



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Tuesday 26 May 2020

Session 5



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# Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 26 May 2020

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** Good afternoon, everyone. Before we begin, I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and across the campus. I ask that members take care to observe those measures over the course of this afternoon's business, including when entering and exiting the chamber.

The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is the Rev Brian Casey, who is the parish minister at Springburn parish Church of Scotland. The Rev Casey joins us via live videolink.

**The Rev Brian Casey (Springburn Parish Church of Scotland):** Presiding Officer, Bishop Oscar Romero said that

"the ones who have a voice must speak for those who are voiceless".

I have spent the past six years in Springburn, with 150 funerals a year, 18,000 parishioners and real social deprivation, and I have found that a minister's job is complex.

In Scotland, church and state are rightly separate. Last year I attended the House of Commons for a prayer breakfast, at which the then Speaker of the House, John Bercow, told the assembled clergy that the church was the only organisation that still held the Government's feet to the fire.

Historically, the Church of Scotland chose not to be a state church. We make our own money and as such—and as Romero said—we speak out for those whom we serve.

I have fought for asylum seekers, and I have worked alongside members across the chamber to improve the lot of those caught in addiction. Currently, we work with our MSP, Bob Doris, to ensure that our people are fed—our people. We share a common goal: the betterment of society and the security and health of members' constituents and our parishioners. They are the same people.

I am not a politician and MSPs are not clergy, but together we can make an unstoppable force. The church will always speak out on issues that are affecting society, and so do members. The clergy care about the same people, in the same

way as their MSPs. We see things that often go unseen, and hear things that often go unsaid to the general public. It is one of the privileges and, indeed, burdens of our jobs.

People confide things that they cannot tell others, and we fight on their behalf. Our church in Springburn, along with our parish priest, got together with community leaders following the Covid-19 outbreak. We now run a food hub and a baby food bank. We deliver prescriptions and feed around 800 people a month. That was much easier to achieve with Government assistance and funding. The money that is given to us is used to feed the good folks of Springburn. That is partnership working in action, not church and state separate.

Christ was a radical who upturned the politics of his day. Many have followed, like Archbishop Romero, but in essence we want the same thing.

Presiding Officer, on the Parliament's mace are the words "Wisdom, Compassion, Justice and Integrity". We stand for the same things. We might be separate, but that does not stop us from working together for the common weal.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much.

## Topical Question Time

14:03

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is topical question time. I will try to get as many members in as possible.

The first question is from Monica Lennon, who joins us remotely.

### Covid-19 (National Health Service)

**1. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how many people have died after contracting Covid-19 in a hospital, and what action has been taken to investigate outbreaks in NHS settings. (S5T-02212)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** Because of the prolonged incubation period of Covid-19, which can be up to 14 days, it is not possible to be certain of exactly how many people have contracted the disease after admission to hospital.

The Scottish Government is working with its United Kingdom counterparts and with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control to establish international definitions for hospital-acquired Covid-19 infections. In the coming weeks we will reach and agree on those definitions and we will publish information about the data that is collected against those definitions in NHS health service boards.

**Monica Lennon:** Robust and reliable data on the transmission of Covid-19 in healthcare settings should be in the public domain as soon as possible.

Worrying reports have emerged about a major outbreak of Covid-19 at Gartnavel hospital in Glasgow. Families who have been affected by the outbreak have shared heartbreaking accounts of the loss of loved ones. David Holgate's family were told that he would be safe at Gartnavel. After being admitted to the hospital, Mr Holgate tested negative for Covid-19. However, he was later struck down by the virus and he died, alone, in the hospital. His daughter Mags has said:

"The virus blew through the hospital like a draught."

What is the cabinet secretary's response to the Holgate family and to others affected by the Gartnavel outbreak?

**Jeane Freeman:** My direct response is to express my condolences to that family, and to other families, for the loss of their loved ones, and my sympathy to those others who have concerns.

Gartnavel hospital, like others, has three pathways for the management of patients. The red pathway is used when a hospital knows that an incoming patient has Covid-19. The amber pathway is used for contacts when a patient is suspected of having Covid-19. The green pathway is for non-Covid-19 patients or for those who have been stepped down from isolation precautions, as per the national guidance.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde initiated a blanket screening policy for all patients every four days, which is broadly consistent with the over-70s testing that we have introduced.

There are two issues here. One is that it is very difficult to know. When someone is admitted to hospital, they may test negative for Covid-19, but that does not mean that they are not incubating the disease. The 14-day incubation period that I mentioned earlier makes it difficult to be certain about that. Secondly, boards and the hospitals within boards should have very clear infection prevention and control procedures.

Ms Lennon is right that this is a serious matter. We must understand, as best we can, what more we must do to ensure that we minimise the transmission of Covid-19 in hospitals. That is why we are doing that work with the European body and with our counterparts in the other three nations of the UK, so that we can reach an agreed definition of what we are looking for and what we are counting.

That is also why the chief nursing officer's nosocomial infection group is due to report back at the beginning of next month with its recommendations for further actions. We will take those actions once we know what is recommended. The chief nursing officer has also instructed the healthcare inspectorate to restart its direct inspections, to ensure that proper infection prevention and control measures are consistently in place across all hospital settings.

**Monica Lennon:** The Gartnavel outbreak raises questions about the safety of other Scottish hospitals and healthcare settings. Health board papers confirm that, during March and April this year, more than 20 ward closures occurred in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde because of Covid-19 outbreaks.

Can the cabinet secretary confirm the total number of wards that have been closed at Gartnavel hospital and across Scotland as a result of Covid-19 outbreaks? If she cannot give those figures today, will she follow that up?

Given that hundreds of patients, including those who were untested, were discharged into care homes, will the cabinet secretary explain what steps have been taken to trace care home residents who were in any of the hospitals where

Covid-19 outbreaks occurred, so that action could and can be taken to isolate them and stop the spread of the virus?

**Jeane Freeman:** In answer to the first part of her question, as Ms Lennon rightly anticipates, I do not know the exact number of wards that were closed across all our hospital settings. I will secure the number and ensure that she has it as quickly as possible.

On the second part of Monica Lennon's question, there are two datasets: the discharge dataset and the testing dataset. Public Health Scotland holds those datasets. In order to respond in a way that means that we are confident that the data is robust, Public Health Scotland is working to bring together those datasets. That is not as straightforward as it might sound. In bringing together the data, we need to ensure that it is comparable, that we are not double counting, that we are not underestimating and that we are measuring the same things as far as possible.

Public Health Scotland has that work under way. As soon as it advises me that it has completed the work and it has double-checked and is confident about the robustness of the data, we will publish it. I will make sure that members know the publication date and the frequency with which the data will continue to be published.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** Understanding to the best of our ability who in hospital settings has the virus would help to minimise transmission in those settings. Can the cabinet secretary advise when the Scottish Government will introduce regular routine testing for national health service staff?

**Jeane Freeman:** The chief medical officer's advisory body is considering that. The advisory body, which involves scientists and clinicians, advises us on what it sees as the risk versus benefit in undertaking that measure. It provides advice; the Government will make the decision.

As I am sure that the member understands and recalls, there is a continuing debate about the value of testing individuals who do not have symptoms. During the early part of the pandemic, the advice was that there was no value at all to testing in those circumstances. That has changed in that there is now a lively debate in which it is argued that there is some value in testing those who are asymptomatic, albeit that the test is not as reliable in its results as it is for those who are symptomatic.

Testing is reliable to a degree. It tells us whether an individual has the virus on the date of the test. To ensure that we use it for the purposes of prevention and precaution, we have to keep repeating the test every seven days, as we are

doing in care homes, in order to provide that level of reassurance.

We await the advice and view of the group. At that point, we will take a decision about whether we intend to take that action on testing, and whether we intend to do it for particular groups, or not—or whatever the options may be. I will advise members when we have made the decision.

### **Covid-19 (Contact Tracers)**

**2. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will have recruited all 2,000 contact tracers by the end of May. (S5T-02214)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** We will. As of today, we have 1,615 contact tracers identified and ready to be deployed. As the member will recall, the contact tracers are drawn from the three parts of our recruitment exercise—that is, from national health service boards, our returner pool and the adverts that we placed, the closing date for which was last Friday. The number that I have given is for those who have been identified and are ready to be deployed from NHS boards, the Scottish Ambulance Service, NHS National Services Scotland and Public Health Scotland.

By 1 June, we will have more than 385 from the NHS returner pool and we are processing those from the recruitment adverts at the rate of 150 a day. As we have said, we do not anticipate that, on 1 June, we will need all those contact tracers: the degree to which they will be needed will be determined by the number of positive tests that come through from individuals.

As we move from where we are now—in lockdown—to phase 1 as was set out in the route map that the Government published last week, if the incidence of the virus in the community is still as suppressed as it is at this point, we would not expect, by any means, to need all those 2,000 contact tracers at the start of phase 1. However, our anticipation is that, as we move through the phases, depending on how the virus performs and what its incidence is, we might need up to 2,000 contact tracers—or we might need more. Over the summer period we will therefore continue our iterative recruitment exercise, as well as the approach that we have achieved to date.

**Miles Briggs:** Will the cabinet secretary clarify how many contact tracers have actually been recruited? At her lunch time briefing today, the First Minister suggested that the number was 700. However, have those people just been moved from other parts of the Government's response to Covid-19?

What lessons have been learned from the failures in contact tracing that we have seen in

relation to the Nike conference at the beginning of the outbreak, and what additional measures have been taken into account in the new system?

**Jeane Freeman:** Let me repeat that, as of today, 1,615 staff have been identified and are ready to be deployed as contact tracers. As the member will recall, from the outset of the outbreak, I have said, on social media and elsewhere, that our recruitment exercise for contact tracers consists of three pillars, the first of which involves NHS staff. It should be remembered that we are starting from a position of having a pool of contact tracers through local health protection teams, which, before the pandemic, would expand or contract depending on what we needed them to do. Added to that is the second pillar, which is our NHS returner pool, and the third, which involves our adverts that closed on Friday of last week. That is the threefold approach that we have been using to grow our number of contact tracers. We estimated that we would need 2,000 tracers, and we will have those in place by 1 June.

What happened around the event that the member has referenced was exactly in accordance with the way in which contact tracing works. The First Minister has already explained the process that was gone through. It should be remembered that the whole process of contact tracing is a clinically led NHS exercise, which involves protocols. At this point, one area that is being discussed is the number of cases that might constitute a cluster. That has not yet been agreed, but the process of considering it is being led by the deputy chief medical officer, the chief medical officer and others. Once that number has been determined and agreed, the other part of the advice that they will issue on how matters should proceed will be on what would then trigger a public health notice to advise a community that a cluster had appeared in a particular setting. Once those two decisions have been made by those individuals, we will ensure that members know what they are.

**Miles Briggs:** In Scotland, more than 100,000 tests have been left unused during the outbreak, and the number of tests being carried out has consistently fallen short of the daily target. Does the cabinet secretary accept that the current testing situation has not been acceptable, and that care home staff and residents who should have been tested have not been able to utilise the available capacity?

Further, the cabinet secretary previously told me that it was taking between 48 and 72 hours for people to receive their test results. What will the turnaround time be under the new testing system? If it will not be below 24 hours, does she think that the new system will actually work?

**Jeane Freeman:** I would dispute the figures that Mr Briggs mentioned. I think that they appeared previously in *The Herald* newspaper, at which time the Government disputed them. If, after this meeting, the member would like to provide me with details of how he arrived at those numbers, I would be happy to give him a detailed answer.

On the second part of Mr Brigg's question, about the turnaround time, if I recall correctly I said that it was up to 72 hours and we were pressing hardest to have that turnaround time reduced in the lighthouse laboratory, which is part of the four-nation, United Kingdom Government-led exercise. There is a target time of 24 hours for going from sample to result. Our NHS labs are achieving that. The Lighthouse lab, I am pleased to say, is close to consistently achieving that target time, too. Our clinical advisers to the health service will determine how that will be monitored to ensure that the 24-hour target time is consistently met across all the lab sites that are operating.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Aileen Campbell is joining us remotely to answer question 3.

### **Covid-19 (Wellbeing Support)**

**3. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what guidance is available to help and support the wellbeing of people affected by Covid-19. (S5T-02201)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell):** To ensure that individuals are aware of the help and support that are available to them, we have provided key information on Ready Scotland and on a new information page on mygov.scot. We have also worked with key partners, including local, national and third sector organisations and local authorities, to strengthen the support that is available, and we have provided guidance on supporting shielded individuals.

We launched a new helpline on 14 April to ensure that everyone who needs help and cannot get it from friends, family or others nearby can access it. We wrote to every household in Scotland to make them aware of the help and support that are available.

**James Dornan:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but many people will be facing challenges in being able to access and afford food and other essentials during this crisis. Can she outline in more detail how the Scottish Government will ensure that people receive the support that they need in a dignified way?

**Aileen Campbell:** Absolutely. We are unique in the United Kingdom in trying to take a cash-first approach to food insecurity, which is the most dignified way to provide support and is founded on

human rights principles. That is why we have more than doubled the national budget for the Scottish welfare fund, and why we have given local authorities the flexibility to provide their £30 million allocation of the food fund as cash or, where appropriate, vouchers.

Of the £70 million food fund, £60 million is directed at a structured public sector response to support food access. There is £30 million for the national shielding programme and £30 million for local authorities to support others who are at risk, and the remaining £10 million of the food fund is going to the third sector partners that are delivering community-based responses. The supporting communities fund and the wellbeing fund are also supporting community food provision.

We are taking a range of different approaches to ensure that people can access and find the support that they need, where they need it.

**James Dornan:** Further to that reply, can the cabinet secretary provide details on how the Government is ensuring that people are informed about and can access the financial support that is available, whether it is in the form of UK reserved benefits such as universal credit, Scottish Government support such as the Scottish welfare fund or grants for the self-employed?

**Aileen Campbell:** We continue to promote uptake of the wide range of available support, including through our partners in Citizens Advice Scotland. In 2020-21, we are providing the CAS network in Scotland with £3 million to support people who are affected by poverty and welfare reforms, helping everyone in Scotland who is struggling financially. That includes an additional £100,000 from the wellbeing fund to support Covid-related pressures, including the new national helpline.

We also provide funding for welfare advice through One Parent Families Scotland, the Child Poverty Action Group and Advice Direct Scotland. That funding covers direct advice to people seeking assistance as well as training support and the second-tier advice that is given to other advice agencies across Scotland.

There are a number of different ways in which we are trying to help people cope financially. Undoubtedly, there will be future pressures and we will need to continue to be agile on the issue.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is a supplementary from Alex Rowley.

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Presiding Officer, I pushed my button to request a supplementary to the first question.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There seems to have been an issue with our screens. We will move on.

For question 4, John Finnie is joining us remotely, as is the cabinet secretary, Fergus Ewing.

#### **Covid-19 (Tourism Industry Support)**

**4. John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of Specialist Leisure Group Ltd entering administration, resulting in seven hotels across Scotland ceasing to trade, what further steps it is considering to support the tourism industry. (S5T-02197)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing):** I was very sorry to learn of Specialist Leisure Group entering administration, and our thoughts are with the large number of employees who are directly affected in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom.

The Scottish Government has done a great deal to support tourism businesses in these most difficult times. In particular, we have provided very substantial financial support.

Tomorrow—for the sixth time, I think—I will speak with Nigel Huddleston, my UK counterpart. I will be pressing him on the fact that the many businesses that have rateable values in excess of £51,000—in particular, rural hotels in Scotland—have had no grant support from the UK Government scheme. I believe that it is not too late for the UK Government to put right that defect, if it wishes. I very much hope that the UK Treasury will listen very carefully and help such businesses to bridge the gap through these troubled times.

I also want to ensure that relaxations to the furlough scheme are flexible enough to assist businesses in Scotland and meet their needs.

Finally, it is vital that we enable businesses in the tourism sector to resume as soon as they can safely do so. A great deal of our effort at the current time is devoted to that vital task.

**John Finnie:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that detailed response.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that the crisis has created an extremely difficult environment for coach operators—the Caledonian Travel brand was part of Specialist Leisure Group, for example. Will he outline the discussions that he has undertaken with coach operators about the long-term sustainability of that sector, given the current challenges? Have those discussions included the role that those operators could play in school transport when schools return after the summer break?

**Fergus Ewing:** I have had a lengthy discussion with a number of coach operators, including representatives of the trade body, the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK.

Most of the coach operators that operate in the tourism sector do so exclusively. Other operators also work for education authorities—local authorities—in providing school transport. As Mr Finnie’s question implies, it is possible that, in the future, some coaches, at least for an interim period, could help out with school transport, or indeed with public transport—not least because, as I understand it, through working closely with my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Michael Matheson, the requirements of social distancing for bus transport mean that only a very small proportion of the seats will be used, meaning that more buses will be required.

Mr Finnie has made a very practical point, if I have interpreted it correctly; it is one that we are interested in pursuing, working with him and with all members.

**John Finnie:** I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for confirmation of the important role that the coach sector could play. Is there a role for the Scottish Trades Union Congress in ensuring that any support that the Government provides will underpin the fair work agenda?

**Fergus Ewing:** Yes. We have always worked very closely with the STUC. Over the years, I have valued its counsel and involvement in ensuring that work arrangements are fair to employees. This is another example of that.

The STUC will be concerned—as I am—that the UK Government has not yet come up with a bespoke scheme to provide assistance for the coach sector, which is so important for the tourism sector overall. If people cannot travel to Scotland to visit our hotels or leave cruise liners to see visitor attractions, or if coaches cannot be used to collect visitors from airports or railway stations and take them to their onward destinations, the task of resuming our successful tourism industry will be that much the harder.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have a few supplementary requests, so it would be good if members could be succinct.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The tourism sector is very anxious that the Scottish Government may not continue the financial support that has been provided so far, even if it advises that the sector will remain closed during the very important summer season. Will more financial support be available from the Scottish Government if it advises that the sector will remain closed?

**Fergus Ewing:** Mr Rennie has made a very important point. I understand that my colleague Fiona Hyslop will be making a statement later this afternoon that may be of interest to the member. We in the Scottish Government certainly realise that our job to provide a financial bridge through this difficulty is not yet complete. The bridge is under construction; it is not finished.

We need to continue to work in a non-partisan way with the UK Government on these matters, recognising that the bridge is not yet complete. In particular, the furlough scheme needs to be extended beyond October. This morning, I spoke to a group of north Highland hoteliers who said that the most important single issue to enable their survival would be a more flexible furlough scheme that would allow them options to navigate through to Easter next year, especially if, as now, there is uncertainty as to whether there will be any chance of a summer season for hotels this year. It is essential that we approach the need to provide that support in an open-minded and non-political, non-partisan way; otherwise, I am afraid that we will see the example of the sad administration of the leading company Shearings followed by others. The issue could not be more important, and I very much hope that the UK Government will be of the same view.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I draw members’ attention to my entry in the register of members’ interests.

The cabinet secretary has rightly pointed out that the UK Government’s furloughing has been a lifeline for the tourism industry. Will the Scottish Government create a bespoke scheme for tourism and hospitality businesses that are fighting for their survival and which are not eligible for the grants of £10,000 or £25,000 or the creative, tourism and hospitality enterprises hardship fund or pivotal enterprise resilience fund?

**Fergus Ewing:** I have been absolutely open from the outset that our job is to provide a financial support mechanism to all legitimate tourism businesses, by which I mean not Airbnbs or second home owners who make a bit of money on the side, but genuine businesses that rely for their main livelihood on tourism and now have no business.

I have consistently argued that it is the Government’s business to keep those businesses going and it follows automatically that the bed-and-breakfast establishments, photographers, people involved in field sports, amusement arcades and marinas and small boat owners who may not have been eligible for the original grant schemes require other support. That work is ongoing and I suggest that Rachael Hamilton listens carefully to this afternoon’s statement, when I hope that further information will be forthcoming. I

absolutely assure her that I support the principle that she has set out. I hope that the UK Government Treasury does not regard the issue as a box that has a tick occupying it. There is no tick in this box. It is our job to complete the bridge and complete the task—and we are determined to do so.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** The Bay Waverley Castle hotel is a 77-bedroom hotel in Melrose that is part of the Bay Hotels group. Staff living on site have been given 28 days' notice to find alternative accommodation, so they have been made jobless and homeless in one go. What assistance can the Scottish Government, perhaps in liaison with the local authority, give to those members of staff?

**Fergus Ewing:** I am not aware of that case. Christine Grahame has drawn it to my attention and, thereby, to the public's attention. I will ask my officials to look into the matter straight away. It is of concern that, during this period in particular, people will face eviction from their property, but I do not know the individual circumstances of the case in question. I will, of course, undertake to work with Christine Grahame if she wishes me to do so to look into the matter and to see what can be done to help the individuals who are now in an extremely invidious position.

## Covid-19 (Transport)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a statement by Michael Matheson. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:36

**The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson):** I would like to provide Parliament with an update on the development of the Scottish Government's Covid-19 transport transition plan, as we begin to chart the route map through and out of the crisis that was outlined by the First Minister last Thursday.

I reiterate my thanks to the people of Scotland, who have heeded the Government's advice not to travel unless it is absolutely necessary to do so. Their following of that advice is what has allowed us to set out the first iteration of the transport plan today.

However, the virus is still with us, and if we move too quickly or without appropriate diligence, it could rapidly run out of control again. In that context, our transport transition plan must be dynamic and capable of evolving as lockdown measures are gradually eased. It will be intrinsically linked to the plans for reopening our schools and for economic recovery that will be set out to Parliament later this afternoon. Our transport transition plan will present a careful and measured approach to a fluid situation in which we must continue to adopt the behaviours that have brought us to this point.

Scotland is planning for a managed transition away from the current restrictions in a way that will enable suppression of the virus to continue. The Scottish Government is taking an open and transparent approach to that, in line with the proposition that was initially set out in "COVID-19—A Framework for Decision Making", which was published last month and has now been set out in the First Minister's "Coronavirus (COVID-19): framework for decision making—Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis".

We are now moving towards phase 1 of that route map. The route map outlines the key high-level messages, the first of which is that working from home should remain the default position, where it can. The reopening of a limited number of workplaces is set out in phase 1, and where home working is not possible, businesses and organisations are encouraged to manage travel demand through use of staggered start times and flexible working patterns.

Secondly, people can travel short distances for outdoor leisure and exercise, but the advice is that they should stay within a short distance of their local community and should travel by walking, wheeling or cycling, where possible. Our transport transition plan is informed by and expands on those key high-level messages.

Transport will help to facilitate the recovery of our health, society and economy by allowing people to get around again to access services, jobs, friends and family. However, I start with the reminder that in order to protect the integrity of our public transport system as we transition, it is of paramount importance that everyone continues to take personal responsibility for their own safety and that of others with whom they might come into contact when travelling.

Our plan will be developed to ensure that the people of Scotland are safe while travelling, and that our transport operators are safe at work. We have engaged with trade unions, passenger groups, operators, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, local authorities and regional transport partnerships, and I emphasise strongly that we will continue to work with them in the weeks and months ahead, as the plan evolves.

As a consequence of the phased approach that is outlined in the route map, there are three separate strands in our transport response to the pandemic through the immediate, medium and long terms. They are: easing of restrictions on daily life and movement; support for economic recovery in the transport sector and the broader economy; and development of the future of transport in Scotland.

As part of the first iteration of the plan, we are publishing clear guidance to support the transport sector in moving to restart and recover, and we are providing guidance for passengers who use public transport. The top-level message that I would like to convey is that the level of physical distancing that is needed as we navigate the phases of the route map will obviously affect public transport capacity, with operators estimating that the 2m physical distancing will mean that capacity is between 10 per cent and 25 per cent of normal capacity. As a result, a system that typically had 1.5 million people journeys per day—with peaks in demand at 100 per cent capacity—will have substantial constraints on it.

Our transport transition plan has a number of national aims, so over the coming weeks and months we will work with local authorities to operationalise them at local level. Our plan will inform passengers about when and how to access public transport safely. It will support management of travel demand by reinforcing broader messages on physical distancing and discouraging unnecessary travel through sustaining behaviour

changes, encouraging active travel options and staggering journeys in order to avoid peak times. It will also inform passengers and road users of busy areas and times in order to encourage alternative choices.

Guided by our principle of ensuring safety, transport operators and authorities are planning for physical distancing and increased cleaning measures on public transport and at bus and rail stations, ferry terminals and airports. The importance of distancing and hygiene on board public transport and at public transport hubs will be critical to the plan's success.

Although transport operators and authorities will ensure that the transport environment is as safe as possible, we all have a personal responsibility to take steps to protect ourselves and others. It is vital that we continue to keep to 2m physical distancing wherever possible, that we wash our hands regularly and that we maintain good respiratory hygiene.

Even with the measures that transport operators are putting in place, it can be difficult for people to maintain physical distancing throughout their journeys on some forms of public transport. I know from my discussions with the trade unions and operators, and from surveys of public sentiment, that those are real and live concerns. For that reason, and as a consideration to staff and fellow passengers, people should—and are expected to—wear face coverings as an additional measure when using public transport. I ask people to please come prepared with face coverings when they use public transport.

Of course, there will be situations in which that is not practicable, as is reflected in the detail of the guidance. Furthermore, it is vital that, when using face coverings, the public follow our guidelines on their use, which includes ensuring a high level of hygiene. We will, of course, keep that position under regular review in order to reflect any new evidence that becomes available.

We are looking to increase the frequency of public transport in phase 2 of the route map—although, given the restrictions on the number of people whom we will be able to carry, we need fewer people than normal to travel, especially at busy times. As I have stated, in line with the route map, we are urging employers to show leadership and to be as flexible as possible in order to allow earlier and later starting and finishing times for people who have to travel.

While we move through the phases, we will need to manage expectations in our public transport network around, for example, travelling into cities. We must recognise that it will be not be possible to satisfy demand fully, and we must

ensure that our recovery is fair, sustainable and does not exacerbate inequalities in our system.

We will continue to work with a range of stakeholders—transport operators, passengers, local authorities, education, the health service and business—to inform the easing of restrictions and to manage demand for transport, based on the evidence that we gather. For example, the Scottish Government is working with local authorities and transport operators to ensure that transport is in place to get children to school.

It is important that our plan will seek to support reallocation of road space in order to give priority to walking, cycling, wheeling and buses. We have a real opportunity to secure a positive and lasting change in our sustainable travel habits. People continuing to walk, cycle or wheel will allow us to sustain the improved air quality that we have benefited from since the start of lockdown.

In April, I announced the spaces for people fund, which is providing £10 million of funding for local authorities to introduce temporary walking and cycling infrastructure to enable physical distancing. I have been delighted with local authorities' response to that offer, and we have already received applications or expressions of interest exceeding the initial £10 million. I am very pleased to announce that we are increasing the fund to £30 million with immediate effect. I want all local authorities—urban and rural—to have the opportunity and support to access the fund.

As I said, we will carry on developing the transport transition plan as we move through the phases of the route map. We will continue to gather evidence to inform its evolution we will be ever mindful to take corrective steps, should they be required. The transition plan aims to make the transport system as accessible as possible for people, who should travel only when necessary, while maintaining physical distancing.

We need to continue to take forward the measures that will support people to use our transport system, while managing the challenges of the virus. I encourage transport operators and the public to make use of the guidance that has been published today.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement, for which I intend to allow around 30 minutes.

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement, and I add my thanks to all the transport workers across Scotland who have kept the country moving during the crisis.

As the cabinet secretary said, the transport sector will play a crucial role in helping Scotland to

emerge from lockdown, and the transport transition plan that has been announced today is a welcome start. However, there are a number of questions about how the plan will work in practice.

First, can the cabinet secretary assure front-line transport workers that there will be adequate supplies of personal protective equipment for those who need it?

Secondly, transport operators have raised concerns that it might not be possible to maintain the required social distancing measures on rail and bus networks during rush-hour periods. Will the cabinet secretary clarify whether transport marshals or other officers will be deployed to monitor compliance with social distancing requirements, or whether travellers will be expected to self-regulate on those matters?

Finally, on the coach sector, I have sent the cabinet secretary a number of letters that have highlighted concerns that coach operators are not getting sufficient support during the crisis and that, as a result, many face going out of business, which will badly affect the tourism sector in Scotland when that market reopens. How does the cabinet secretary intend to address those serious concerns that coach operators have raised?

**Michael Matheson:** On Dean Lockhart's latter point, I am sure that he heard the response from Fergus Ewing on the coach industry, which Fergus Ewing is leading on. Fergus Ewing will no doubt keep Mr Lockhart informed and respond to his correspondence in due course.

On supply of PPE, if Dean Lockhart looks at the detail of the guidance, he will see that a very clear hierarchy of risk is set out that operators and employers have to consider as part of the risk assessments that they should be carrying out for their staff. PPE is the final point that they should arrive at in that hierarchy, because they should look to put in place mitigation measures in order to minimise the need for use of PPE. In our discussions with the transport sector, we have been given assurances that it has sufficient stocks of PPE to meet that need as and when it arises.

The guidance also emphasises the need to ensure that, as risk assessments are undertaken, there is engagement with affected employees, health and safety representatives and trade unions, for example, to ensure that the assessments are carried out in a compliant way that those groups are comfortable with. We will continue to keep that under review, as we will all the other parts of the guidance.

There is an absolutely critical point about compliance. The reality is that, with a transport system that will be constrained by physical distancing to such an extent that some modes might be able to carry at best only around a

quarter of the number of people who would normally use them, we cannot expect the system just to absorb the pressure. People need to take responsibility for their own decisions, including looking at whether they can start earlier or later to avoid peak times. Employers need to demonstrate leadership by being prepared to support staff who can work from home to be able to continue to do so. If staff have to go into work, employers need to be flexible and consider allowing staff to have flexible start and finish times and staggering the days on which staff can work from home and in their office space.

The business community, the public sector, operators and individuals all have a part to play in helping to meet the challenges that we will face with a constrained transport system. That is why it is important that there is a collective effort and that we recognise the challenges that our transport sector will face in the weeks and months ahead.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement.

Labour recognises the challenge that the Government faces in increasing public transport capacity as we ease out of lockdown while ensuring that we meet what must be our number 1 priority: the safety of passengers and our transport workers, to whom we owe a huge debt of gratitude. That is why there cannot be any ambiguity. Therefore, why does there appear to be so much ambiguity in the guidance that the cabinet secretary published today? For example, it states:

“When travelling by bus, tram or rail you should, and are expected to, wear a face covering”.

Does the cabinet secretary accept that, with the words “should” and “expected”, that cannot be enforced? Under the guidance, there is, in fact, nothing to stop anyone—not just those who cannot wear face coverings for practical reasons—getting on public transport without a face covering.

The cabinet secretary said that PPE will be a last resort. What specific new measures has he announced today to protect our key front-line transport workers? Does his position on PPE and, indeed, the transition plan have the full agreement of the trade unions?

Finally, it seems that social distancing on public transport will be largely self-policed. What future support will the Government provide to ensure that there will be sufficient capacity to allow that distancing? Will the cabinet secretary give a personal commitment that we will not witness in our cities at peak times the scenes of overcrowded and dangerous buses and trains that we saw in England?

**Michael Matheson:** I will try to deal in turn with the points that Colin Smyth has raised.

The expectation is that, if a person is travelling on public transport, they should have a face covering. However, that is not appropriate and not necessary on some modes of transport. The expectation has been set out clearly in the guidance. If someone does not have a pre-existing medical condition that suggests that they should not have a face covering, and if they are travelling on a mode of transport other than a ferry, they should have a face covering. That is a matter of courtesy not only to other travellers but to those working in the transport sector.

On PPE, the member will recognise that the hierarchy that I mentioned is not specific to the transport sector. The need to ensure that employers have mitigation measures in place to minimise the risk of the 2m rule being compromised is also required in the construction sector guidance. Where a risk is identified that that could occur, employers should look at what appropriate PPE measures should be put in place. That is exactly why the guidance sets out in detail the need for operators to apply an assessment process to identify any risk. As I mentioned to Dean Lockhart, the feedback that we have had from transport providers is that, if after conducting an assessment process they consider that PPE might be required, they have sufficient stock and supply chains in place to address that.

I am sure that the member will recognise that a system as complex as our public transport system will, by its very nature and design, inevitably have pinch points where the 2m rule will be compromised. We are responding in a proportionate and measured way to try to minimise the risks of that happening. Rather than announce on a Sunday night that things will go back to normal on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, we are giving due notice about the timescale in which we will take forward our plans to allow transport operators, employers and the public to plan. Everyone—politicians, the public, employers and leaders in our communities—has a part to play in getting across the message that, when using public transport while it is constrained, we need to avoid making unnecessary journeys and comply with the guidance that has been issued.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement, which confirms that the route map includes supporting economic recovery in the transport sector and the broader economy while ensuring safety at bus and rail stations, ferry terminals and airports.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that quarantining people who are travelling to the United Kingdom should have been introduced

months ago, rather than when the UK has one of the highest Covid-19 death rates in the world? That is absolutely a case of closing the stable door after the horse has bolted and it has inflicted further damage on our economy in sectors ranging from aviation to tourism. Given that the relatively inexpensive DnaNudge test can produce an accurate result within 75 minutes, does the minister agree that it would be better to test people who are arriving in the UK at our airports and ports rather than quarantine them?

**Michael Matheson:** The arrangements for aviation and at our airports, and the messages to the travelling public who may be coming into the country, whether it be through a domestic or an international route, are guided by the advice that is received from Health Protection Scotland.

The member will recognise that the quarantine policy is reserved to the UK Government. We remain engaged with the UK Government about quarantine and the proposals that will be introduced at airports in June. As it stands, there are still some uncertainties as to how some of those arrangements will operate, but I assure the member that we will continue to engage with the UK Government to ensure that the needs of Scotland's aviation sector are reflected in any guidance that is implemented.

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** I thank the cabinet secretary for the early sight of his statement and accompanying documents.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that a system of safer routes to school is already in existence that, of course, does not have regard for social distancing requirements. The cabinet secretary has talked about sustaining behavioural change. I welcome the new money that has been committed to encourage active travel, walking and cycling. Self-evidently, students can cycle to school only if they have a bike. What steps has the Scottish Government taken to ensure that all children have access to a bike? Will the cabinet secretary consider the Scottish Green Party's proposal to provide £100 bike grants to all children who are eligible for school uniform grants so that the welcome changes that are already under way have the widest possible benefit?

**Michael Matheson:** The member raises an important point about seeking to capture the behaviour changes that we have witnessed in recent weeks, in particular the increase in the number of people who are making use of active travel options, whether that is walking, wheeling or cycling. He will recognise the significant measures that we have put in place, including the additional funding that was announced today to support local authorities to develop and put in place pop-up infrastructure that can support physical distancing while assisting people to walk, cycle and wheel.

I am as keen as Mr Finnie is to ensure that, if the existing lockdown arrangements have a lasting legacy, it will be that people continue to make use of active travel in the months and years ahead. The member will be aware that we have a range of schemes in place to support young people at school to consider cycling, such as the Bikeability training programme. We are looking at existing schemes to see whether they can be tailored to meet the growing need that there might be to support young people to consider cycling as an option for accessing school. I assure the member that we are considering the issue that he has raised. However, at this stage, I cannot give a commitment to his specific proposal.

**Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** The cabinet secretary has referred to guidance that comments on

"an unprecedented package of support ... from both the Scottish and UK Governments"

to the transport sector. It also refers to a

"basis of further specific support"

to be

"considered in due course".

The UK Government has provided the Scottish Government with Barnett consequential of £339 million as a result of spending on transport elsewhere. Will the cabinet secretary confirm today that that £339 million will be allocated in its entirety to the transport sector in Scotland?

**Michael Matheson:** On that specific point, I can say to the member that we have moved very quickly to provide support to the transport sector in Scotland from the outset of the pandemic. In fact, we are one of the few parts—if not the only part—of the UK that has gone so far as to support the aviation sector. For example, we have given business rates relief to airports and our aviation-based industries in order to support them through what is a very difficult time economically. The member should be in no doubt about our commitment to help to support and sustain our transport sector, and that will continue to be a focus in the weeks and months ahead.

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):**

The cabinet secretary must know that people who need to travel on the train will get on it if they can. Has he therefore considered recommending a booking-only system, particularly for rail travel, to ensure that people who need to travel can do so safely, as there might only be, as he says, a safe 10 per cent capacity on the train? Otherwise, we could face some of the scenes of chaos that we have seen occur down south.

**Michael Matheson:** We are looking at a range of options to help to manage aspects of demand. Arrangements are already in place so that people

can only book train tickets for longer journeys if they do so in advance.

The challenge is short commuter journeys, for which it is much more difficult to manage the numbers. The Strathclyde electric network alone accounts for 40 per cent of our rail network commuters, and many of those individuals are going only one or two stops on rail. A booking system in that type of environment would not work, so it becomes very challenging to operate a system in that way.

The member is right that the existing assessment, which has been carried out by ScotRail, is that capacity on our rail network will be constrained to between 11 and 14 per cent, depending on the type of train that is being used on a particular route. That is why it is critically important that we do not expect to simply be able to put systems in place that allow the transport system to go back to normal. To meet the demand, businesses and individuals have to take the responsibility of changing working arrangements and encouraging changes such as working from home and flexible start and finish times, in order to avoid travel at peak times.

The public should be trying to use active travel for short distances rather than using trains or buses at peak times. We should all be looking at the role that we can play to manage demand. It is just not possible to expect us to put a simple system in place that will be able to manage the demand in the transport system while going back to normal.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Alasdair Allan is joining us remotely.

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** The travel restrictions on ferries to and from the Western Isles have played an important part in containing the spread of the virus in the islands. With the publication last week of the route map for moving out of lockdown, how will the travel restrictions to the islands fit into that route map? Can the cabinet secretary give an assurance that any discussions between Transport Scotland and ferry operators about timetables for this summer will reflect the need for any changes to be gradual and done with great care?

**Michael Matheson:** The transport transition plan sits alongside the route map, which the First Minister set out last Thursday. As we move through the phases in the route map, the transition plan will adapt to make sure that we address transport needs that might be required to meet any increase in demand. That will include ferry services to our island communities.

We are acutely aware of some of the concerns and issues that our island communities have about

any changes to the timetable arrangements. Only this morning, a discussion took place between Transport Scotland and our island authorities to explore that issue. I assure the member that, before any changes are made to the timetabling arrangements for ferry services, there will be engagement with the island authorities to look at the issues and to ensure that any changes are introduced appropriately.

Ferry capacity is likely to be significantly constrained through physical distancing. CalMac estimates that its network will be constrained to something like 17 to 18 per cent capacity because of physical distancing. That will have a significant impact on who can use our ferry services. It is part of our thinking and planning for making sure that any increase in demand for ferry services reflects the needs of our island communities. I give the member that assurance and will continue with that engagement as we move through the phases of the route map.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** The UK's best bus company, Lothian Buses, which is owned by local authorities, is under massive pressure with 90 per cent loss of revenue and hundreds of jobs on the line. The buses have seen investment to make them safer for staff and passengers and they are key to getting our economy moving again and to let people travel safely. Will the Scottish Government follow the UK Government's support for Transport for London and provide support to Lothian Buses and Edinburgh Trams now, so that when we have moved on from the lockdown, we have the public transport available for people in the Lothians and for those using park-and-ride facilities travelling from the central belt, Fife and the south of Scotland?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Excuse me, but could the members over in that corner speak a bit quieter please?

**Michael Matheson:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will not mention whom you are referring to. Mr Crawford.

I recognise the concern that Sarah Boyack has raised. We have already engaged with City of Edinburgh Council about the challenges that it faces with Lothian Buses and the tram services that it operates. The member will recognise, however, that, in ramping up bus services to meet any increase in demand, given the capacity constraints that they will be under, the majority of bus services across the country will effectively be running at a loss because they will not be able to run at the normal capacity that would allow them to meet the costs of those services.

The discussions that we are having with Lothian Buses and other public bus service operators across the country are about understanding the

potential financial impact they will face. If we are to expect those operators to increase capacity in the weeks and months ahead, it will need to be financially viable for them to do so, given the loss of revenue that they face as a result of physical distancing. That is why we are having to undertake a level of detailed work with operators such as Lothian Buses to understand that fully, and to look at what measures we can put in place to support them to ensure an increase in bus services in the weeks and months ahead.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Unless we speed up with the questions and answers, I will certainly not get everyone in.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** We have spent recent years encouraging people to use public transport, but now, in the short term, we are kind of discouraging that. How will the balance be struck so that we do not put people off public transport long term?

**Michael Matheson:** I hope that the public take reassurance from the guidance that was issued today, which is not only for operators. There are two elements to it: the operators guidance and the public guidance on making use of public transport.

We want to encourage people to consider that guidance and to make use of it if they have to use public transport. However, the reality is that it will remain constrained for a considerable period while physical distancing remains in place. That is why it is critical that we see the right type of leadership in businesses in relation to supporting their staff to continue working from home for extended periods and being flexible with work routines if staff have to come into work, in order to avoid peak-time travel.

It is also critical that the public have assurance that bus and rail operators and other public transport providers are putting in place enhanced cleaning regimes as well as management systems at particular transport hubs to support people in maintaining physical distancing, and that they put out clear messaging on how people should purchase tickets—for example using contactless payment and in advance of their journey.

Those measures, collectively, can support people who need to use public transport to be assured that we are doing everything possible to help manage physical distancing and hygiene on the public transport network. Equally, we need others to play their part; we need individual personal responsibility and we need businesses and the public sector to consider work arrangements to minimise the risk of peak demand getting to a point at which it extensively compromises physical distancing on the transport network.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** In April, the cabinet secretary announced the £10 million spaces for people fund. He said at the time that he thought that some schemes could be up and running within two weeks. Has that transpired and, if so, for which schemes? Will the cabinet secretary publish a list of the schemes that have been approved? The money for the spaces for people fund was taken from the places for everyone fund, which was for permanent schemes. Is this extra £20 million also recycled money?

**Michael Matheson:** Unfortunately, Mr Simpson is a bit behind the curve. In fact, less than a week after the fund was announced, Edinburgh had already put in place road closures in a number of routes in response to the guidance that we issued and the creation of the fund. In the past fortnight, Glasgow has, I believe, opened up the Clydeside expressway cycle route, which I think has introduced about 1.5km of cycleway.

The City of Edinburgh Council has announced today the further measures that it intends to take forward as part of the spaces for people fund. There are therefore already schemes in place, and there are plans for further schemes not only in the big cities but across areas such as Lanarkshire and the Highlands. We are seeing schemes being rolled out, and I encourage Graham Simpson to continue to engage with councils as they take that forward.

On the question of the funding being recycled, Graham Simpson is correct that the spaces for everyone funding is for permanent structures. The challenge is that, because of the lockdown arrangements and the restrictions that we have at present, local authorities are not able to develop and take forward schemes in the way that they normally would. Rather than that money remaining locked and not being used, we are freeing it up to allow it to be used for a different purpose—that is, for temporary infrastructure. Although some of that temporary infrastructure might become permanent infrastructure, it is about making sure that we free up the money so that it can be used to benefit people now, rather than it lying there and not being used in a way that could benefit people in supporting physical distancing and active travel in the weeks and ahead.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Many young people travel on contract school buses and others access public transport. Will the public transport standards—the wearing of masks and social distancing—be applied to school transport? Will local authorities be funded to negotiate the bus contracts? Will a prioritisation system be applied in public transport to get young people to school safely and not put them in a situation of being denied boarding?

If bus drivers are expected to deal with those issues and other potentially challenging situations, does the transport transition plan have the full agreement of the trade unions?

**Michael Matheson:** We have faithfully engaged with and consulted the trade unions during the shaping of the transition plan and guidance. They have given us feedback on issues that relate to the plan; some of that feedback has been incorporated into the plan and some will be reviewed. That engagement will continue.

The member will be aware that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has issued guidance to local authorities on the continuance of funding of bus contracts for education purposes until the end of the school term. We are engaging with our colleagues in education with regard to any future arrangements around that issue, because education leads on those matters. We will support our colleagues around the demands of the transition and its potential impact on transport. I expect any arrangements for school transport to reflect the need to maintain social distancing.

On the member's point about buses not allowing young people to board when they try to go to school, we need to consider how to address that issue effectively. For example, there might be a way to stagger start times for schools, which would help to reduce the risk of buses being busy at peak times. All those issues are being explored and I am discussing them with my colleague the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, to ensure that we understand the implications for transport and consider what mitigation measures could be put in place to help to manage demand.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** I thank bus drivers for taking on the unenviable task of trying to implement the major reduction in seating capacity on buses. I will see that for myself this evening when I get the number 7 bus back to Maryhill.

How will the Scottish Government support bus companies to significantly increase the frequency of buses, which will undoubtedly be required, ensure that revised timetables are displayed at every bus stop so that all passengers—not only those with smartphones—are fully informed, and ensure that bus companies identify and rectify pinch points on routes, so that some passengers do not constantly have buses run past them due to unavoidable capacity restrictions?

**Michael Matheson:** The member will be aware of my earlier response on the economic impact of capacity constraints on the bus industry, including operators such as First Glasgow. We are assessing the financial impact that any increase in service could have on operators and whether

financial support needs to be provided to sustain services, given that operators will effectively be making a loss when they run services on which capacity is so constrained. We are taking that piece of work forward.

Bus operators have been looking to increase frequency of services on routes where there has been greater demand. First Glasgow introduced double-decker buses, where they had initially been operating with a single decker, to support physical distancing, and has looked at increasing the frequency of service on particular routes, where demand has increased.

Those are issues on which the transport transition plan looks to support operators, including regional transport partnerships such as the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, to ensure that they engage with transport providers in areas such as Glasgow and look at the arrangements that they have put in place to help to meet demand. We continue to consider those issues. I assure the member that the guidance that has been published today for the public and for operators and their staff helps to give operators assurance on the approach that they should take in dealing with such issues.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** The effects of being shut off during lockdown are felt more acutely by people in Scotland's islands. Normal ferry services and tourism have all but disappeared, and incomes have been lost.

How will the cabinet secretary's transport transition plan offer hope that Scotland's islands will be protected but not shut off for business? Given that most ferry services rely on substantial public subsidy to survive, has the Government revised the budget that will be required to replace the loss of the passenger revenue on which so many services rely?

**Michael Matheson:** On Jamie Greene's latter point, we already have in place a contract variation with ferry operators that provide services to us, to recognise the financial consequences of the lockdown arrangements and to support the services to be sustainable, and we will continue to look at that.

Jamie Greene raises an important point about the need to strike a balance between opening up our island communities in a proportionate and appropriate way and not exposing them to undue risk. As I outlined earlier, as we go through the phases that are set out in the route map, our approach is to assess the potential impact on transport modes, including ferry services, and consider what arrangements we need to put in place to meet and manage any additional demand.

As I outlined, the reality is that, even when we move our ferry services back to a normal

timetable, capacity will be very significantly constrained, particularly on our largest vessels, which will have in the region of 17 to 18 per cent of their normal capacity. No matter what happens, there will be significant constraints and we need to make sure that we manage them in a way that reflects the needs of island communities and the people who live in them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can squeeze in a quick question from Joan McAlpine.

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** What advice does the cabinet secretary have for transport workers who are shielding? I have a shielding constituent who works for Stena Line, which refuses to furlough him, thereby forcing him on to statutory sick pay. When I approached the company, it said that it was short of able seamen, which suggests that it is trying to force the vulnerable man back to work. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that is unacceptable?

**Michael Matheson:** I am not aware of the individual case that Joan McAlpine refers to, although it strikes me as concerning if the individual is shielding. If Joan McAlpine wishes to provide me with further information, I will be more than happy to look into the issue for her.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes questions on the cabinet secretary's statement on Covid-19 and transport. Apologies to Rona Mackay for not being able to reach her.

## Covid-19 (Economy)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald):** The next item of business is a statement by Fiona Hyslop on Covid-19 and the economy. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:23

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop):** We know that, as well as being a public health crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic is an economic crisis. I have real sympathy for those who have had to close their businesses or who have lost their jobs, and I understand the need to carefully get our economy moving again.

Our route map sets out a phased approach to lifting lockdown measures, to give people and business time to prepare to begin the process of restarting. Today, I will provide more details on our plan for restart and our wider recovery.

Our economic response has been defined by four phases: response, reset, restart and recovery. Our initial response has been focused on protecting lives, critical services, businesses and household incomes, and our economic interventions so far have been significant.

We have set out a unique package of business support of more than £2.3 billion to reflect the specific needs of our economy. The support includes rates relief measures, hardship funds and grants for specific sectors such as small businesses, retail, hospitality and leisure, and seafood and fisheries.

Support is getting to those who need it. Under the business grants funding scheme, by 19 May—last week—local authorities had worked hard to pay out almost 65,000 grants, with more than £741 million being distributed to support Scottish businesses.

We know that recovery for some sectors, such as tourism, will be extremely challenging, and Fergus Ewing is leading Scottish Government activity to seek more financial support and to work with that sector to steer and plan for re-opening.

I announce today that we will extend eligibility for the current small business, retail, hospitality and leisure grants to businesses that occupy multiple premises with a cumulative value of more than £51,000, and to businesses that occupy premises such as shared office spaces, business incubators and shared industrial units where the landlord is the ratepayer.

We are also working with local authorities to support small businesses that are not in the rates system and were not eligible to apply to the hardship scheme solely because they did not have a business bank account. Further detail on those arrangements will be set out later this week.

Moving beyond the initial response, we have worked to reset, including working to clear the supply chain blockages that we experienced at the beginning of the crisis. That has laid the groundwork for us to restart the economy.

The sacrifices that we are all making are having an impact, but the margins for controlling the virus are tight. Our economic restart must be safe and should be built around three pillars: successful measures to suppress the virus; guidance that promotes fair and safe workplaces and sectors; and the right structures for workplace regulation.

On our measures to suppress the virus, the First Minister today announced that our test and protect approach will be rolled out across health boards. The roll-out will include the publication of guidance for those who are self-isolating and for employers.

Clear guidance and regulation are essential in providing confidence to workers, employers and customers that workplaces are safe. Guidance that was produced recently by the United Kingdom Government will be helpful, but it goes only so far, which is why we are developing sector-specific workplace guidance.

Reflecting the diverse nature of our businesses, our guidance is being developed through a number of different routes. Some industries have already published guidance, whereas that of others is still in development. Ministers across Government are working in partnership with industry, trade unions and regulators to prioritise activity based on the phasing that is set out in the route map.

We are currently working with around 14 sectors. We will publish guidance sector by sector in the coming days and weeks.

I am pleased to begin that process today with the publication of guidance on manufacturing and retail. The guidance draws on the experiences of businesses that have responded magnificently so far in providing essential equipment and the services that are needed in the crisis, while maintaining safe workplaces. Both sectors have excellent examples of business, trade unions and regulators showing collective leadership to create the right environments to protect workers and customers as we learn to live and work in the new normal.

Those publications should be considered alongside guidance on education and transport—also published today—which are critical to people

being able to work. They will be followed by more sectoral guidance later this week, including for the construction sector, with which we have been working closely to agree a carefully planned approach.

On its own, guidance will not create safe working environments. We are also working closely with the key enforcement agencies—the Health and Safety Executive, local authorities and the police—to ensure that there is a joined-up approach to the enforcement and monitoring of workplace public health measures. I announce today the publication of a joint statement that sets out how those bodies will work together to ensure that workplaces operate safely and in compliance with the new regulations.

As that statement sets out, it is essential that employers carry out a Covid-19 risk assessment and that, where possible, such assessments should be developed with union health and safety representatives. Working together—employers, workers, unions and the regulatory bodies—we can create safe workplaces for all.

It is also vital that there is a public health advice service for businesses. We are collaborating with Public Health Scotland to enhance its healthy working lives service, which will provide small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular, with the advice and support that they need to implement safe working arrangements.

I will continue to take the steps that are necessary to build capacity across the system, to ensure that workers and consumers have the confidence to return to safe workplaces.

As more parts of the economy restart, we will be putting our fair work principles at the heart of everything that we do, reflecting our joint statement with the Scottish Trades Union Congress, and we will review those principles throughout the recovery phases to ensure they respond and adapt accordingly. I want to continue to work with employers to ensure that workers are treated fairly if they are shielded or managing childcare as the schools transition. It is essential that we understand the impact of the crisis on equalities groups, particularly women.

Our recovery is about looking forward and preparing our economy for a post-Covid future. Our aim is not only to get back to where we were. We will need a revolution in economic thinking that stimulates and values co-operative sharing of risk and reward—a revolutionary approach that rethinks what value is, and where old thinking of battling over wealth distribution that is never properly delivered is replaced by collective endeavour. The time of a wellbeing economy has well and truly arrived—a time in which creative

thinking about wage subsidies can be seen as a generator of innovation and change.

We must be brave and bold and rethink the world of work and how we can work productively. We must think differently about remote working—in geographic as well as workplace terms. We must look to a new future that accelerates a green recovery, and we will press the UK Government on transmission, carbon capture storage and other critical issues.

I want to explore ways to advance energy transition measures—for the north-east, in particular—with a major focus on domestic manufacture and supply chains by working to build resilience into all that we do to meet and manage domestic demand, and by putting innovation, technology and advanced manufacturing at the heart of our new futures industrial plan.

Our recovery will be an opportunity to renew our economy and build our resilience and future prosperity. We have seen an innovative and compassionate response from all parts of Scotland, and by harnessing the innovation, skills and strengths of our businesses and people we can ensure that Scotland can thrive and compete in the future, and that our recovery is inclusive.

I understand the impact of the crisis on those who have lost their jobs, and I know that the impact will be greater on those who have traditionally faced barriers in the labour market. We will provide continued support to those groups to ensure that no one is left behind.

We will support people to retrain and reskill into good, sustainable jobs as the economy begins to grow again, to make the most of the skills and expertise that we have—for example, in the oil and gas industry—and to lead the way towards clean energy and technologies such as hydrogen and carbon capture and storage.

We will support businesses to innovate and adapt their business models, embedding the use of data and new technology to meet changing demands and to access growing global markets for more sustainable goods and services.

We will continue to seek the advice of experts, including the independent advisory group on economic recovery, as we set our path to renewal, and we will engage with, learn from and collaborate with other countries, including the group of wellbeing economy Governments, with which we share values and purpose.

Setting that clear direction to where we want to get to, and working with employers, people and places, will be key to ensuring not only that we recover from the impacts of covid, but that we build back a better economy that is more resilient and able to thrive in the future.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 35 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. As always, succinct questions and answers are appreciated.

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** As the number of deaths from Covid-19—thankfully—declines, the economic challenge that we face shows no sign of abating. Indeed, many businesses and local authorities are in desperate circumstances.

I welcome the remarks in the cabinet secretary's statement regarding the extension of the criteria to cover multiple premises and those in shared spaces in which the landlord is the ratepayer. However, we saw reports yesterday that, despite the Scottish National Party promising to pass on £155 million in funding to councils, there is still no word on that actually happening. Many councils now face funding black holes of tens of millions of pounds by the end of June.

There is also a concern that the SNP is putting Scottish businesses at a disadvantage by not allowing them to reopen alongside English firms. Construction is the obvious example, with the housing minister refusing to say when the sector can get going again. Manufacturing will suffer too, potentially losing out on contracts to firms south of the border.

The SNP has a duty to provide Scottish businesses with the support that they need while they are forced to stay closed, but the latest figures show that that is not happening. There are 16,500 applications for support, and £458 million in payments is now outstanding. To make matters worse, more than two months into the crisis, there is still confusion and disparity over which businesses qualify for support. The cabinet secretary said that business grant support is getting to those who need it, yet some dentists and garages are receiving grants while others are being excluded. It is a postcode lottery.

Will the cabinet secretary give clarity and provide a level playing field for those businesses?

**Fiona Hyslop:** It would have been helpful if Maurice Golden had done his homework. The £155 million, which is for councils and is not part of the business support for the economy that we are now discussing, has already been paid. He should know that.

There is an important point about supporting businesses. The Scottish and UK Governments have moved swiftly to support businesses. Schemes have been set up in a matter of weeks, but because they happened swiftly they have also been simple. In the rest of the UK, and in

Scotland, businesses that do not have a business bank account have not received payments, because there are concerns about the possibility of fraud when payments are made into personal bank accounts. Those are challenges across the UK.

We are working hard with our local authority partners to deliver support. Mr Golden wants to have the same level playing field across all local authorities, but we also have Opposition members, including other Conservatives, saying that we must respect the autonomy and independent decision making of local authorities in a host of different areas.

We are providing guidance, and Kate Forbes, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, will provide further guidance on the announcements that I have made today, which will be very welcome. That is, in part, a response to what members have said in this chamber. We have had Clare Adamson and Linda Fabiani arguing the case for the extension of grants to shared office spaces, and Alex Cole-Hamilton and Andy Wightman made those points last week in relation to the Coronavirus (Scotland) (No 2) Bill. Angus MacDonald and Liam McArthur have made points about businesses continuing to get hardship grant support if they do not have business bank accounts, and many businesses have made those points directly to us. You cannot attack us for being unresponsive when we are looking for a better opportunity to move, tack and change and to roll out even more grants.

The UK Government is adapting its schemes. It has done that with the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme and the coronavirus job retention scheme. We are doing the same thing, because we want to help as many businesses as possible. With some good grace and focus, we can ensure that as many businesses as possible get support as we move into the future. We will use all the resources that we have to meet the specific needs of the Scottish economy. I hope that members will support not only what we are putting forward today but businesses in their own constituencies, so that they can get back to work safely.

Our phasing report has been well received. Opinion polls show that people have faith in the Scottish Government and real concerns about the leadership elsewhere. Our job is to lay out a phased route map that will lead us in the right direction. Manufacturers and companies that are not in phase 1, but which can start preparing for phase 1 when we get Thursday's hoped-for green light, want to have a lead-in time to prepare their supply chains for when they do return. Their biggest challenge is not in setting up their business when they return but in doing so

profitably. Let us get behind business, make sure that businesses can work safely and make sure that they and individuals have incomes.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. At the weekend, the cabinet secretary said that the Scottish Government's route map for business and the economy is "plain as day". Today, she has called for a "revolution in economic thinking". Perhaps she can tell us what the difference is between Boris Johnson's mantra, "If you can't work from home, go out to work" and the First Minister's statement to this Parliament, in which she said that we will

"focus first on industries in which people simply cannot work from home."—[*Official Report*, 21 May 2020; c 6.]

What is the "plain as day" and "revolutionary" difference between the First Minister's and the Prime Minister's return-to-work policies? Does she mean that all industries, factories and offices across Scotland in which people cannot work from home must reopen, or just some of them? Can the cabinet secretary, who mentioned the construction industry, tell us about the guidance that is coming out later this week? What steps are contained in it to ensure that workers in the construction industry who raise health and safety concerns when they return to work will not face the threat of blacklisting for doing so?

**Fiona Hyslop:** There are many parts to that question. It is clear that we expect home working to continue—indeed, that will continue be the case for the majority of people. We heard from the transport secretary about the capacity of public transport; there will be a demand for home working. From a safety point of view, the more that people can work from home, the safer it will be for the few people from the industries that initially have to restart work who have to use the transport system.

Ours is an integrated response; it also recognises that people will be working from home because of childcare responsibilities and for other reasons.

I emphasise that there is a clear difference between our policy and the UK Government's policy. From the start, the UK Government has said that people who cannot work from home should be working. That is not our position at all.

We have been clear in setting out what our approach will be in each of the phases. For example, in phase 2, indoor non-office workplaces such as factories should resume work once the relevant guidance has been agreed.

On manufacturing, we have worked very closely with the trade unions, which is important in giving people confidence—they can be confident that

trade unions and employers have come together in relation to the sector-by-sector guidance.

Richard Leonard asked an important question about advice and compliance, which are critical to ensuring continued safety, and the third pillar of my announcement is a joint statement by the HSE, local authorities and the police. We have to build capacity in that regard, and there have been welcome statements by trade unions in support of that element of my announcement.

The member will find that recognising people's rights is part of the guidance on construction and part of the third pillar that I have mentioned—indeed, it is the law that people can refuse to go to work if they feel that their workplace is unsafe. It is incumbent on us all to set out what the issues are, and this week we will provide guidance on construction and advice on the compliance and enforcement regime.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of her statement. I am pleased that there has been progress on meeting the needs of small independent businesses that are not ratepayers—that is, they pay rates through a landlord. However, I am a bit confused about the comments on the gathering in of expert information and advice.

The Government and the cabinet secretary mention the advisory group on economic recovery, which is leading the work on some of the important questions about how we recover, but the Government also has a separate sustainable renewal advisory group, and there appears to be no overlap in the membership of the two groups. Will the two groups be working to a shared agenda? Will they be working completely separately, in different silos, as though sustainability is separate from economic recovery? How will the Government ensure that there is coherence when there are separate advisory groups, each working to different ministers and talking about economic recovery in different terms?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member makes an important point, which I will try to address directly. The shared agenda that I have set out is clearly about sustainable economic recovery. Therefore, the focus of both the advisory group and the existing and continuing sustainability group will be their shared agenda. Both of those groups have access to ministers, and there is co-ordination between them—indeed, they correspond directly with each other. Of course, although advisory groups advise, it is ministers who make the decisions. I hope that the Parliament will also have an opportunity to debate such issues when we reach the stage of publishing our ideas.

I work extremely closely with Roseanna Cunningham, with whom I share an agenda, and with Michael Matheson, especially on infrastructure and transport issues that will form part of the sustainability agenda. I therefore assure Mr Harvie that we all intend to work towards the same agenda and that we will ensure that there is direct access both for ministers and for groups. For example, I know that the advisory group is having extensive discussion with those who are involved in the renewables sector, and especially the groups with which Roseanna Cunningham is working. She is also having discussions directly with the advisory group on economic recovery.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The Health and Safety Executive, local councils and the police have important roles in refereeing complaints and concerns about whether workplaces are safe. However, their powers on those are only those that are conferred by the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, and those on physical distancing are derived from the emergency powers. They do not have the power to close any business simply on the basis that it is non-essential. How can we avoid workplace conflict if those referees do not have powers to enforce the Scottish Government's guidance?

Will the cabinet secretary provide members with an update on her discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on implementing a universal basic income to help people who have been left out of the various financial support mechanisms introduced by the UK and Scottish Governments?

**Fiona Hyslop:** We have great interest in the idea of a universal basic income. I have not spoken directly to the chancellor about that, but I intend to do so as part of our discussions on recovery. The case for it is also being made by other ministers.

The existing regulations that Willie Rennie mentioned contain powers for the police to enforce the new guidance on physical distancing, which they are doing. If further regulations should be required, we would certainly consider developing and publishing those. However, the statement that has been made today recognises that the issues that we face can—and should—be dealt with by existing legislation, which is also the strong view of the HSE and local authorities. Therefore the approach should be one of compliance with and of policing within both the existing regulations and the physical distancing guidance.

It must be remembered that the powers of the HSE are quite extensive and applying them to the new experience that we are all having will give them more strength. That is one area of a pillar in which I have said that we will have to develop more capacity, which we will continue to do. As we

continue to live with Covid-19—unfortunately, it looks as though that will be the case—and as we roll out guidance for different sectors of the economy, more and more workplaces will have to comply with that and will want to give their customers confidence that they are doing so. That will be a critical element of the process and I am glad that Mr Rennie’s question focused on it.

**Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP):** Meeting our statutory targets to end child poverty was always going to be challenging. Now more than ever, we need to have an economy that will work for everyone. As we begin to look at life beyond lockdown and to seek a new future, how will the cabinet secretary ensure that we have a plan not just for economic recovery but for economic resilience? Such a plan might include ideas such as a job guarantee scheme to ensure that, in the future, we cannot be blown off course when it comes to ending poverty and inequality and to securing fair work.

**Fiona Hyslop:** As I referenced several times in my statement, resilience is a key aspect of how we will secure our future. Of course we need resilience in relation to global and local supply chains, but we also need resilience in our economy and our society more generally. If we still have poverty and inequality, it is not a resilient society.

One of the strong lessons of Covid is that we cannot afford a situation in which those who suffer from inequalities suffer most from the disease itself. Building that resilience is very much part of a wellbeing society; it is very much part of what we are seeking to do and will continue to do. That is an important point to raise.

I know that the member has personal experience of driving forward the move to tackle youth unemployment. We had some experience of that over 10 years ago with the financial crisis. This crisis is on a completely different scale, but if we agree collectively that we want to ensure that our young people in particular do not suffer disproportionately, we will have to look at schemes such as those that the member mentions, on job training and job subsidies for innovation and skills in particular. We have done that before to some extent. We might have to think about doing that much more widely than we have ever done before.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The cabinet secretary will be aware that, at the weekend, the hotel and travel company Specialist Leisure Group went into administration, leading to the closure of hotels across Scotland, including three in the Highlands and Islands, and causing huge anxiety for their staff. Although additional support is welcome, does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that the hospitality sector remains in great danger of collapse and can she

outline what further measures the Scottish Government will take, using its own resources, to support that sector?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member might not be aware that the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism, Fergus Ewing, addressed those points during topical questions this afternoon. I refer the member and others to Fergus Ewing’s answers.

However, the member makes an important point about the importance of tourism to Scotland; it is probably disproportionately important here compared with the rest of the UK. That is why, in our decision making, we have specifically created schemes that do not exist anywhere else in the UK. The creative, tourism and hospitality enterprises hardship fund is unique to Scotland and, as we speak, tens of millions of pounds are being paid out to different sectors—in particular to the tourism sector—through that fund and through the pivotal enterprise resilience fund. Those schemes are particular to Scotland because we know the need for them in Scotland.

There will need to be additional and continuing support for tourism and Fergus Ewing is working to identify where those resources might come from. Again, I mentioned that in my statement.

On the job retention scheme, we need to ensure that the UK Government decides to carry out sector-by-sector analysis in relation to a further extension of the October deadline specifically for the tourism, hospitality, culture and heritage sectors, as they have been impacted the most and will probably take the longest to return to being fully functional. There is also the oil and gas sector in relation to other particular areas.

The member’s points are well made; I refer him to Fergus Ewing’s earlier answers as the tourism secretary.

**Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** As the cabinet secretary knows, Aberdeen is suffering not just from the effects of Covid but from the oil price crash, not to mention the stalling of strategic projects such as Aberdeen Harbour. It has also been identified as being particularly hit by Brexit.

What support is the Scottish Government making available to the north-east of Scotland and what representations has the Scottish Government made to the UK Government on behalf of the oil and gas industry in Scotland?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The oil and gas sector is facing a specific and serious situation. We understand from the Oil & Gas UK report that the direct and indirect jobs in the UK supported by the industry could decline by 25,000 to 30,000 over the next 12 to 18 months.

We are working closely with the UK Government on this issue. In particular, Paul Wheelhouse, the Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands, has had extensive discussions with the UK Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth, Kwasi Kwarteng, and he has spoken—most recently, on 7 May—to the strategic leadership group on oil and gas and the energy transition.

We are already supporting the north-east, and will continue to support it, in a number of ways. My colleague Michael Matheson, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, has engaged with Aberdeen Harbour in particular; we need to work with it on big and important issues to ensure a confident future in that sector.

I have engaged with the minister Nadhim Zahawi at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, who is acutely aware of those issues. We want to co-ordinate the support that can be brought forward.

I have asked my officials to accelerate the work that we were already doing for the north-east—in particular, to see what step changes we can make in transition to such areas as hydrogen. I have also engaged with Aberdeen One, because its plans look as if it can move fairly quickly.

We will look at what we can bring forward, and will report to Parliament when we have further detail.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's announcement of the extension of the business grants scheme. She is right to do that. Currently, £449 million is unallocated. One in five of those applying have had their applications rejected and, with an overall fall in the number of grants being awarded, there is concern that businesses are losing out on much-needed Government support.

In that light, will the cabinet secretary reconsider the decision to limit businesses that have multiple premises to 75 per cent of grant, putting them at a competitive disadvantage compared with businesses in England, which get 100 per cent of grant? Given that £449 million is still unallocated, will she lift the cap and get desperately needed support to struggling businesses?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member may have misinterpreted the amount that is available—in terms of not having been allocated—but we are happy to engage, and I can ask my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Finance to update her separately about that. One of the reasons why there are still issues with grant applications is that, as we speak, some people are still making their applications.

We have extended the grants to those who have multiple properties. I reinforce the point that, for example, a retail chain that is currently operating at 65 per cent—it is still making money—would, under that scheme, receive even more funding, whereas other areas and other types of business would get no funding. The company to which I have just referred could also be in receipt of UK loan funding and job retention scheme money for furloughed staff.

In many ways, a significant number of companies will get a better deal in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, precisely because we have a more generous small business bonus scheme. However, if we are trying to be equitable, to make sure that we can support people, and to have specific additional funding for the tourism industry, as Donald Cameron has asked for, we must direct funds into the pivotal enterprise resilience fund and the creative, tourism and hospitality enterprise hardship fund.

The member can argue to have more funds available for those who have already received funds, or we can direct the funds that we have to those that have yet to receive anything. I think that it is important to support those companies that have yet to receive anything, rather than those that have already received funding for one property and can do so for a number, when others are suffering.

It is about fairness and equity—yes—but we have to respond to the distinct needs of Scotland, rather than copying decisions that have been made elsewhere. If we copied what happened in the rest of the UK, we would not have that funding in the resilience fund or the hardship fund.

**Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP):** I thank the cabinet secretary for ensuring that financial support was made available to a great many businesses as quickly as possible, because of Covid-19. I very much welcome the extension announcements today.

As the cabinet secretary has recognised, gaps and anomalies remain. Will she say more about businesses, such as those that are run from home, which do not qualify for assistance from any Government scheme, and about bed and breakfast operators who do not yet have a business bank account?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Those businesses have been the most challenging to support, which is why we and the UK Government used the rates system for the initial tranches, to reach tens of thousands of small businesses. Evidence from people who work from home or do not have business bank accounts is more difficult to administer centrally, which is why Kate Forbes will be working with local

authorities to establish mechanisms by which those businesses can achieve access to grants.

They will have to provide some evidence. Paying public money into personal bank accounts is very challenging, but we know that that is how some businesses, such as bed and breakfasts, operate. That is why we tried the hardship fund for those businesses that could provide evidence, but there is still the issue of the integrity of the system and, in particular, avoiding fraud, for which the best approach will involve local authorities. We learned from the experience of the newly self-employed scheme, which is unique to Scotland, that there is a way in which we can probably forge a path to ensure that the businesses that Bruce Crawford spoke about can achieve funding. Again, it is about being agile and responsive. It might not be as swift as people would want it to be, but we know that bed and breakfasts will be one of the last parts of the economy to open up so, even now, grant support will help to bridge the period until they can open.

While we are on the topic of bed and breakfasts and tourism—I am not the tourism secretary but I was, for many years—I hope that the people of Scotland will get behind Scotland's tourism industry. I want them to make bookings when they can to support our local industry and visit not just Bruce Crawford's constituency but elsewhere, as part of our economic response and return.

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** The cabinet secretary mentioned how she has given specific support to a number of sectors. However, constituents who have been unsuccessful in their applications, particularly to the hospitality fund, have been given no feedback on whether their applications failed the criteria or simply required additional information. What can the cabinet secretary do to correct that and ensure that it is not repeated in the further support that has been announced today?

**Fiona Hyslop:** With regard to feedback, I am happy to share the response that we received about why, on a global scale, the relevant information has not been provided. Sometimes applicants have not provided the correct information and sometimes they do not have business bank accounts, which are a requirement of those schemes. As members have heard, we are finding another way to help to support that particular group.

Alexander Burnett's point about getting feedback is really important. The criteria for some of the funds is that applicants have had to have experienced a 50 per cent loss of income, but it is about not income replacement but hardship. The response should include indications of where people can find additional help for their businesses. An example is the business bounce

back loan, which was announced after we established the hardship and resilience fund. Many companies are looking for short-term cash flow, so the bounce back loan, which is very welcome, is another source of income.

With regard to oversubscription, it is obvious that there is a clear need but not everybody's needs can be met. The pivotal enterprise fund's criteria and the involvement of South of Scotland Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Creative Scotland and the tourism body VisitScotland have helped to identify the pivotal companies that are vital to the recovery of sectors and regions in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much. To get more questioners in, I would like succinct answers and succinct questions, please. I call Alex Rowley, to be followed by Annabelle Ewing.

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** The trade union Unite argues that the way out of the crisis is through major investment in growth by taxing more those who can afford to pay more and by unprecedented job creation schemes. Does the cabinet secretary agree? Also, although she referenced oil and gas in her statement, there was no mention of offshore renewables. Yards are lying empty in Burntisland, Methil and Stornoway. Has the Government given up on us getting jobs from the offshore wind renewables sector?

**Fiona Hyslop:** If the member rereads my statement, he will see that I was specific about the importance of renewable technologies to the green economic recovery.

I agree that additional job creation in that area will be vital. We should look to bring forward initiatives that we might have looked to pursue on a longer-term basis and consider pursuing them in the shorter term. Across the Cabinet, we are looking at what infrastructure opportunities we can bring forward. In that regard, we must make sure that we can retrain and reskill people, where that is required.

Sadly, people will lose their jobs because of the economic crisis that we are in. Part of our responsibility is to ensure that we can redeploy them. That will require the provision of Government and state support in that area.

Alex Rowley asked about offshore renewables. Do I want a functioning, competitive supply chain here in Scotland? I absolutely do. Do we have all the levers to bring that about? The answer is no. We will try to persuade the UK Government to relax some of the constraints surrounding the contracts to which Mr Rowley refers, to allow us to be in a far more competitive space and to ensure that domestic companies can win those contracts.

Resilience is a factor here. Having shorter supply chains for international activity will be imperative in the future, and that should play to Scotland's advantage in the renewables revolution.

**Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** When it comes to areas that are covered by Westminster's reserved powers, the job retention scheme is playing an important part in the response to the coronavirus pandemic by helping to mitigate unemployment and protect people's livelihoods.

With different parts of the UK at different stages of lockdown, it is vital that the scheme remains in place for as long as it is required in each of the devolved nations. Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on discussions with the UK Government to ensure that the scheme's support for Scottish workers is not cut off prematurely?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member might be aware that Kate Forbes and I wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on that specific issue. He has yet to reply, but we wrote to him immediately before the announcement that the job retention scheme would be extended from the end of June to October. That extension will support a large number of the companies that we are seeking to support, and it is welcome that the flexibility that has been called for by those companies that want to restart their businesses slowly and gradually, and to keep some staff on furlough as they do so, is to be provided. There are still challenges with that and we will continue to press the UK Government, but it has responded to our requests for an extension and for flexibility.

However, there will still be sectors that might need support beyond October. In particular, we need to see whether we can persuade the UK Government to have an extension for the tourism, hospitality, heritage and oil and gas sectors. The UK Government was responsive at the start of the job retention scheme when our medical advice was distinct and different from that for the rest of the UK for a short period of time, so there is no reason to think that it would not be flexible at the other end of the process as we come out of the scheme, but we will enter those discussions in good faith and will continue to press the case for the sectors in Scotland that we think will need support beyond October.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** There are more than 2,500 tourism businesses in Scotland that sit above the £51,000 rateable value threshold and which, to date, have received no grant support whatever. Those medium to larger businesses are the lifeblood of the industry; they are major employers, which have received zero income since lockdown started.

I welcome what the cabinet secretary had to say about extending the current grant to businesses that occupy multiple premises with a cumulative value of more than £51,000. Will that extend to those businesses with a single premises that has a rateable value of more than £51,000? If not, why not?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am neither the tourism secretary nor the finance secretary, but as the economy embraces all sectors, I will try to answer that question. I agree with the member that that would be desirable if we could do it, but we are not currently in a position to do it.

I raised the issue with the chancellor, because at the time there was a strong underutilisation of the UK Government's guarantee for the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme, although that subsequently changed with the bounce back loan scheme. Indeed, it is interesting that some banks have rapidly seen more applications for the bounce back scheme than they have had for the original scheme. I asked the chancellor whether, where there was undershooting, banks could use the resources from the UK Government to extend the grant opportunities for those with rateable values over £51,000 and provide funding for them across the UK. If that were done, we would get consequentials and we would be able to use them in that way. However, that has not been taken up as yet.

On the one hand, people want us to be the same as the UK, but on the other, they want us to do something different. We are trying to chart a course that is both fair and equitable. The issues around businesses with rateable values over £51,000 in the tourism sector are one reason why we set up the hardship fund and the pivotal resilience fund, and companies can apply to those two funds. There has been a great deal of demand, but I know that one of the companies that originally had concerns—the Selkirk Arms—has now had funding from that route.

As we speak, those funds are starting to deliver. However, that will not stop us impressing on the UK Government the need to provide more funding for businesses with rateable values over £51,000. Can we do it on a sector-by-sector basis? That is always problematic, but there may be a case for it, particularly in relation to tourism and hospitality. I will try to maximise my opportunities for resources in making those decisions, but ultimately it will be Kate Forbes and Fergus Ewing who will take that forward.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask Claire Baker to be brief. I hope that her question can be followed by a final remote contribution from Richard Lyle.

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

When the route map was published last week, we saw that the earliest mention of the cultural sector is at phase 3, when it is suggested that museums, galleries and cinemas could reopen and live events be held with restricted numbers. As the cabinet secretary knows, performances are often preceded by the need for recording studios and access to rehearsal space and the mobilisation of crews and technicians. Will there be sectoral guidance that recognises the need for a phased recovery in the cultural sector and enables such activity to take place before phase 3?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member makes an important point about the culture side of the challenges that we face. People would like to have certainty so that they can plan. We are establishing the guidance groups for the creative industries sector. Currently, there are discussions about how fragmented they might be to reflect the different nature of different parts of our culture and heritage sector, which include not just museums and galleries but, as she said, studios. We are looking to develop guidance for those areas.

On the point about trying to phase activity, the sector is a bit like the construction sector. People need to be able to plan in advance, because they cannot deliver a show or a performance from a standing start. There is essential preparation work, so lead-in time is required. In our dialogue with producers, the unions that are involved and the various sectors, we hope to be able to plan a sensible phased return for the sector.

I hear what the member says about trying to give some certainty. As of now, we have not yet had the decision to move into phase 1, so we cannot give certainty about dates. However, we know how important that certainty is, particularly for the outlying sectors that might not reopen until phase 3.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The final question is from Richard Lyle. I ask him to be brief.

**Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. Showpeople are part of Scotland's heritage and economy and they have been hit hard by the crisis. They have been unable to run any fairs since the start of the lockdown, so they have had no income. Further to the cabinet secretary's announcement, can she help showmen who are self-employed, do not have a rateable office and are unable to access any funding, and help them to get over this period? What further steps will the Scottish Government take to help showpeople? Will the cabinet secretary please look into their plight in the light of her announcement today?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I know that the member is a great champion of showpeople, who have clearly been hit hard at this time, as have others who are involved in the leisure sector.

I hope that the relaxation and the changes that we have announced today—the new scheme to enable local authorities to support those businesses that do not have rateable properties—might help the sector in which the member has a particular interest. However, I am happy to defer to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance to correspond with him to confirm whether that is the case.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes questions on the statement. I apologise to Claudia Beamish and John Mason, whom I was not able to call.

## Covid-19 (Education)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a statement by John Swinney. The cabinet secretary, who is joining us remotely, will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

16:15

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** I welcome the opportunity to update Parliament on the phased reopening of schools and early learning and childcare settings in Scotland, as set out in “Coronavirus (COVID-19): framework for decision making—Scotland’s route map through and out of the crisis”.

I start by expressing my appreciation to all those in the Scottish education system for their commitment and efforts during the pandemic. Education staff have gone to great lengths to sustain learning and teaching, and to support the wellbeing of young people and their families, and parents and carers have contributed significantly to the education of children at home since the lockdown began.

I want especially to thank the children and young people of Scotland for their resilience during these difficult days, and to assure them that we are listening carefully to their concerns and hopes about how we plan the way ahead. We are again reminded that the children and young people of Scotland are a credit to our nation.

Last week, we published the strategic framework for reopening schools and early learning and childcare settings. It was developed by the Covid-19 education recovery group, which has brought together the Scottish Government, local authority partners, trade unions, parent representatives and other stakeholders. Collaborative working has allowed all stakeholders to share their knowledge and experience, and to build the widest possible agreement as we plan the way ahead.

The framework is designed to achieve safe reopening of schools, and provides consistency and equity in a national approach for children and young people, which is underpinned by local planning and delivery. A suite of supporting guidance will also be published to cover the practical issues that local authorities and learning settings must consider when developing local arrangements. It will include implementation measures, models of curriculum and assessment, wellbeing support and delivery of early learning and childcare. It will also include specific

considerations for each sector, based on the health evidence that is relevant to each age group.

I have written to local authorities to ask them now to prepare local phasing delivery plans. There cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to implementation, given the different contexts in which individual local authorities and schools operate. Flexibility within clear and consistent national guidelines will provide an essential balance between equity and localism.

Decisions that will be made regarding the reopening of schools and ELC provision must be consistent with Scotland’s framework for decision making and the latest scientific advice. We will continue to be guided by the national improvement framework, our shared vision of excellence and equity for education in Scotland, the getting it right for every child policy and other legal requirements. I am aware that school closures are considered to have a negative effect on all aspects of the progress and development of children and young people, as well as their wellbeing, which is why we are working to enable as many children and young people as possible to return to education and care settings at the earliest date on which it is safe to do so.

Scientific evidence and advice are important parts of that decision, alongside consideration of the other harms that are caused by on-going restrictions. I am therefore publishing today a summary of the scientific evidence that has informed our discussions and decisions to date. The evidence around coronavirus in general, and that relating to children in particular, is continuing to evolve. Some aspects are not yet well understood—the science in many cases cannot provide us with definitive conclusions.

Our consideration of the scientific advice that we have received so far leads us towards taking a cautious approach. We will continue to monitor the evidence and advice and we will use them to inform decisions on further changes to restrictions. The research and evidence base is changing and growing quickly, and we will build in an appropriate mechanism and capacity to review our approach, as it evolves. That will include learning from the experience of other countries, including experience in other parts of the United Kingdom, as they begin to reopen their education settings and children’s services.

I am grateful to the Covid-19 advisory group for the work that it is doing to advise us on our strategy for reopening schools and early learning and childcare settings. The majority view of the advisory group is that it is necessary to consider actions to support physical distancing guidance in schools and in other situations in which children are indoors for extended periods of time. It follows that almost all children and young people across

Scotland will experience a blend of in-school and in-home learning from 11 August 2020. That will bring benefits, including an earlier return to school for many, and the ability of all learners to engage with weekly in-home learning tasks.

I expect that that will apply to all pupils except those who are unable to attend because they are following the latest public health guidance. We will ensure that pupils in that category are catered for so that there is no detriment to their learning experience.

Those safeguarding protocols will be kept under constant review, and the time that is spent in school will be increased further as and when it is safe to do so in working towards full-time in-school learning for all.

Education Scotland is providing nationally available learning materials to support in-home learning and to augment and support schools' own arrangements. That includes consideration of children and young people with additional support needs, and of other families who are most in need of support.

In-home learning takes many forms and is by no means all based online. I recognise that some pupils will need extra help, particularly with home access to technology. That is why the Scottish Government is working with local authorities and schools to identify families in need and is initially investing £9 million to provide 25,000 free laptops or tablets, with internet access included if it is required. That is part of the first phase of our £30 million commitment to support digital learning outside school through provision of appropriate devices.

The phased return of pupils will need consideration of the emotional, physical and mental health and wellbeing of learners. School leaders will need time to work with the school community to explain local approaches and to provide reassurance and support to learners and families.

The implementation of physical distancing will impact on the capacity for in-school learning within a specific setting. Initially, schools should assess the maximum number of pupils whom they can safely accommodate at any one time while maintaining a positive learning environment.

We want to maximise the time that children can spend with their teachers and their peers, so we are calling on local authorities to expand the size of the learning estate where possible. That could include use of community facilities or vacant office accommodation, subject to health and safety considerations and risk assessments. We are also working with the General Teaching Council for Scotland on plans to call on registered teachers who are not currently teaching or are recently

retired to consider returning to work to support children through the blended learning model.

Local authorities and schools should use those capacity assessments plus knowledge of their local circumstances to determine the optimum pattern of in-school attendance. In keeping with our belief in equity, it is right that they will also consider the needs of different groups of learners. Access to education and childcare for children of key workers will continue to be provided.

There will remain an important role for assessment, in supporting progression in learning, during the phased return to schools. The Scottish Qualifications Authority will continue to develop plans to deliver the 2021 exam diet, and it will provide further advice to ensure that arrangements are in place to capture on an on-going basis the learning outcomes of young people in the senior phase in the 2020-21 school year.

In early learning and childcare settings, and for the youngest primary school children, it would not be desirable for children's wellbeing were we to implement strict physical distancing between young children or between a child and a key worker.

Alternative age-appropriate public health measures, building on expertise that has been developed across Scotland in delivering critical childcare, will be put in place. Childminding services and outdoor nurseries will be able to reopen when we move into the first phase of our managed relaxation of lockdown restrictions. We are working with the childcare sector, the Care Inspectorate and public health advisers to prepare guidance in advance of their reopening. Other types of childcare provision will reopen over the summer. It might be that fewer children can be accommodated in each setting, so capacity will be prioritised.

The timetable for reopening services will take account of the lead-in time that is required to bring staff off furlough. The framework for ELC provision will safeguard the financial sustainability of services across all sectors. To ensure on-going provision for vulnerable children and the children of key workers, critical childcare will continue throughout June and the summer break. As recovery progresses, use of childcare hubs might reduce as more children return to their familiar settings. To prepare for August, teachers and other school staff should return to schools in June, when it is decided that it is safe to do so. Health and safety guidance, including risk assessments, must be in place prior to their return.

I am mindful of the impact of lockdown on many of our most vulnerable children. Local authorities have been asked to increase the numbers of children attending critical childcare provision, and

there will also be a focus on supporting children at key transition points, which could include some in-school experience in late June.

I look forward to working with all partners to monitor and review continually the support that is in place, and to ensure that children and young people's wellbeing and learning are prioritised in these challenging times. We have a mission to make that work, to educate Scotland's children and young people and, above all, to keep them safe. That approach, working with our teachers, school staff and local authorities, gives us a way to do that. We can safeguard our children's future and get them learning alongside their classmates again.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow approximately 30 minutes for questions.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement and add my thanks to the teachers, parents and young people who find themselves in the most difficult time of their academic lives. It is only right that schools do not open until it is safe for them to do so for both pupils and teachers, but every day out of school is another day that is lost from the full learning experience and another opportunity for the attainment gap to grow.

How set in stone is the 11 August date? If the scientific advice, or the Government's interpretation of it, changes, is that date also likely to change? Schools have remained closed for months, so if, when they reopen, they offer only part-time attendance, the fundamental question on the minds of many parents will be how they can possibly return to work with their children still at home. If our economy reopens and people are able, or find it necessary, to return to work, childcare becomes the central barrier to that.

Does the cabinet secretary have any expectations around how long that blended learning model might last—are we talking weeks, months, or all of the next academic year? Will detailed guidance be issued around changes to the restrictions that govern childminding and indoor nurseries, the majority of which are currently off-limits to most parents? Will the hubs for key workers' children remain open throughout the summer to allow those workers to continue with their vital duties? Finally, can he confirm that there are absolutely no plans to cancel next year's exam diet, as unavoidably happened this academic year?

**John Swinney:** Mr Greene has posed a range of questions and I will give some answers across them all.

My view is that the 11 August date for the start of term is set in stone; I cannot see it being any earlier than that, and it is important to provide clarity to parents on that point. Of course, there is the risk that scientific advice indicates that even 11 August is not safe for us to reopen schools, but I believe that the current direction of the scientific advice that is available to us contains a significant amount of confidence that we will be able to reopen then.

On the duration of the blended learning model, it will continue for as long as we require it to operate but not for a moment longer, because I recognise the importance of restoring full-time schooling for pupils as early as possible. My statement made reference to the fact that, as the scientific advice improves, we will be enabled to move out of the blended learning model at the earliest possible opportunity.

I recognise the challenges that all of this poses for parents. Mr Greene will note from the Government's route map that the other steps that the Government is taking, particularly in relation to employment and the return to work, are predicated on the importance of ensuring that people work from home where they are able to do so. I regularly discuss with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture—and she regularly discusses with employers' representatives—the importance of taking a pragmatic approach to the working location of individual employees in order to enable us to tackle coronavirus, which obviously has a knock-on effect on the education system, into the bargain.

Finally, Mr Greene asked about the exam diet. The exam diet for 2021 is being planned now. We are uncertain about the path of Covid over the next 12 months. The Scottish Qualifications Authority will give advice to schools on the importance of capturing evidence of the performance and achievements of young people, so that that can properly be borne in mind in any certification process in 2021.

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** I echo the cabinet secretary's recognition of the efforts of parents and carers, teachers and young people themselves during the period of school closure. Now, however, we need them to be confident that it will be as safe as possible to return to school as planned—the cabinet secretary has quite a challenge ahead of him. I will ask about creating that confidence.

The cabinet secretary has acknowledged that the scientific advice and modelling are evolving, and in some respects remain inconclusive. Will he promise to publish updated evidence as he has it in the coming weeks? Can he guarantee that all teachers in all schools will have access to an

established test and support system in June, when they are asked to return to school? Can we be assured that the Government will provide all the extra funding that is required by councils to reopen our schools safely, whatever that takes?

**John Swinney:** Earlier today, I published the latest scientific advice that we have; I hope that Mr Gray and parliamentary colleagues find that to be of assistance. I am committed to ensuring that there is openness around that information, and I will certainly publish further information as it comes to hand to ensure that we can have an effective, open and accessible debate about the scientific issues. I fundamentally agree with Mr Gray that we can reopen schools only when it is safe to do so and only when there is public confidence in the actions that are needed around reopening them.

I will be happy to engage in discussion with members of Parliament, as I am doing with members of the education recovery group, about the scientific advice that is available. If members of Parliament, having had the opportunity to reflect on the material that I have published today, have any other specific requests for information or data, or have other questions to pose, I will be happy to address those issues.

Mr Gray will be aware from the announcements that the First Minister made today that the test, trace and isolate strategy that the Government is bringing forward will be in place and operational on 1 June. That addresses the testing issues that he raised.

The Scottish Government is in regular dialogue with local authorities on issues of funding. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Kate Forbes, takes forward those discussions and is fully sighted on the issues and discussions that we have had in the education recovery group on those questions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move on to open questions. I have a lot of requests and we will also have quite a lot of remote contributions. Members should bear that in mind and try not to prolong their contributions.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement. I note his comments about the investment in digital and about vulnerable children.

The barriers facing vulnerable children and some additional support needs children when they access education are varied and complex. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that pupils are not excluded from engaging with the full curriculum during the phased reopening of schools?

**John Swinney:** One of the key priorities of the locally delivered approach that we have taken in

the national framework that I have set out to Parliament today is to ensure that the needs of individual young people in their localities can be fully and adequately met. Our local authority partners will be looking closely at how to ensure that the needs of individual young people, vulnerable young people and young people who have additional support needs can be most effectively met through the blended learning model that we are taking forward.

Given the local flexibility that is available for young people to be more deeply engaged with formal schooling, local authorities will, where possible, take those opportunities to advance that approach, which is the benefit of the local flexibility that we have put into the framework. I reassure Clare Adamson that the focus is very much on the interests of individual young people and making sure that their needs can be most effectively met by their participation in the education system.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The Scottish Government has announced that it is having to spend £9 million so that 25,000 laptops can be provided to disadvantaged children to support home learning. That is part of a total of £30 million that has been allocated to the area. Will 25,000 laptops be enough to cover all disadvantaged children, or will some miss out during phase 1 of that scheme? Will the laptops be with the children by 11 August, when schools go back? If 25,000 laptops represent £9 million of spend, what is the remainder of the £30 million earmarked for?

**John Swinney:** That is the subject of active discussion with local authorities. The 25,000 laptops have been ordered and we await their delivery so that we can make them available to the young people.

As we take that provision forward, we will be in discussion with local authorities because, fundamentally, this must be a locally driven set of decisions about who requires to be supported with technology. We will continue those discussions with local authorities, and they will heavily influence our discussions about how the further resources that have not yet been finally allocated are spent. We want to make sure that the technology is able to reach the young people who require it, and to deliver that on the ground, we need an effective partnership with local authorities.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** Many parents made sacrifices to be able to afford to send their children on school trips this term. Many low-income families will have put themselves into debt. Those trips have now been cancelled because of the Covid-19 restrictions, but some providers are trying to get schools to rebook for next year, rather than provide refunds.

Will the Scottish Government use its power and influence and work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to ensure that every family is immediately refunded the full value of what they paid? If any travel companies refuse to co-operate, will the Scottish Government and COSLA circulate a list of those companies to every school in Scotland?

**John Swinney:** I recognise the seriousness of the issue that Mr Bibby raises. I give an undertaking today that we will pursue that issue with our local authority colleagues.

I am conscious of the fact that—as Mr Bibby rightly suggested—many families make significant financial sacrifices to make sure that young people are able to participate in school trips. Making those sacrifices puts significant strain on families, and I am sure that they will be making other sacrifices during the pandemic.

I therefore give Neil Bibby the commitment that we will explore that issue with COSLA and that, if there is a need for us to publish any information about a lack of co-operation—although I hope that there is not—I will certainly give consideration to doing exactly that.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement. Given the difficulties for parents who are working if their children are at home, will this mean that the children of people who are in work are more likely to be expected to attend school than the children of parents who are not? What level of viral spread will be considered low enough to allow children to attend school as normal and to end blended education?

**John Swinney:** On Mr Gibson's first point, there has to be equity of access to education for young people. That is one of the fundamental principles of Scottish education; young people must be able to gain access to education services on an equitable basis. It is for that reason—to enable them to have that access—that we are putting in place the support that some young people might require due to a lack of digital connectivity.

In relation to the second point that Mr Gibson raised—the significance of which I recognise—we have to take great care in making judgments about the scientific advice and evidence that are available to us. All our judgments as a Government are designed to ensure that we take no actions that fuel coronavirus in our society, and that we take every action that we can to try to suppress its effects. The plans to resume education in the fashion that I have set out are consistent with those aspirations.

As we see progress being made, I hope to be in a position in which we can move away from the blended learning model and into the traditional

formal schooling model. However, that will depend on our seeing further reductions in the key indicators that the First Minister set out in her statement last Thursday. Those key indicators are to do with the reproduction number, the number of admissions to intensive care units, the number of fatalities and the number of cases that have been diagnosed. Of course, the testing strategy that the First Minister announced at lunch time today will also provide us with a significant amount of information with which to determine the progress of coronavirus, which will influence our thinking.

Finally, there is an emerging evidence base around the transmissibility of Covid-19 among young people, which will also have a bearing on our thinking.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** This coming term, from August, young people are set to spend less time in school than at any point in modern history, which the Deputy First Minister acknowledges is to their detriment. To have them sit exams at the end of that will therefore only compound the inequalities that reduced schooling brings, particularly for those who are already disadvantaged by poverty.

Why have the Government and the Scottish Qualifications Authority not considered the Educational Institute of Scotland's call for national 5 and higher exams next year to be scrapped and replaced by a system of continuous assessment that can be planned for ahead of schools reopening in August?

**John Swinney:** There is a general view within Scottish education of the importance of our having reliable and certificated qualifications for all as part of the way in which we deliver education, and the exam diet represents a significant part of that process.

However, as I acknowledged in my statement—and as I acknowledged in my answer to Jamie Greene—although the exam diet is planned for in 2021, we cannot be certain that it will be able to take its course. The SQA will therefore deliver guidance to schools on the way in which we capture evidence of the performance of young people, to make sure that it can be as influential on the certification process as it might need to be in the spring of 2021.

That guidance will be available to schools before the start of the term in August and will be a significant element in relation to the evidence that teachers can gather of young people's performance and attainment, which will be critical in assessing performance in 2021.

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I return to a point that Mr Gibson made with regard to teachers who have children who are at school. Will teachers whose children are still at school go to school full

time every week? How will they be expected to teach week in and week out, if they have childcare problems?

**John Swinney:** Local discretion and planning is the most appropriate level at which those judgments should be made.

A multiplicity of issues will affect the availability of the teaching population once schools return. Given the prevalence of Covid-19, some teachers might not be able to present for teaching purposes for health reasons. There will be other issues, such as the one that Mr Balfour raised.

In the strategic framework that the Government has put in place through its dialogue with the education recovery group, local decision making is critical in coming to judgments about many of those questions. Local authorities in schools will be best placed to undertake their workforce planning, with that degree of flexibility at their hand.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** I welcomed the offer from the Scottish Government to support blended learning by providing laptops and broadband for young people who require them, because that will be crucial.

Many young people in my constituency attend our excellent further education colleges. Student representatives from Glasgow Kelvin College told me that many FE students depend on college information technology and do not have laptops or broadband at home. Will the support that was announced also be open to those students?

**John Swinney:** That is one of the issues that we are considering in relation to the other resources that are available to us, which I talked about earlier. We will actively look at the position of further education students, to determine whether we can put in place appropriate arrangements with colleges to deliver such support where it is necessary.

It is important that all elements of the education system are able to take steps forward after this period of disruption. I am committed to ensuring that that is the case; we will work with the further education sector to enable that.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** Scotland's teachers work long hours at the best of times. How will the balance of blended learning work, given the demands of teaching children in the classroom while other children learn from home? Is that one of the reasons why the Government is looking to hire extra teachers? How many extra teachers does the cabinet secretary think might be needed, and how many might be available, according to the General Teaching Council for Scotland's list?

**John Swinney:** The judgment on the need for local teachers to supplement the existing workforce will be arrived at at local authority level. I have indicated a number of times that the framework that I have put in place provides sufficient flexibility for local authorities to make such judgments and come to decisions.

A number of teachers are registered with the GTCS but are not actively teaching. The GTCS will contact those teachers to set out the opportunities that exist for them to contribute and participate in formal education, should they wish to do so, which would assist in providing the necessary skills and capacity.

Local authorities and schools have to wrestle with the important question of how the model can most effectively be delivered at local level. Circumstances will vary significantly. The composition of the school estate in Beatrice Wishart's constituency is dramatically different from the composition of the school estate in Mr Doris's constituency. There will be great diversity in provision, and it is important that local authorities actively look at how arrangements can be put in place at local level to ensure that young people's needs are met effectively.

Education Scotland is providing additional nationally based support and materials to assist schools in ensuring that the blended learning model is maintained and supported actively at local level.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** In Edinburgh Southern, there are four schools with school rolls that are above capacity, and a further four that have rolls of more than 95 per cent. Even with blended learning, it will be extremely difficult to implement social distancing without the use of additional space, which will obviously incur costs.

What practical and financial assistance will the Scottish Government extend to local authorities with significantly high school rolls?

**John Swinney:** We have committed to discuss those issues with local authorities. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance is sighted on the discussions that it has been agreed will be taken forward, and we will look at any issues of that nature that arise.

The framework that we have put in place provides the maximum amount of flexibility to local authorities to design arrangements that meet the needs of children and young people in a diverse range of educational settings. I encourage local authorities to take forward that consideration to enable us to come to conclusions about the most appropriate way of delivering education in the different circumstances that we face.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I refer to the local phasing delivery plan. In my rural constituency, there is a key role for local bus companies in transporting pupils to school. Given that we are looking at part schooling—possibly in shifts—what discussions has the cabinet secretary had with his colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, to ensure that buses can also operate a shift service and observe social distancing, which would involve additional journeys and might need additional funding?

**John Swinney:** In one of the answers that the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity gave earlier this afternoon, he indicated that he and I are in active discussion around the whole issue of school transport and its interrelationship with some of the wider issues that Mr Matheson wrestles with in relation to support for the bus industry and how it operates around the country.

The issues with physical distancing are as relevant on school transport as they are in the school estate and will be actively discussed at local level. The issues will be challenging to resolve, particularly for rural areas such as the areas that Christine Grahame represents; indeed, the issues are very significant for the areas in Perthshire that I represent.

I assure Christine Grahame that those issues are very much at the heart of discussions. As I indicated in my statement, a number of practical elements of the arrangements will vary from area to area across the country, so we need to ensure that there is appropriate opportunity for local flexibility in deploying those elements, where that is necessary.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I remind members that my eldest daughter is a secondary school teacher.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that many teachers have raised the issue of losing contact with some of our most vulnerable pupils during this time and that they are struggling to maintain a contact protocol that protects the pupils' welfare. What measures can the Scottish Government put in place to protect our most vulnerable pupils during the crisis?

**John Swinney:** One of the steps that I have taken during the crisis is to discuss with local authorities the need to maintain contact with some of the most vulnerable young people in our society. There are two elements to that, the first being the children and young people who are in our child protection system. In the most recent data, more than 90 per cent of those young people had been contacted by local authority staff in the

previous seven days. That picture has been broadly consistent throughout the pandemic, and I pay tribute to local authorities for the effectiveness of their contact with those young people.

The other element is the work that is under way in individual schools to maintain contact with young people. I have taken part in a number of events with schools over the past few weeks—remotely, I might add—and one of the points that we have been discussing is that schools have demonstrated over the course of the pandemic that they do not have to occupy buildings to retain their communities.

When schools have not been able to use their buildings and infrastructure, they have successfully reached out to maintain the school community through the connections that exist between staff, pupils and their families. I can provide the example of a school in my constituency with which I was in touch last week through a parent council discussion. The volume and quality of teacher-pupil engagement by that school was very high, indeed. In the course of the past seven days, I have also heard of similar examples from Christine Grahame's constituency.

On a sustained basis, teachers are maintaining contact with pupils. It is harder to do so now, but, where there are good strong relationships between teachers and families, that is bearing fruit in the context of the current pandemic. Scottish education is the better for having that strength in its foundations.

**Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** I add my thanks to those of my colleagues to teachers and staff for keeping everything going at the moment.

My question is about practical subjects. When the schools return, how will equipment, kit and instruments be used in a hygienic manner? Will teachers be responsible for cleaning and sterilising everything, or will schools have to employ extra cleaners? Will additional equipment need to be purchased?

**John Swinney:** Without doubt, effective hygiene measures will need to be in place in schools when pupils return in August. Into the bargain, those measures will need to be in place before any members of staff return in June.

I issued a letter to local authorities, inviting them to develop delivery plans for the resumption of formal schooling. They will have to give consideration to the substantial issues that Gail Ross raises, which will be integral to ensuring that there is no diminution, as a consequence of the reopening of schools, of our efforts to tackle the coronavirus. The cleaning of the school estate and equipment and the maintenance of the cleaning

regime will be critical to the resumption of school education in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There are three questions left, and I am minded to take them, so we will continue for a couple of minutes past 5 o'clock.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** There was a strong emphasis in the cabinet secretary's statement on blended learning, which means home schooling. In families in which the parents work—often all day and full time in order to make ends meet—their children will be in school for part of the day and in childcare for the rest. Will there be any changes in how childcare is delivered to provide the home schooling element of that? Otherwise, it is difficult to see how that schooling will be delivered in many households. Will those parents have to pay for childcare if it is being delivered during what would have been the normal school day?

**John Swinney:** Colin Smyth raises a number of complex questions, and it is impossible to give a general answer to all of them. The approach to blended learning will require a degree of pragmatism among employers that is commensurate with the route map that the First Minister set out last Thursday, which, fundamentally, envisages that home working will continue for many people as a consequence of the pandemic.

The discussions that I have with the economy secretary and that the economy secretary has with the business community are critical to creating a shared understanding of how the blended learning model can work and how individuals can return to active employment effectively in different settings around the country.

**Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind):** During one of the cabinet secretary's recent statements, I spoke to him about the issues around transition, particularly for those children who have additional support needs and who might be transitioning from nursery to primary school—or, as is the case for my son, from primary to secondary school—and the potential for some special measures to be required. Given that we now have the August 11 start date for schools and the probability of blended learning, what further thought has he given to the impact on children with additional support needs and the special measures that might be required for them?

**John Swinney:** The route map that was published last week envisages transition support opportunities being available for pupils who are leaving primary 7 to enter secondary 1, and my statement gave express account of the importance of ensuring that we meet the needs of young people who have additional support needs. It is

crucial that, at local level, the opportunities for transition that we would envisage arising before the summer break, at the end of June, can be taken forward and that specific account is taken of the needs of young people who have additional support needs, in order to manage and support their transition into the next stage of their schooling. The framework envisages that that will happen in a sustained way to meet the needs of children and young people across the country who have diverse and different needs.

**Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary will be aware of the concerns that have been raised by teaching unions in England about the reopening of schools there this coming Monday and the risks that they fear that might involve. Can the cabinet secretary provide people in Scotland with some reassurance that he has engaged with our unions, local authorities and—crucially—parents, to ensure that their views have been heard and that health and safety are at the forefront of any decisions that have been taken, and that are to be taken, ahead of the phased reopening of schools in Scotland?

**John Swinney:** My objective throughout the whole discussion—which is a challenging one—about the resumption of formal schooling has been to work in a manner that creates maximum agreement and unity around the reopening of formal schooling in Scotland.

The education recovery group has brought together the Scottish Government with our local authority partners in joint leadership of that work. We have been working closely with the professional associations, teaching trade unions, education stakeholders and the National Parent Forum of Scotland, and the proposals that were announced on Thursday were endorsed by all the partners that are involved. Unison was also involved in those discussions, in recognition of that fact that staff in our schools are not only teachers—there are many other critical staff, whose interests are represented by that union—and we reached a point of agreement.

I very much welcome the endorsement of the approach that we are taking, which has been based on looking at the evidence and making judgments about the safety of the decisions that we are taking to ensure that we do nothing that jeopardises the safety of pupils or staff, and that we do everything to contribute, as an education community, to tackling the coronavirus.

Annabelle Ewing has my absolute assurance that that is the manner in which we have embarked on that exercise and that it is the manner in which we will take it forward in the period to come.

**Decision Time***Meeting closed at 17:04.*

17:04

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** As there are no questions to be put as a result of today's business, I close the meeting.



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

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