members: Hear, hear.

John Swinney: We are determined, through our persistent focus on closing the attainment gap, to address that damage and to establish and recognise the link that exists between poverty and education. We recognise that the solution lies in education providing individuals with the means to overcome poverty and to have a better life in the future.

Mr Tomkins went on to say that we have to tackle with more zeal the challenges in social and affordable housing in Scotland. He is oblivious to the fact that the housing problems that we are wrestling with today were created by the recklessness of Conservative housing policy that sold off the housing stock of our country and did absolutely nothing to protect it for future generations. Thank goodness that our Government is tackling with imagination and boldness the scale of the challenge that exists in public sector housing.

The other Conservative whom I seem to have offended today is Liz Smith. She claimed that the reform agenda belongs to the Conservative Party, but she attacked that self-same reform agenda. I simply point out the inherent contradiction in her remarks.

Liz Smith: I thank the cabinet secretary for giving way, because I think that he misunderstood what I said. I am very much in favour of the principle of reform, which we support, but we are not prepared to accept the type of reform that Mr Swinney is trying to deliver, because it is the opposite of devolving powers down to schools.

John Swinney: We will have the opportunity to vote in Parliament on the proposed education bill, which will include a statutory provision to empower headteachers. If Liz Smith wants to vote against that, good luck to her in reconciling the hypocrisy of the position that she has outlined to Parliament today with the substance of what I have set out to Parliament in the education governance reforms.

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

John Swinney: I will not, at the moment.

The boldness of the Government's agenda was captured in the speeches of Ben Macpherson, Kate Forbes, Joan McAlpine, Gillian Martin and

Christina McKelvie, who reflected on the strength of the measures to strengthen our economy. Our economic performance is, of course, strong. In the most recent quarter for which figures are available, economic growth in Scotland was four times the level of economic growth in the UK, and unemployment in Scotland has fallen consistently and employment has grown.

We have a bold agenda on the environment, as the First Minister set out. We are taking measures to further our ambition on electric vehicles, as well as taking steps to protect our natural environment and to introduce a deposit-return scheme.

We are also introducing reforms on the public services agenda. Jackson Carlaw paid tribute to us for the due and orderly process that we went through in relation to organ donation. We have gone through the same process in relation to Frank's law in order to ensure that the detail of the proposals that we intend to implement will be effective in meeting the aspirations and needs of the people who advocate the change in question.

Coupled with that is the bold social agenda that the Government is taking forward. I have talked about the work that we are doing to tackle child poverty. Among our social reforms are pardons for individuals who were in the past convicted for same-sex offences, and an increase in the minimum age of criminal responsibility to ensure that our legal framework is appropriate for, and commensurate with, the challenges of our times. That boldness of our agenda has been reflected in the contributions that we have heard in Parliament this afternoon.

One of the other significant themes of the debate has been comments about Brexit. I welcome what Lewis Macdonald said about this Government's handling of the deep and serious issues affecting the powers and responsibilities of this Parliament that would result from the UK Government's legislative proposals for Brexit. I am very pleased to be involved, along with my colleague Mr Russell, in the discussions with the United Kingdom Government on those issues. Mr Carlaw thinks that I am the voice of calm and rational common sense in those discussions, so I have to say to him that I agree entirely with the stance that Mr Russell has taken, because I have never seen a more barefaced attempt to grab powers from this Parliament than that which is captured by the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill.

I presume that Mr Carlaw made those remarks a moment ago because he knows that I carefully stewarded the negotiations with the United Kingdom Government on the fiscal framework, which his party applauded me for taking forward and which were done in such a fashion as to protect the interests of this Parliament. I come to the EU withdrawal discussions with exactly the

same aim—to protect the interests of this Parliament, which are under threat from the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. We must ensure that the UK Government understands that. That is exactly Mr Russell's intention, and I am delighted to support him in that effort.

The Government has been in office for 10 years and has done a great number of things to improve the quality of life of people in our country. In education, in the course of this Administration there has been a 30 per cent increase in the number of highers that are being achieved by young people. Ten years on, we have the best-performing accident and emergency system in the United Kingdom and, 10 years on, we have a 42-year low in crime in this country. Our economic performance, at 0.7 per cent growth in the last quarter, is four times that of the rest of the United Kingdom. That demonstrates the strength of the achievements that this Government has under its belt. We are determined to build on those achievements with an ambitious programme for government that will address the needs of the people of Scotland and ensure that we create a better and safer Scotland.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Thank you. That concludes today's debate on the Scottish Government's programme for government.

I remind members that if they have spoken in the debate, or if they intend to speak tomorrow, they should be here for the closing speeches on Thursday.

Decision Time

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There is no decision time this evening.

Boys Brigade Juniors 100th Anniversary

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-07188, in the name of Alexander Stewart, on Boys Brigade juniors 100th anniversary.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the news that, in Autumn 2017, the Boys' Brigade in Scotland is marking 100 years of working with the "Juniors" age group, which was established in September 1917 when the Brigade Council, the Brigade's governing body, established the Boy Reserves to cater for boys aged from nine to 12; notes that members of the Juniors have been marking the milestone throughout 2017, including taking part in the Juniors 100 Challenge where young people are being encouraged to complete 100 challenges including activities such as taking part in a world record attempt, learning basic first aid skills, raising £100 for a local charity and trying out a new sport; further notes that members have been getting active, being creative, learning new skills, exploring and being adventurous while helping others in their local communities; understands that the celebrations have also involved looking back at the Juniors' heritage, sharing stories of the past and looking forward to the next 100 years; believes that more than 5,000 eight to 11-year olds are taking part in a fun and active programme across more than 400 groups throughout Scotland; acknowledges that membership of The Boys' Brigade offers young people so much, the chance to excel in new skills or talents, to explore, discover new things and provide opportunities and, above all, to have fun; commends The Boys' Brigade in its calling for a team-based approach to encouraging participation in sports and activities that are critical for children and young people's health, tackling childhood obesity and helping bridge the educational attainment gap, and considers that, in most cases, expenditure is low, with an average of £120 spent on sports equipment annually as a result of the majority of members benefitting from church-based premises and shared use of equipment.

17:04

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted and grateful for the opportunity to open this members' business debate. This autumn, the Boys Brigade in Scotland is celebrating 100 years of the Boys Brigade junior section. From its formation in Glasgow on 4 October 1883 by Sir William Alexander Smith, and up until 1917, the Boys Brigade catered only for boys aged over 12.

However, in September 1917, the Brigade Council set up the Boy Reserves to cater for boys aged between eight and 11. The mission of the Boy Reserves was:

"The advancement of Christ's Kingdom among young Boys and the training of ... suitable Recruits for The Boys' Brigade'."

In the early days of the Boy Reserves, there was a notable increase in attendance at Sunday

schools in the churches that had adopted the section, and the number of companies operated by the reserves grew. In 1918 there were almost 1,500 members of the reserves across the United Kingdom, in 59 sections that were formed in the first session of 1917-18. Twenty-five of those original sections are still running today.

In 1926, the Boy Reserves of the Boys Brigade merged with the Boys Life Brigade to become the Life Boys. After that amalgamation, membership increased to more than 30,000 in the early 1930s and more than 70,000 in the 1950s. In 1966 the Life Boys became a full part of the Boys Brigade, as the junior section. That name was intended to be temporary, lasting only until such time as a better name could be thought of, but it still holds today.

Members of the juniors have been marking the milestone throughout 2017, including by taking part in the juniors 100 challenge, in which young people are encouraged to complete 100 challenges in activities such as taking part in a world record attempt, learning first aid skills, raising £100 for a local charity and trying a new sport. Many juniors have been actively engaging in such activities over the past few months.

Members have had the opportunity to be creative, learn new skills, explore and be adventurous, while striving to support their local communities. On-going celebrations have also involved looking back at the heritage of the juniors, sharing stories of the current celebrations and looking forward to the next 100 years.

Primarily the Boys Brigade junior section provides a fun and safe learning environment for children between the ages of eight and 11. Its programme consists of five areas—body, mind, spirit, community and creativity—and activities ensure that the juniors have the opportunity to learn and grow.

The programme enables the youngsters to experience teamwork and responsibility, which gives them the opportunity to grow and develop in their roles. Juniors also have the opportunity to go to camps and on residential trips. For some, it is the first time that they have been away from home for an evening.

Throughout their time in the junior section, youngsters are able to gain badges in recognition of their participation in simple activities. It is a real form of motivation that gives a visual and tangible record of their achievements. Many of them wear their badges with real pride.

Membership of the Boys Brigade offers young people so much more. It gives them a chance to excel at new skills and talents, to explore and to deliver. It provides new opportunities for them to have fun.

As my motion states, the Boys Brigade is to be commended and congratulated for trying to gel a team-based approach to participation in sports activities, which are crucial for children and young people's physical and mental health, tackling childhood obesity and bridging the attainment gap.

The Boys Brigade is a Christian youth organisation that is committed to providing a fun and safe learning environment. As a result, the majority of members benefit from church-based premises and shared use of equipment. That is why in many cases expenditure is kept low.

As a result of its positive message, the Boys Brigade juniors section now has 14,900 members, 5,010 of whom are in Scotland. As a past battalion president of Perth and Kinross District Boys Brigade and the current battalion president of Stirling and District Boys Brigade, I am proud to have witnessed many youngsters have the opportunity to grow and to become proud and confident. As they excel, they become very capable young adults.

An example is a young member of the Boys Brigade company in the Stirling area, whose name is James. He joined the local group several years ago. Although James is now in his late teens, his mother has reflected to the directors of the BB on how the time in the junior section has helped to support her son. These are her own words with permission from the Boys Brigade. She speaks about how the junior section

"Provided a well-balanced programme of activities including trying different sports & drill and of course an introduction to camp and a first stay away from home. In three years, James did not miss a single BB meeting—there can be no better testament to the programme and the leaders than that! As a parent, I appreciate the BB for providing so many varied opportunities in a safe and structured environment, and its leaders, who in giving up so much of their time are being great role models for our boys."

I am proud of the organisation and what it stands for. It has unlocked and continues to unlock the potential of youngsters and I wish it continued success. I have taken much pleasure in speaking this evening and commend and congratulate all who have worked in the past, who work in the present and who will continue in the future to ensure that the Boys Brigade goes from strength to strength.

17:11

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I thank Alexander Stewart for bringing the debate forward. I went through the Boys Brigade as a youngster; I was in the 13th Coatbridge, to be exact—a company that no longer exists, unfortunately. I went through all the sections and have many fond memories of my time in the junior section, which is what inspired

me to put my name down to speak in today's debate.

Members might remember that, towards the end of last term, I hosted an exhibition at the Parliament for the Boys Brigade in Scotland. The motto for the week was:

"The Boys' Brigade is challenging politicians from across the political spectrum to support its #TeamPlayerScot campaign; working together to recognise the vital role that youth organisations have in promoting a Healthier Scotland through sport and play opportunities for young people."

That ethos seems to have prevailed since more than 20 years ago—that is being generous—as I recall getting involved in football, badminton and chess while others in the same company might have been getting involved in music, running or other activities from a wide range, as Mr Stewart mentioned.

It is clear that organisations such as the Boys Brigade and the Girls Brigade can help to meet national outcomes in relation to health and education. Many children of junior section age will be facing challenges in their home situations, and attending BBs can be a refuge for them and give them another person to speak to about school or other issues. It is not uncommon for an officer in the Boys Brigade or someone in another organisation to take up an advocacy role for a young person who might be dealing with a school issue, for example.

The BBs and other voluntary organisations can carry out in a non-confrontational way community work that can be hard for local authority providers to do. They can be and are involved with issues such as youth offending and sectarian and hate issues. I say that because, earlier today, the Justice Committee discussed taking forward the proposed member's bill on the repeal of the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012. During my time in the Boys Brigade in Coatbridge, most people were either Celtic or Rangers fans and some work was done on that.

The Boys Brigade works on healthy relationships from an early age. The junior section officers talk to boys at an early age about what is a healthy and respectful relationship. The officers also work on developing confidence, self-esteem and freedom of thought.

One thing that I remember from the junior section was being encouraged to think independently and analyse information. I have kept in touch with a lot of people from the BBs, either directly or through the new medium of Facebook, and, years on, particularly during the referendum campaign in 2014, I was struck by how passionate those people were. For the sake of argument, I will say that 50 per cent were yes

and 50 per cent were no, but all were able to formulate a really good argument. I could not help but wonder how much being involved in the Boys Brigade had contributed to that.

When I supported the exhibition in Parliament, it was clear that many members across all the political parties had a Boys Brigade—or Girls Brigade—background. Perhaps the BBs have done something that is often difficult to do in this chamber and united us all. We must take our hats off to them for that.

As for the next 100 years, I think that the Boys Brigade, including its junior section, is a modern organisation. Although it is, as Mr Stewart said, rooted in a church ethos, membership—as I recall—is not dependent on religion or ethnicity. That was certainly not the case when I was there. This is a personal view and I am by no means saying this in a formal capacity, but it may be time, as the Boys Brigade moves forward after 100 years, to look at a merger with the Girls Brigade or to find other ways to include girls in the Boys Brigade and boys in the Girls Brigade. That is a personal view more than anything else.

Again, I thank Alexander Stewart for the motion and I say well done to the BB and the junior section. I certainly got a lot from it and I hope that everybody else can continue to do so.

17:15

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I thank Alexander Stewart for securing the debate, which marks an important event in the life and times of the Boys Brigade junior age group. I add my congratulations to the Boys Brigade junior age group on reaching its 100-year anniversary. It is good to see representatives of the brigade in the public gallery and I thank them personally for all the work that they have put in over the years. I know how valued such work is and, having been a member of the Territorial Army and having helped with Army cadets, I know how valuable the experience and the amount of time are that people, including parents, give to such organisations.

For the past 100 years, as the motion notes, being a member of the Boys Brigade has offered children and young people, not just here in Scotland but around the world,

“the chance to excel in new skills or talents, to explore, discover new things and provide opportunities and, above all, to have fun”.

It is therefore appropriate that, to celebrate the past 100 years of the junior section, more than 5,000 members of the Boys Brigade junior age group in Scotland are doing what the organisation has been successfully encouraging members to do for the past 100 years, such as trying new

things, taking up opportunities, learning new skills and developing talents that will benefit not only themselves but the wider communities that they live in, as well as becoming good citizens.

The West Scotland region, which I represent, is home to dozens of Boys Brigade companies with junior sections, all of which are doing great work. For example, in Helensburgh, which is in my region, the Boys Brigade junior section offers a weekly programme of activities for eight to 11-year-olds each Wednesday, in addition to the local competitions and special events that it runs. The members come not only from the town but from surrounding villages. In the past year, youngsters have had the chance to experience several special events, including visits to the fire and lifeboat stations as well as an excursion to the Denny ship tank museum in Dumbarton.

There is also the Vale of Leven Boys Brigade junior section, which meets weekly in Bonhill church and is taking part in the juniors 100 challenge as part of the big birthday celebrations. It is encouraging children to take part in the 100 years celebration by completing 100 different challenges. The members have so far looked back at Dunkirk as part of their programme. Earlier this year, they even got the chance to meet a world war two veteran who served at Dunkirk.

It is worth mentioning that, as with all voluntary organisations, the Boys Brigade is able to function correctly only because of the massive amount of support and help provided by its 3,500 adult volunteers, some of whom are represented in the public gallery, as I said. We are grateful for their work and dedication.

In mentioning the Vale of Leven Boys Brigade, it would be remiss of me not to mention one of the section's adult volunteers, Mrs Mary Burch, who received the British Empire medal for her voluntary work with the Boys Brigade, Mary's Meals and other community groups.

The Boys Brigade as a whole is a great credit to Scotland and it is an institution that has served our young people well over the years. I am sure that the entire chamber wishes the brigade and the junior section all the best for the next 100 years of their existence.

17:19

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I add my congratulations to Mr Stewart on securing the debate.

When it comes to the Boys Brigade, I fear that I am rather the black sheep of my family. My grandfather and father, my uncles and brothers-in-law were all BB officers; in fact, most of them were BB captains.

I am afraid that I reached the rather lowly heights of lance corporal in my time as a Boy but, throughout my youth, I was certainly a member of the Boys Brigade, and that began with membership of the Life Boys. In fact, I think that, through those BB connections, I sneaked in a year early, at around seven, and joined the 21st Leith Life Boys, which were based at Ebenezer United Free church, right in the heart of Leith.

My experience of the junior section goes back quite far through the 100 years, although not quite back to the Boy Reserves, which were pre-1926. That is probably just as well, as I found some advice to leaders of the Boy Reserves in the very early days, and it went like this:

“One minute late on parade should disqualify the Boy from attending and no excuse, however good, should allow the Boy to remain. Strictness to the point of severity on this point makes the percentage of perfect attendance very much higher.”

Fortunately, even by the time that I joined the Life Boys, a slightly more enlightened attitude to discipline had begun to prevail.

My time spanned a couple of important historical changes in the century of history of the juniors. First, while I was a Life Boy, we became the junior section, and I remember that change. Looking back on the history, it is clear that some important organisational changes were involved but, for us, the main change was that we stopped wearing that slightly strange sailor's hat and began to wear a hat that, in all our minds, bore more than a passing resemblance to the hats in “Thunderbirds”.

I was also part of the introduction of the recognition of achievement in the juniors, which Mr Stewart mentioned. Originally, that was done not through badges but through coloured lanyards. The idea was introduced by a leader in the Life Boys at the time, the legendary—or perhaps notorious but certainly fearsome—Miss Gibling of the Leith battalion, who introduced the idea of coloured lanyards to mark achievement and piloted them in the Leith battalion, including the company that I was in. They then became generalised throughout the Life Boys and transformed into the badges that are used to this day to mark achievements in different sectors.

It is worth noting that that important character in the history of the juniors was a woman. Looking back at the history, it is clear that very early on—in the days of the Boy Reserves—many of those who came forward as instructors were women and there was a certain reluctance to accept them. However, they had to be accepted. Initially, they were accepted as honorary instructors, but they later became official lady instructors. It is worth noting the great contribution that women leaders have made to the junior section. In my case, that

means mentioning Ruth Johnstone, who was the leader of my Life Boy and junior section, and who was a big influence on me as a young boy. In fact, I met Ruth Johnstone most recently only a few weeks ago, and it was clear to me that she still exercises a certain authority over me, perhaps second only to that of my mother. It is also clear to me that she must have been an awful lot younger in those days than I had understood, because she is still to a degree going strong and has contributed throughout her life.

The juniors 100 challenge goes with the grain and the tradition of the juniors. The challenges go from the sublime to the ridiculous—from learning a circus skill to meeting your MSP—and from traditional activities for the juniors, such as spending a night under canvas, to very new ones, such as getting 100 Facebook likes.

It has been a tremendous 100 years for the junior section, which was, for good or ill, an important part of my formation. I am sure that it will continue to be that for young men and now young women, too, for 100 years to come.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Gray. You remind me how much I learn about members' backgrounds during members' business debates.

I do not know whether you were ever a Life Boy, Mr McMillan, but we are about to find out. You are the last speaker in the open debate.

17:24

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): No, I was not a Life Boy but I was a member of the junior section of 1st Port Glasgow Boys Brigade.

I congratulate Alexander Stewart on securing the first members' business debate of the new parliamentary term. I note the declaration of interest that he made. I wanted to speak in the debate because I was a member of 1st Port Glasgow Boys Brigade. As with Fulton MacGregor's company, that company is no longer in existence. I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the junior section. It certainly was an opportunity to learn, as well as run about, play, have some fun and burn off some energy.

I am genuinely pleased to highlight the positivity and opportunities that the Boys Brigade—whether the anchor boys, the junior section, the company section or the senior section—provides to all its members and all our communities. Whether through team building, sport, charity activity, helping people to become good citizens or the many other activities that it does, the Boys Brigade delivers in every constituency in the country, throughout the UK and globally. It has been a

force for good and it is a huge cause for celebration that the junior section is now 100 years old.

I mentioned learning and charity. Members know—they have probably heard it once or twice—that I am the parliamentary piper and have the privilege of piping at many events. This summer alone, I piped at the pipathon 2017 charity event, the royal Edinburgh military tattoo and, yesterday, the opening ceremony for the new Queensferry crossing, which came in at £245 million under budget.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We do not know that tune. Perhaps you will play it some time.

Stuart McMillan: I am sure I will.

I started learning the pipes in the 1st Port Glasgow Boys Brigade junior section. Growing up in Port Glasgow while a huge amount of industrial change was happening around me, I started out on that journey into piping. It was a good way to distract me from what was taking place in my community and the learning in the Boys Brigade was useful. It provides life skills for ever. I dare say that all youth organisations will say that they provide the same as part of their offering, and they do. I certainly am happy to promote all the youth organisations that work in our communities and constituencies.

One thing in which I, as an MSP, have taken a huge amount of pride was being asked to take the inspection of the 2nd Gourrock Boys Brigade in May 2014. It was the first time that I had ever taken an inspection, although, obviously, I had performed in them many times before. It was a huge privilege and an honour to do it. A few months later, I took part in a debate in the run-up to the referendum. That was a bit more bruising, I hasten to add, but the inspection was fabulous.

Charity work is a mainstay of the Boys Brigade. I remember that, in one event, I obtained a certificate in recognition of having raised the princely sum of £5 for a local organisation. With inflation, that has increased to £100. I kept that certificate until only a couple of years ago.

I am delighted to wish the Boys Brigade junior section a very happy birthday. I am proud to have been a member of the junior section and I wish it every success for the next 100 years and beyond. The Boys Brigade motto, “sure and steadfast”, has stood the test of time, and will stand it in future.

I thank Alexander Stewart for securing this excellent and timely debate.

17:29

The Minister for Childcare and Early Years (Mark McDonald): I congratulate Alexander

Stewart on securing the first members’ business debate of the new term and thank all members who have participated in the debate, which has been interesting and positive.

I feel that I should begin with a confession: unlike the other speakers, I was not a member of the Boys Brigade; I came through the scouting movement in my youth.

Iain Gray: Shame.

Mark McDonald: I know, I know. I say to Mr Gray that it is just one of those things. However, it is a privilege to be part of the Boys Brigade centenary celebrations that Mr Stewart is highlighting in the chamber this evening.

It is clear that the sheer variety of activities that have been carried out over the Boys Brigade’s 100 years have stood all the young people who have taken part—including the members who have participated in the debate—in good stead throughout their lives. I was interested to hear of the experiences of my colleagues Fulton MacGregor and Stuart McMillan and of their mutual experience in relation to the fact that both the companies that they were part of no longer exist. I am sure that that has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that they were members of those companies; rather, it allows us to reflect on the fact that there is a requirement to ensure that volunteers continue to take part in Boys Brigade companies so that those opportunities can remain available to young people across Scotland’s communities.

For many young people, being part of the Boys Brigade provides them with life lessons that will not be forgotten and will stay with them into adulthood. The work of the Boys Brigade is an important part of the life of Scotland and it complements and contributes to the Government’s mission for Scotland.

Fulton MacGregor: After I sat down, it dawned on me that I should have taken the opportunity to pay tribute to one of the officers who was in the junior section when I was there: Mr English, from Coatbridge. During the summer recess, I heard the sad news that he had passed away. Given that the minister is talking about volunteers and the work that they do, I thought that I would take this opportunity to pay my respects to Mr English in the Scottish Parliament. I thank the minister for allowing me to do that.

Mark McDonald: I am grateful that I was able to afford Fulton MacGregor that opportunity. He highlights the impact that volunteers who support young people across Scotland have on young people as they move into adulthood. Many of those individuals are not forgotten in terms of their impact.

We recognise and value the contribution that the Boys Brigade, the other uniformed organisations, youth work and the third sector more widely make to promoting equity and improved life chances. Indeed, we have allocated £60,000 from the Scottish Government's children, young people and families early intervention fund to the Boys Brigade to support the work that it does across the communities of Scotland.

At the heart of all that the Boys Brigade does is building confidence, capacity, resilience and skills, while recognising, capturing and celebrating young people's achievements, which is a point that Iain Gray highlighted. It supports thousands of young men to be the best that they can be, which, in turn, will lead to Scotland continuing to flourish in the future.

It is no secret that this Government wants the poverty-related attainment gap in Scotland to close, whenever, wherever and however it is measured, and we have a clear educational policy framework in place to give children and young people every chance to succeed, based on the foundations of getting it right for every child, curriculum for excellence and the developing the young workforce programme. We know that there can be challenges for children in the classroom, but we recognise that the challenges that some children face are rooted well outside the school gates and that, therefore, support for children and families from the early years through to the post-18 period is crucial. That work does not start and end in the classroom; it continues through a young person's journey into further education and the workplace. The most effective work goes beyond the school gates and into the local community—that is the true breadth of education in Scotland. We recognise the role that youth work can play in that regard, and I particularly highlight the work of the Boys Brigade in engaging young people in areas that the education sector can sometimes struggle to reach, in offering a large chunk of the acknowledged 80 per cent of learning by children and young people that takes place outside school, and in engaging families and communities in a range of opportunities to support our ambitions for young people.

Through opportunities offered by youth work—such as being a member of the Boys Brigade—children and young people can be introduced to science, technology, engineering and maths activities that enable them to participate in fun and enjoyable practical experiences outside the formal classroom setting, without, at first, realising that what they are doing relates directly to those subjects. Realising the breadth of opportunities that those experiences bring can encourage and inspire young people to take up further studies in science, technology, engineering or maths subjects, thus leading to a positive career path.

For example, as we all know, members of the uniformed youth work organisations—the Boys Brigade, the Girls Brigade, the girl guides and the scouts—undertake a range of outdoor learning activities. I recognise that that helps to support team building and links into the Scottish Government's aspiration to increase and improve outdoor learning experiences for young people across Scotland.

I recognise the valuable role that the Boys Brigade plays in promoting and enhancing young people's confidence, capacity and resilience, which impacts on attainment and achievement. Youth work, in particular, can support young people who are at risk of disengaging from education. We know that youth work changes lives; there is increasing evidence for that.

Youth work provides young people with a safe and nurturing environment where they can share their talents and skills, have fun and learn new things. Thanks to the talents and skills of thousands of youth workers in Scotland, including those who work in Boys Brigade companies—a great many of whom are volunteers—our young people are supported and nurtured to be the best that they can be. Some of those volunteers are young people themselves and, by helping their peers to be all that they can be, they are giving back to their communities. In the Boys Brigade, those volunteers can be young leaders, some of whom might be the only positive male role model in a person's life. Those young leaders also ensure that the valuable work of the Boys Brigade continues into the next generation.

I thank everyone who is involved in the Boys Brigade, especially those who give their time as volunteers. We need them to utilise their skills and expertise with children and young people, adults, families and communities to support that crucial work and to help with our wider aspirations to improve outcomes for children and young people; to engage those people in activities that will increase their confidence and self-esteem so that they can realise their full potential; and to recognise the difference that, as volunteers, they make to people's lives through the work that they do.

As a Government, we know that youth work changes lives for the better and can give young people the skills that they need and deserve to succeed in life. Scotland is fortunate to have a vibrant youth work sector that engages hundreds of thousands of young people in fun, challenging and progressive learning activities every week.

The Boys Brigade is a crucial part of the youth work landscape and it matters to us that it continues to do its strong work in supporting young people in the communities of Scotland.

I congratulate everyone who is involved in the 100th anniversary of the Boys Brigade and I give my full support to Alexander Stewart's motion. I wish the Boys Brigade all the best for the next 100 years.

Meeting closed at 17:36.

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