



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 13 May 2015

Session 4

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 13 May 2015

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Education and Lifelong Learning

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

Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions on education and lifelong learning. In order to get as many members in as possible, I would be grateful for short and succinct questions and answers to match.

#### **Gaelic-medium Education**

**1. Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making in expanding Gaelic-medium education outwith Gaelic-speaking areas. (S4O-04304)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** The Scottish Government has made good progress with Gaelic-medium education, with a rise in the number of pupils entering primary 1 from 386 in 2007 to 556 in 2014. With support from the Gaelic schools capital fund, we have witnessed the expansion of Gaelic-medium education across Scotland as new Gaelic schools and units open or expand in Aberfeldy, Bowmore, Cumbernauld, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Fort William, Glen Urquhart, Inverness, Irvine, Oban, Portree, Salen and Thurso, with further developments planned for Fort William, Glasgow, Portree, Kilmarnock and Inverness.

**Angus MacDonald:** I certainly welcome the new figures and the inclusion of Gaelic-medium provision in the new Education (Scotland) Bill. However, it has come to my notice that, despite some local authorities having produced Gaelic language plans, others, including my own, Falkirk Council, have paid only lip service to their plans, failing on many of the targets and objectives despite being happy to take the economic gains, such as hosting the Royal National Mod in 2008, which injected £1.5 million into the local economy. What can the Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig do to ensure that local authorities pay more than lip service to Gaelic, ensuring that our fragile indigenous language survives?

**Dr Allan:** The member has raised many such Gaelic issues with me in his role as convener of the cross-party group on Gaelic. It is fair to say that local authorities across Scotland have, on the whole, helped to make good progress on

delivering support for Gaelic, but we acknowledge that there is still an awful lot of work to be done by all public bodies. The national plan for Gaelic clearly demonstrates the areas that have the potential to support the language and names the public bodies that can help to deliver it.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** The minister will be aware that the council in the area that I represent is the smallest local authority in Scotland and that, like all other education departments across the country, it is under serious budget pressures at the moment. What assurances can the minister give that the changes that are being introduced will not result in resources being taken away from other vital educational provision in Orkney and similar councils?

**Dr Allan:** Gaelic-medium education will certainly not result in resources being taken away from English. The resource that is devoted nationally to the provision of education and other services in English dwarfs that provided to Gaelic by a factor that I cannot even work out. However, I am conscious of the fact that Orkney and Shetland are two of the few areas in Scotland that never had a Gaelic tradition, and I am aware of the importance of the Orcadian, Shetlandic, Scots, Norn and Norse traditions. Through such initiatives as the provision of Scots language co-ordinators in schools, one of whom Liam McArthur will know is an Orcadian, we are supporting those cultural traditions too.

#### **Liberton High School**

**2. Kenny MacAskill (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the tragic event at Liberton High School in 2014, what additional support and resources have been and will be provided to the school. (S4O-04305)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** The Scottish Government has been working closely with the City of Edinburgh Council. We are also committed to providing support of up to £1.6 million towards the cost of replacing the gymnasium where the tragic event took place.

**Kenny MacAskill:** I welcome that. All who are associated with the school are grateful for the assistance given. It has been a trying time, but great courage has been shown by all. Because of the private finance initiative and public-private partnership liabilities that were incurred by the previous Labour council, funds for development at the school through the council are limited, so any support—whether for infrastructure or for counselling—is welcome. I do not know whether any lessons have been learned regarding counselling, but perhaps the minister can confirm

that the support given, both in cash and in kind, will continue.

**Dr Allan:** I cannot comment on the Health and Safety Executive's response to the situation, because I have not received any indication of when it will be published, but I can confirm that the on-going support that there has been, in terms of both infrastructure and co-operation between the local authority and the Government, is essential for moving forward from this deeply tragic situation.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Has there been any concern over the question of school buildings being included in an Education Scotland inspection report?

**Dr Allan:** Those issues have been raised in the past. Nonetheless, the assessment of the condition of school buildings remains a matter for local authorities.

### Schools (Literacy)

**3. Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what it will do to improve literacy in schools following the recent results of the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy. (S4O-04306)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** Although the latest survey showed that Scottish pupils perform well, the results are not as good as they should be. They demonstrate the need to redouble efforts to ensure that every child can succeed in school and so gain the skills that they need for life. As a result, we are stepping up work to improve children's literacy.

Education Scotland inspections will focus on raising attainment in literacy. Each school will be expected to demonstrate a very clear strategy for raising attainment in literacy. We will work closely with partners to establish a national improvement framework to provide us with the information that we need to show that children's skills in reading, writing, listening and talking are improving. We and our partners will work with parents and carers to develop resources to support learning at home from the early years through to secondary, building on the read, write, count campaign. Round 2 of the access to education fund, which makes available £1.5 million to help reduce barriers to learning experienced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds, opened last week. In 2014, 303 schools benefited from access to education grants.

**Cameron Buchanan:** Does the Scottish Government plan to reform the testing of reading, writing and numeracy in schools?

**Angela Constance:** Some of the work that we will undertake with our partners in education is in relation to a national performance framework. Although the Government's position is not to reintroduce things such as national testing, which is onerous for teaching staff and children, we need to address the need for more intelligent use of information. We need more data about what is happening in the early years and in primary schools so that we can identify issues earlier and act on them. That is a very important aspect of the work that we will undertake with our partners as we develop the national performance framework.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** In response to the survey findings, Larry Flanagan, Educational Institute of Scotland general secretary, said:

"We increasingly see tired and hungry pupils coming to school. Austerity-led measures do have an impact on performance, just as deprivation at home impacts on pupil attainment."

Does the cabinet secretary agree with that?

**Angela Constance:** Yes, I do. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has done a detailed and compelling piece of work that looks at the link between poverty and attainment. We know that cuts of £12 billion are coming down the line from the Conservative Government and we know that austerity penalises the poor and has a disproportionate impact on women and, crucially, children. That is one reason why the Government is focusing on our endeavours within and outwith the classroom.

### Primary Schools (Literacy)

**4. Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking to improve literacy standards in primary schools. (S4O-04307)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** In February, we launched the Scottish attainment challenge, supported by a £100 million attainment Scotland fund over four years to drive forward improvements in educational outcomes in Scotland's most disadvantaged communities. The attainment fund will initially be targeted at primary schools in local authorities with the biggest concentration of households in deprived areas and will have a relentless focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

Our raising attainment for all programme, launched in June 2014, now covers 23 local authorities and 180 schools, including 155 primary schools. The programme is delivering a targeted approach to improvement in schools.

**Alex Fergusson:** The 2014 Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy, to which my colleague

Cameron Buchanan just referred, was quite clear in identifying that key literacy standards among schoolchildren have fallen. However, the standing literacy commission that was set up by the Scottish Government has claimed that those standards have improved. How does the cabinet secretary explain that apparent contradiction?

**Angela Constance:** Of course, the standing literacy commission is an independent commission that reflects a broad range of measurements across Scottish education. We know that, with regard to national qualifications, for example, we are seeing an increase in pass rates. We know that literacy is embedded in national qualifications. We know that we have halted the decline in our international standing in the programme for international student assessment—PISA—rankings.

However, let me be clear to Alex Fergusson and other members that the results of the literacy survey fall short of our aspirations for our children. Although the majority of children are doing well—we know that eight out of 10 children read well or very well—the results are simply not as good as they should be, and we will redouble our efforts to address that.

#### School Refurbishment (Edinburgh)

**5. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how much was spent refurbishing schools in Edinburgh in 2014-15. (S4O-04308)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** The Scottish Government does not hold that information. It would be for the relevant local authority, in this case the City of Edinburgh Council, to provide the member with that information.

However, through the Scotland's schools for the future programme, the Government is undertaking significant investment in Scotland's school estate. In Edinburgh, the Scottish Government will provide funding of up to £41.9 million for the replacement of James Gillespie's high school, Boroughmuir high school and St John's primary school, as well as the £1.6 million for Liberton high school that I mentioned earlier.

**Gordon MacDonald:** The Wester Hailes education centre in my constituency was built in 1978. During 2014, a phased refurbishment programme was started, including a new roof, windows and cladding and an electrical upgrade. Does the minister agree that ensuring that pupils are taught in modern, well-designed schools is important with regard to ensuring that children receive the best possible education?

**Dr Allan:** As the member would expect me to say, responsibility for those areas lies with the local authority, but the Scottish Government has shown its commitment in a big way in recent years to reducing the number of children in schools that are not in an adequate condition. The proportion of schools that were in a good or a satisfactory condition was 61 per cent in 2001. In 2014, that figure had risen to 81 per cent. The three schools that I mentioned in Edinburgh are testimony to the Scottish Government's commitment to continuing to improve the school estate.

**Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con):** What plans has the Scottish Government made to meet the demands of the growing population in Edinburgh's schools?

**Dr Allan:** Again, the member would expect me to repeat that the local authority is the statutory education authority. However, the fact that £1.8 billion has been committed throughout Scotland through the schools for the future programme is an indication of how seriously we take the importance of our young people being educated in schools that are adequate for that task.

#### Computer Science

**6. Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to promote the study of computer science in schools and other educational establishments. (S4O-04309)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** I thank the member for that question and for his recent letter on this matter.

We have invested £400,000 over two years from 2013 to 2015 in the plan C project, which provides free professional development for secondary school computing science teachers. Education Scotland provides advice, guidance and support for computing science teaching and learning in both primary and secondary schools. From 2015-16, reflecting a key priority of the report on developing Scotland's young workforce, college outcome agreements will outline the steps that colleges are taking to expand their science, technology, engineering and mathematics offer, including courses related to computer science.

In this academic year and the next, three of Scotland's universities will participate in a pilot operated by the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council to recruit additional undergraduate students to information and communications technology courses, including computing science.

**Jim Eadie:** I thank the minister for that answer. Although the Scottish Government has included computing studies as one of the priority subjects

for the postgraduate diploma in education—the teaching qualification—is the minister aware that there is real concern among the academic community, notwithstanding the commitments that he has made today, about what it sees as a decline in the status of, and the recognition that is given to, computing science, which is reflected in a falling number of computing science teachers, the closure of some computing science departments in our schools and the withdrawal of computing courses at Scottish universities that provide appropriate computing qualifications? In providing the policy direction and leadership that I know the minister and the cabinet secretary are committed to providing, will the minister meet me and other interested parties to discuss what further progress can be made?

**Dr Allan:** I am more than happy to meet the member to discuss the issues that he raises. Although it is certainly the case that between 2008 and 2014 the number of young people taking Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 5 in computing science has declined, there has been a rise at higher and at advanced higher level. The Government takes this area very seriously in ensuring that targets are set for our teacher training and initial education at universities so that teachers are there for the future for this vital area of our education system and our economy.

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** There seems to be some confusion in local authorities on the difference between computer science teachers, who cover programming and advanced skills, and computer literacy teachers, who cover word processing and administration skills. Is the minister willing to issue guidance to clarify the situation so that we can get an accurate picture of the spread of computer science teachers in Scotland and start to address the falling number of teachers, which has left schools in some areas with no computer science teacher at all?

**Dr Allan:** Education Scotland's technology review recognises a number of the member's points, not least the important distinction that he makes between computer literacy and computing science. It is important to stress again that there have been efforts in the past year to increase the number of people becoming computing science teachers. We saw an increase—I concede that it was modest—in the number of students on the computing science PGDE course, which was up from 17 to 22, and the target intake for this year is up to 37. I take seriously the point about ensuring that the supply of teachers is there for the future.

### Outdoor Education

**7. Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what public agencies are doing to promote outdoor

education for both urban and rural pupils and with what success. (S4O-04310)

**The Minister for Children and Young People (Fiona McLeod):** Outdoor learning is promoted in a number of policies—for example, within the General Teaching Council for Scotland standards for registration—while Education Scotland supports practitioners in every sector to build confidence and competence in outdoor learning. A range of public agencies, including sportsScotland and local authorities, provides and promotes outdoor education for children all over Scotland.

Since 2012-13, we have invested £1.9 million in Inspiring Scotland to deliver the go2play programme to further engage children in active and outdoor play. On Thursday 2 April, Inspiring Scotland launched our £300,000 play ranger fund. That will allow the play ranger model to roll out nationally to upscale outdoor play, activity and knowledge across Scotland.

**Rob Gibson:** I thank the minister for that answer. I had the pleasure of opening the refurbished visitor centre at Beinn Eighe national nature reserve last Saturday. Along with other places such as the RSPB visitor centre at Forsinard in my constituency, the reserve is at a considerable distance from large numbers of pupils. I asked my question about encouraging pupils to experience the outdoors because many others who are further away from such places should be able to enjoy those tremendous facilities and learn about our nature and environment.

**Fiona McLeod:** It is lovely to hear from Rob Gibson about the wonderful work that is being done by organisations in his constituency. He might be interested to learn of the findings from the University of Stirling's most recent research on outdoor education. From 2006 to 2014 there has been a 50 per cent increase in outdoor provision for primary school pupils in Scotland, and one of the advantages of that is that teachers are seeing increased engagement among pupils when they are part of outdoor education.

### Schools (Literacy and Numeracy)

**8. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the reasons for falling literacy and numeracy in schools. (S4O-04311)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** Although the most recent Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy found that most children are doing well, the results—as the Scottish Government has acknowledged—are not as good as they should be. Accordingly, we are redoubling our efforts to address that and in particular to close the attainment gap. Part of our work will



focus on gaining a better understanding of what influences attainment in literacy and numeracy and of the role that is played by disadvantage.

**Iain Gray:** I heard the cabinet secretary's response on the statistics to colleagues who asked earlier about the survey, but my question is about reasons and responsibility. We all visit schools and find them full of dedicated and passionate teachers and bright young people who are eager to learn, so the fault cannot be theirs, but it is clear that literacy and numeracy standards are in decline in Scotland, whereas they are improving in other developed countries.

The cabinet secretary's Government has been running education for eight years. Surely she must have some view as to what has gone wrong. Will she share it with us?

**Angela Constance:** The survey results indicate a number of issues. We have debated at length in the chamber the role of disadvantage and—in various forums—the challenges in closing the attainment gap, which is the Government's number 1 education priority. That is why, since the survey was carried out this time last year, the Government has undertaken an ambitious programme of reform—not least through the Scottish attainment challenge and the £100 million Scottish attainment fund—that is targeted at and focused on addressing disadvantage.

There are issues to do with transition—we need to do better in supporting children through the transition from primary to secondary. We also need to do far more to address the issues with boys in primary schools.

I say to Iain Gray that, under Labour, there was a decline in reading literacy according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's programme for international student assessment results, and Labour failed to reduce the attainment gap. However, that is in the past; some would argue that Mr Gray and his party are also in the past.

I am interested in the present and the future. Since last year, we have unveiled an ambitious programme of work, and in response to the literacy survey results we have outlined a number of ambitious measures, such as a national performance framework. We will not rest until all our children get the best start in life. Literacy and numeracy are at the core of a child's education.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Audit Scotland has confirmed that there is no consistent approach to testing or assessment from primary 1 to secondary 3 and no evaluation of the relationship between spending and raising attainment. How will the Government's ambitions and its national performance framework address those two issues?

**Angela Constance:** If Mary Scanlon had listened to my earlier response to one of her colleagues, she would be aware that I said that one of the important factors in the national performance framework is the need to have better and more comprehensive information at an earlier stage in a child's education career.

We have to use information intelligently. I do not want to overburden children or teachers, but we need better information, earlier, about what is happening in our education system. One of the reasons why the Government introduced the literacy and numeracy surveys was to get a more comprehensive picture, so that we know what is happening and can therefore act on it.

I have to say to Mrs Scanlon that, unlike the Tories, the Scottish Government will not be driven by ideology. We will do what works and we will be led and informed by the evidence, first and foremost.

**Mary Scanlon:** Poor show.

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

**Angela Constance:** We will look at the evidence about what supports children and move forward.

**Mary Scanlon:** You have had eight years in government.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Angela Constance:** I say to Mrs Scanlon that we will not introduce free schools, which are companies limited by guarantee that are exempt from the national curriculum in England and where teachers are not required to be qualified or registered. Tell me, how will that improve standards? [*Interruption.*]

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

**Angela Constance:** We are absolutely focused on improving standards. Scottish education is good and we have much to be proud of. What we will not do, Mrs Scanlon—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, will you speak through the chair, and can I hurry you along?

**Angela Constance:** Where we have shortcomings in our education system, we will not demur; we will look fairly and squarely at the strengths and weaknesses and how things have to improve. That is what we are doing. We will lead an honest debate about what is next for Scottish education.

### Colleges (Disabled Students)

**9. Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it

provides to disabled college students. (S4O-04312)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** In its guidance to colleges, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council has made it clear that improving access for disabled people is a national priority. To support that, the funding council is investing a record £100 million across the sector to ensure that colleges are resourced to meet disabled students' needs. Additionally, eligible learners who are studying higher education courses at college are entitled to financial assistance through the disabled students allowance, and those on further education courses are eligible for support through the additional support needs for learning allowance. The funding council continues to work closely with the Equality Challenge Unit, Enable Scotland, the College Development Network and other partners to improve outcomes and support for that group of learners.

**Nanette Milne:** In 2013-14, 6,270 applications were received for disabled students allowance, which was an increase of 8.6 per cent on the previous year. How many of those applications were rejected and what is the expected uptake of the allowance in future years?

**Angela Constance:** Mrs Milne asks about higher education and the disabled students allowance, which is awarded by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland. It is important to say that it is a non-income-assessed allowance. I will write to her on the specific factual points that she raises. We have had a review of DSA in Scotland, and the National Union of Students carried out a survey in July 2013 that indicated that, on the whole, the allowance is working well. I will reply to Mrs Milne directly to provide the factual information that she seeks.

### Student Support

**10. Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent improvements it has made to student support. (S4O-04313)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** This academic year, the college student support budget is at a record level of £105 million, and students can now receive bursaries of up to £93.03 per week, which is the best level anywhere in the United Kingdom. In higher education, students who are most in need are now entitled to a minimum income of £7,500, through a combination of loans and bursaries.

As Mr McMahon will be aware, unlike the UK Government, we have committed to maintaining

the education maintenance allowance scheme, and we are investing £29.6 million in that in the current financial year. In line with the First Minister's commitment to helping more young people to access and stay on in education, we are considering how we will extend the scheme.

**Michael McMahon:** Is the cabinet secretary aware of the information that was published recently in the *Financial Times* that indicates that funding for student grants in Scotland has fallen as support for loans has risen and that Scotland now has the lowest rate of grant in western Europe; that, since 2007, spending on income-related student grant in Scotland has almost halved in real terms; and that Scotland is the only part of the UK where borrowing levels are highest among students from poor backgrounds? Does the cabinet secretary agree that the research shows that the net effect of Scottish Government policies is a resource transfer from lower-income households to higher-income ones? Does she believe that the findings of the research reflect a progressive agenda?

**Angela Constance:** Mr McMahon and the Labour Party would have far more credibility on the issue if the leader of Labour had not spent all his career opposing free higher education and being a proponent of tuition fees.

For the record, it is important to recognise that there has been no reduction in bursaries and, when we compare average student loan debt in Scotland with that in the rest of the United Kingdom, the average for Scotland is £7,500, compared with £20,000 in England in particular. [*Angela Constance has corrected this contribution. See end of report.*] As for our offer to students, as I mentioned, we made a commitment to a minimum income guarantee. Our manifesto spoke of £7,000, and we have delivered a minimum income guarantee of £7,500. It is important also to recognise that there was a 23 per cent increase in the value of the average student support package for 2013-14.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** If questions and answers were shorter, we might make a bit more progress.

### Teacher Numbers

**11. Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how local authorities are using the funding that was provided to maintain teacher numbers. (S4O-04314)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** The Government is committed to raising attainment and closing the attainment gap. We have been clear that we do not believe that reducing teacher

numbers or increasing the pupil teacher ratio will achieve that.

That is why we have offered all 32 local authorities £51 million to support teacher numbers, which they have all accepted. That includes an extra £10 million over and above last year's settlement and commits local authorities to maintaining their teacher numbers and pupil teacher ratio at 2014 levels for 2015-16. Within these broad parameters, however, it is for local authorities to determine how best to distribute the funding to ensure that they are able to meet their commitment to maintain teacher numbers.

**Christian Allard:** Can the cabinet secretary reassure us that the funding that is allocated for teacher numbers will be used for that purpose? One thing that it could be used for would be to recruit teachers from far and wide. I know that some local authorities have done that. Would they be allowed to use the money for that rather than using it for something other than education?

**Angela Constance:** As the member is aware, local authorities are responsible for teacher recruitment and employment. However, it is encouraging to note that a number of local authorities are, as Mr Allard suggests, proactively exploring potential labour markets both within and outwith Scotland.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland, which is the independent regulatory body for the teaching profession, is responsible for ensuring that only teachers who meet the relevant high standards can register to teach in Scotland. However, the GTCS is currently reviewing its registration and probationary service requirements in order to build a greater degree of flexibility into them while at the same time ensuring that high standards are maintained.

#### Higher Education Institutions (Governance)

**12. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will improve the governance of higher education institutions. (S4O-04315)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** Higher education makes an important contribution to our economy and to Scottish public life, in which we are investing more than £1 billion this year and next.

The programme for government highlighted the importance of good governance in our universities and included a commitment to introduce a higher education governance bill. Consultation on such a bill ended on 30 January this year. Informed by the findings, legislation is being developed to modernise and strengthen governance, which will further embed the principles of democracy and

accountability in our higher education system. The Scottish Government intends to introduce the higher education governance bill to Parliament before the end of the current session.

**Graeme Dey:** The cabinet secretary will be aware of the University and College Union's proposals for elected chairs of governing bodies, for those bodies to include trade union and student representation and for a definition of academic freedom to be agreed.

I accept that the process that we are going through, which the cabinet secretary highlighted, means that she is constrained in giving undertakings as such, but would she agree that those proposals are worthy of serious consideration?

**Angela Constance:** Yes, I agree that those proposals are worthy of consideration.

The member is correct to highlight that there is a particular process that the Government needs to go through with the Presiding Officer. Therefore, there is not much further that I can add on the detail of the bill until it has been to the Presiding Officer and has been introduced to Parliament.

I can say, however, that the views of all stakeholders that have been shared through the consultation on the higher education governance bill were examined very carefully. Those views and ideas will influence the final form of provisions in the bill.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 13, by Mary Fee, has not been lodged. An explanation has been provided.

#### Children with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (Glasgow)

**14. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with Glasgow City Council regarding children with an autistic spectrum disorder being sent to mainstream schools. (S4O-04317)

**The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan):** The Scottish Government has not had any recent discussions with Glasgow City Council regarding children with an autistic spectrum disorder attending mainstream schools.

The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 places a duty on education authorities to provide education in a mainstream school unless specific exceptions apply. These are: if mainstream schooling would not be suitable for the child in question; if placing the child would be likely to be disruptive to the education of the other pupils; or if placing the child in question would incur unreasonable levels of public expenditure.

**John Mason:** I very much thank the minister for that response. I wonder whether he shares the concern of some of my constituents, who feel that those specific exceptions are being met, that the school is not suitable for some of the pupils and that it would be disruptive to the other pupils, yet Glasgow City Council insists on sending the pupils to a mainstream school.

**Dr Allan:** I cannot comment on the individual circumstances or school that the member alludes to. As I have mentioned, however, the 2000 act is very specific about the circumstances concerned, and it places a duty on education authorities to provide education in a mainstream setting only if that is in the best interests of the child. The three circumstances that I have set out are those that any education authority would have to have cognisance of.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** The same thing is happening in my area in West Lothian. The reality is that the situation is a direct consequence of the underfunding of local government. This is very serious.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could I hurry you along, Mr Findlay?

**Neil Findlay:** Children across Scotland are not being placed for financial reasons, I believe. The Government really has to look into that, because parents will not put up with it.

**Dr Allan:** The member may be in a better position than I am to know about the internal workings of the local authority concerned, but all that I can say is that the 2000 act—[*Interruption.*]

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

**Dr Allan:** The act is extremely specific that it is the best interests of the child that are concerned.

As far as local authority funding is concerned, as the member well knows, despite all the pressures placed on the Scottish Government from another place, this Government in Scotland continues to maintain its commitment to funding local authorities.

### Education Scotland (Meetings)

**15. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning last met Education Scotland and what was discussed. (S4O-04318)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):** I met Bill Maxwell, chief executive of Education Scotland, on Thursday 23 April at a quarter past 1. We discussed a range of topics, which included progress in the implementation of curriculum for excellence, the developing the young workforce

programme and Education Scotland's current consultation on the future development of inspection.

**Mark Griffin:** Is the cabinet secretary aware of the concerns in the teaching profession over Education Scotland's withdrawal of the national contract to supply the glow materials Twig and Tigtag—a much needed science resource—in Scottish schools? How does the cabinet secretary plan to address the concerns of more than 700 teachers, who have signed an online petition, and the impact that the move will have on science teaching in our schools?

**Angela Constance:** I agree with the member that resources for science teachers are very important. We are reviewing the position and, indeed, Dr Allan has been in discussions with representatives from Education Scotland to ensure that science teachers have resources available. We are looking at some other arrangements to ensure that some of the resources mentioned by Mr Griffin continue to be available.

## United Kingdom General Election Outcome

14:40

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is a statement by the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, on the outcome of the United Kingdom general election. The First Minister will take questions at the end of her statement, and there should therefore be no interventions or interruptions. You have about 10 minutes, First Minister.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make a statement on the outcome of the UK general election. First, let me take the opportunity to congratulate all those elected or, indeed, re-elected to serve as members of Parliament. It is the greatest honour to be elected to represent our fellow citizens in Parliament, whether here in the Scottish Parliament or in the House of Commons. It is also, of course, an enormous responsibility, and I know that all those taking up seats for the first time will be feeling a combination of pride, excitement and trepidation. I wish them all well as they get down to work on behalf of their constituents.

My good wishes also go to those who lost seats last week. My party may have won the election on Thursday, but we also know—from past experience—what it feels like to lose, so, while we may celebrate our success, we take no pleasure in the personal loss that defeated candidates will be feeling. I wish each of them, and their families, the very best of luck in whatever they choose to do in the months and years ahead.

The result last week was of truly historic proportions. The Scottish National Party now has the honour of representing 56 out of 59 seats in Scotland, in the north, south, east and west of our country. We secured 50 per cent of all votes cast and 1.4 million people in total voted SNP—the largest number of votes that any party has won in Scotland, ever. The trust that the Scottish people have placed in the SNP to represent the country's interests at Westminster is unprecedented. We will now work each and every day, with determination and humility, to repay that trust in full.

I also want to make clear that we will work just as hard to win the trust of those who did not vote for the SNP last Thursday. As Scotland's Government—and as the largest party in Holyrood and now the largest Scottish party at Westminster—we recognise the unique obligation that we have to reach out to and speak for all of

Scotland. I pledge today that we will make Scotland's voice heard. We will stand up for the progressive policies that we put right at the heart of the election campaign, but we will also seek, in everything we do, to build unity in our country.

There is one final point that I want to make today about the nature of our task at Westminster. During the election, I spoke often about my desire to build a progressive alliance at Westminster to lock the Conservatives out of office. While Scotland voted for that change, Labour failed to win sufficient support in England. I regret that, but our determination to work with others of progressive opinion across the political spectrum—in and out of Parliament—remains undiminished. We will build alliances to argue for the protection of the vulnerable against deeper welfare cuts. We will seek to defend our human rights protections, to halt further privatisation of the national health service and to safeguard the UK's place in Europe.

A clear majority of people across the UK did not vote Conservative last Thursday, and they deserve a strong voice in Parliament. I promise today that the SNP and the Scottish Government will seek to be that voice. We will be a constructive, principled, determined and effective Opposition to the majority Tory Government, and we will seek to be so on behalf of people not just in Scotland but right across the UK.

The scale of the mandate that the people of Scotland gave to the SNP last week ensures a much stronger voice for Scotland at Westminster, but it also strengthens the hand of the Scottish Government in seeking to secure the very best deal for Scotland from Westminster, which in turn strengthens our ability as a Government to deliver for Scotland.

Yesterday, I visited the emergency department of Edinburgh royal infirmary to thank our front-line NHS staff for the hard work that they are doing to improve accident and emergency waiting times and to reaffirm our commitment to support our NHS to make the further improvements that are needed. The delivery of healthcare and other public services is, of course, the responsibility of my Government and we will rightly be judged on our performance, but it stands to reason—does it not?—that we can do more to support and protect our public services if our budget is not being cut year on year by Westminster. It is for those very practical reasons that we put an end to austerity at the very heart of the election campaign, and we will now use our mandate to put it at the very heart of the Westminster agenda.

I spoke to the Prime Minister by telephone on Friday. Yesterday, I wrote to him to seek a meeting at the earliest possible opportunity, and we are looking to meet later this week. Let me be

clear that public spending and the protection of Scotland's budget will be key issues on the agenda when we meet. The issue of more powers for the Scottish Parliament must also form part of our discussions. I pay tribute again today to Lord Smith of Kelvin. The work that he and his commission did provides us with a strong starting point for the further devolution of power to this Parliament that is so necessary if we are to grow our economy faster, support more people into well-paid work and lift children out of poverty.

The Scottish Government welcomed the proposals that Lord Smith brokered, but we have also been consistent in our view that they do not go far enough. The outcome of the election makes it abundantly clear that that view is shared by a significant proportion of the Scottish electorate. If the Prime Minister and his Government mean what they say about respecting the outcome of the election in Scotland, they must now agree with us a process that looks again at the Smith commission proposals with a view to extending devolution even further, and that must be a process that is made here in Scotland and involves wider Scottish society.

As my party's manifesto made clear, we believe that the Scottish Parliament should move to full financial responsibility. However, as a matter of priority, we want to see devolution of powers over employment policy including the minimum wage, welfare, business taxes, national insurance and equality policy—the powers that we need to create jobs, grow revenues and lift people out of poverty. It is such a package of priority, job-creating, poverty-tackling powers that we will now seek to build support for and agreement on.

Let me say this sincerely. I very much hope that Scottish Labour will now become part of this growing consensus. This morning, I met the Scottish Trades Union Congress, and it agreed to join us in calling for powers over the minimum wage, trade union and employment law, health and safety law and equalities legislation and for greater responsibility for welfare to be devolved as a matter of priority to this Parliament. For Scottish Labour to want to leave those powers in the hands of a UK Labour Government was perhaps understandable, albeit that it was not a position that I agreed with, but for Labour to argue that those powers should remain in the hands of a majority Tory Government with no mandate in Scotland would be simply inexplicable to most people across our country. I genuinely hope that Labour will now think again and join us in arguing for a powerhouse Scottish Parliament that is equipped with the powers that we need to build economic prosperity and foster greater social justice.

The last issue that I want to address today is one that was—ironically—talked about much more by our opponents during the election campaign than it was by the SNP: the issue of independence. It is no secret to anyone that the SNP supports independence. We always will. However, I made it clear during the campaign that the election was not about independence. It was about making Scotland's voice heard at Westminster. I said clearly to people across our country that I would not take a vote for the SNP as an endorsement of independence or of a second referendum, and let me be absolutely clear that I stand by that.

There will be another independence referendum only if the people of Scotland vote in a future Scottish Parliament election to have one. That is democracy. Of course, it cuts both ways: I cannot impose a referendum against the will of the Scottish people, but nor can David Cameron rule out a referendum against the will of the people. It will be the people who decide.

What happens to public opinion on this question in the years ahead will depend not just on what the SNP and the Scottish Government do but on the respect that is shown to the decisions that the people of Scotland have made. How David Cameron, his Government and the Westminster system choose to respond to the message that Scotland has sent will be crucial to how we move forward.

It is worth reflecting that last week's election resulted not just in record high support for the SNP in Scotland but in record low support for the Conservatives in Scotland—it was the lowest share of the vote won by the Tories in Scotland since 1865. It seems to me that the Conservatives now have a clear choice. They can ignore the voice of the Scottish people and carry on regardless, as if nothing has happened, and let people draw their own conclusions about the ability of Westminster to respond to Scottish opinion. Alternatively, they can choose to demonstrate that Westminster does listen and is capable of serving Scotland better.

For our part, we will work in good faith to get that better deal for Scotland. We will be constructive and seek agreement with the UK Government on issues where we can find common ground, and we will always act in the best interests of all the people of Scotland.

We asked people to vote for us in this election to make Scotland's voice heard at Westminster. Last week, people placed their trust in us to make Scotland's voice heard loud and clear. We now intend, in the House of Commons and here in the Scottish Government, to get on with that job on behalf of all the people we are so honoured to serve.

**Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank the First Minister for early sight of the statement, which I will reflect on in a second.

First, I take the opportunity to congratulate the First Minister on a remarkable result for her party. Our campaign was led from the top with dignity and flair, but I am sure that she will agree that the hard work and dedication of activists and volunteers cannot go unnoticed. One sentiment that we can share across the chamber is pride in our democratic process, in which people do not just stand up for their beliefs but make the case for them—in town halls, on doorsteps, in cafes and in workplaces—and then the people decide. The people decided to send a strong team of SNP MPs to Westminster, and I wish each and every one of them well.

The First Minister referenced human rights protections. I assure her that those of us on the Labour benches will do everything that we can to oppose any attempt that the Tories make to scrap the Human Rights Act 1998. Enacted in the early days of a fresh Labour Government full of hope and aspiration for the future, the act embodies the civil and political rights that are fundamental to any liberal democracy. In my view and the view of those on the Labour benches, a threat to the Human Rights Act 1998 is a threat to those very rights and must be stopped.

This week, I have met and spoken to a number of constituents who are fearful of Tory Government plans to further attack disability benefits. From mums caring for disabled children to adults with long-term conditions, there is fear and trepidation in the air. What reassurances can the First Minister give those individuals that, although there is no question but that she will give voice to those fears, she will act here, in this Parliament as well, to protect them?

**The First Minister:** I thank Kezia Dugdale for her very gracious remarks. I agree absolutely with what she said about the efforts of party activists of all parties the length and breadth of our country. For my part, I know that the SNP victory last Thursday was down to the hard work of tens of thousands of candidates, activists, supporters and members right across our country, and I place on public record my heartfelt thanks to each and every one of them.

I welcome Kezia Dugdale's comments on opposition to repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998. It is one example of, I hope, many in which Labour and the SNP, in that progressive alliance that I spoke about, can work together against some of the wrong-headed measures that are being proposed by the Conservative Government. Any suggestion that we should move back from human rights protections is appalling and completely wrong. I say on behalf of the Scottish

Government that we will do everything in our power to ensure that vital human rights protections remain undiminished in Scotland. I welcome the Scottish Labour Party's support in that respect.

Kezia Dugdale also mentioned the threat to the support on which people with disabilities rely so heavily. Of the mainstream parties in this chamber—I will be corrected if I am wrong—we were the only party to stand firmly and say that we would oppose the £3 billion cut coming from the Conservative Government to the support of disabled people across our country. In Westminster and here in this Parliament, we will do everything that we can to oppose that. Disabled people should not pay the price of balancing the books. They deserve the support that they need to live independent lives. As well as opposing those measures using our new voice in the House of Commons, we will continue in this place to do everything that we can to mitigate the welfare cuts that we so passionately disagree with.

To return to what I said in my statement, I say in all sincerity to Kezia Dugdale that, rather than us simply standing here in this Parliament trying to mitigate measures from a Westminster Conservative Government, let us join together in saying that the welfare powers should be put in the hands of this Parliament and this Government, so that we can stop those attacks in the first place.

**Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con):** I thank the First Minister for advance notice of her statement. I congratulate the Scottish National Party on its performance at the general election. I add that congratulation to those that I have expressed to David Cameron on managing what no Prime Minister has done since 1955: increasing the number of both votes and seats while already in office. Although in Scotland we did not manage to add to our seat total, we contributed to the total of votes, with 434,000 fellow Scots voting for the Conservative Party—the most at any election since devolution.

I am, naturally, delighted that the Conservatives have been returned to Government to finish the job of an economic recovery, which, today's figures notwithstanding, has seen 175,000 more Scots in work over the past five years. Our goal is to reach full employment, so that anyone in Scotland who wants a job knows that there is one there for them.

In her statement, the First Minister revealed a shopping list of requests, including powers over business taxation and measures. What level of support from Scotland's business organisations did the Smith commission receive when it examined that very issue just a few short months ago?

**The First Minister:** It is no secret that I did not want David Cameron to continue to be Prime Minister, but he won the election and I congratulated him on that last Friday. I would hope that, notwithstanding my opposition to the Conservative Government, in the days following this statement, Ruth Davidson will strike a different tone.

I said in my statement that the Tories scored their lowest percentage share of the vote in Scotland since 1865. That is a fact. The SNP scored a record high share of the vote. Therefore, whether it is on more powers over business taxes or welfare or whether it is over continued austerity, which people in Scotland have voted against, I say directly to Ruth Davidson and her colleagues in the UK Government that it cannot be business as usual. If they simply turn their faces against what people in Scotland have indicated support for, they will be saying to them that Westminster cannot and does not listen and that it is incapable of responding.

Let us have the discussion about how we want to build on Smith. Ruth Davidson will put forward her views on business taxes; I will put forward my views on those matters and others. Let us move from this starting point: the people of Scotland must be listened to. That is the starting point that I begin with; I hope that Ruth Davidson will begin with that, too.

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** I was pleased to hear the First Minister say that SNP MPs will do everything that they can to halt the planned £3 billion cut to disability benefits. Does she agree that the best way to stop the welfare state's erosion is to devolve all powers over social security to this Parliament?

**The First Minister:** I want social security powers to be devolved to this Parliament. I have said this on the record before, so it is no secret that I think that the proposals that Lord Smith put forward and brokered do not go far enough. They would leave the vast bulk of decisions on and the budget of social security in the hands of Westminster.

In a debate between politicians, we can often sound as if we are having an esoteric, academic debate about where power lies, but the issue is real for hundreds of thousands of people across our country. For disabled people, it will make a difference to whether they get the support that they need to live independent lives.

Putting welfare powers in the Scottish Parliament's hands would not give the Parliament a magic wand. Tough decisions would still have to be taken, but we would at least know that we were taking them with our values and priorities

uppermost on our agenda. That is where decision making should lie.

I do not expect to get agreement on the matter from the Conservatives today, but I hope that in the not-too-distant future we can form an alliance with Scottish Labour and other parties in the Parliament to say that welfare powers and decisions over support for the most vulnerable in our society should be in the hands not of a majority Tory Government with one MP in Scotland but of the democratically elected Parliament and Government of Scotland.

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** I congratulate Nicola Sturgeon on her party's election victory last week. It was a hard result for us. We have lessons to learn, and we are absolutely determined to learn them.

The Parliament has a job to do every day of the week. Just this week, we have heard about police with guns on the streets of Stirling, mental health services falling short, unemployment levels being on the rise and accident and emergency waiting time targets being missed for months on end, yet the First Minister has taken up parliamentary time with a self-congratulatory Scottish National Party statement that tells us absolutely nothing new. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Willie Rennie:** SNP members do not like it.

When will the First Minister make a statement on just one of those important issues for which she has responsibility?

**The First Minister:** I will be standing in this very spot tomorrow at 12 noon for First Minister's question time to answer questions, as I do every Thursday at 12 noon. I am not sure whether Willie Rennie will get to ask a question tomorrow—the strength of his party is such that he does not get one every week, but that is hardly my fault.

It is extremely important for the Parliament to reflect on the result of the UK election and to reflect on how we can use what people in Scotland said last Thursday to influence the decisions that the Westminster Government takes. Why do I think that that is important? It is important because the decisions that the Westminster Government takes impact directly on the ability of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to serve the people of Scotland. Therefore, I make no apology for saying that I want to use the mandate that the Scottish people have given my party to say to the UK Government that austerity must stop and that this Parliament must be empowered to serve the people of our country better.

The day-to-day work of the Scottish Government never stops. Willie Rennie mentioned the accident and emergency figures. As I said



yesterday when I visited Edinburgh royal infirmary to speak at first hand to the front-line staff who deliver A and E services, there is work to do, but yesterday's figures represent the best performance since we began publishing weekly statistics. Let us all thank our national health service staff for the work that they do and be determined to support them to do even more. In my view, part of that support consists of me, as First Minister, saying loudly and clearly, "I do not want further cuts to be made to the budget of this Parliament."

**The Presiding Officer:** We have very little time for questions, so I ask for questions that are as brief as possible. I will do my best to call as many members as possible.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I congratulate the First Minister on the scale of the SNP victory last Thursday. I will ask her about national insurance. I know that she wants control over it to be devolved, so that it can be reduced to create jobs. Will she publish an assessment of the scale of job creation that is envisaged and—this is the flipside of the coin—the impact that the proposal would have on pensions, which are currently linked to national insurance? That would allow us to take a considered view of the proposal based on the fullest possible evidence.

**The First Minister:** As Jackie Baillie knows, there is no such direct link between national insurance and the payment of pensions, but I will put that to one side.

Following my meeting with the Prime Minister, I hope that the debate about what further powers should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament will start in earnest and that the proper process will be followed to allow as many voices and people in Scottish society to be involved as possible. As we go through that process, I will be happy to publish analysis, assessment and evidence that make the case that the more powers over job creation, business taxes and welfare we have in this Parliament's hands, the more successful we can be in creating jobs, growing our economy, growing revenues and lifting people out of poverty.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** With regard to building alliances, particularly on human rights, I am heartened by the commitment made by Kezia Dugdale and the tenor of her remarks. Given Theresa May's announcement about shipping desperate refugees back to the awfulness of their countries of origin, will the First Minister, in building alliances on human rights protection across the two Parliaments, also commit to building an alliance with and reaching out to the wider UK community?

**The First Minister:** I said during the election campaign that I wanted SNP voices in the House of Commons to be voices for progressive change, and the progressive change that we will argue for in Scotland is the kind of progressive change that I believe many people across the rest of the UK also want. We will continue to reach out with a hand of friendship and build alliances with people of like mind, not just in Scotland but across these islands, to make the kind of change that we want.

I have already commented on the Human Rights Act 1998, and I hope that it will be possible to build an alliance in the House of Commons as well as in wider society against the repeal of that legislation. I think that ordinary people across the country are appalled at the idea that we would row back on protecting human rights. Such protections are vital for people from all walks of life and in many everyday situations, and we should work hard to protect them. I make it very clear that the SNP will seek to work with others in all parties and in no party and to build alliances for the change that we want and in opposition to the changes coming from the Conservative Government that we do not want.

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** Had a Labour Government been elected last week, it would have abolished the bedroom tax across the UK and devolved control over housing benefit to Scotland, which I know the First Minister would have supported. Instead, the bedroom tax is likely to be increased and extended. Given that we worked together before to protect Scottish households from the impact of the bedroom tax, will the First Minister undertake to work with us again to maintain that mitigation in the face of any extension of this iniquitous measure, irrespective of any debate on where powers lie?

**The First Minister:** Yes—I will. We have mitigated the impact of the bedroom tax, and we will continue to do as much as we possibly can within the powers and resources that we have to mitigate the impact of welfare cuts on the most vulnerable in our society. I very much hope that we can unite around that.

But do you know what? As I have said in the chamber before, I did not come into politics simply to mitigate the worst impact of Tory welfare cuts. I came into politics, and I want to be and to continue to be First Minister, so that we can be the author of the changes that we want and the society that we want to live in. Let us work together to mitigate the impact of the bedroom tax, but for goodness' sake, let us also work together to get the power over the bedroom tax out of the hands of the Tories and into the hands of this Parliament.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I, too, congratulate those who were successful in the

election, and give my commiserations to those who lost their seats.

I am glad that the First Minister chose to have an early meeting with the STUC, given the very direct threat to the right to strike that is coming from the new UK Government. I find it ironic that despite the nature of its proposals on the right to strike, that Government has been formed with the direct backing of fewer than one in four of people who are eligible to vote. Does the First Minister agree that even if there were a popular mandate for such a policy, there is no justification for that direct assault on the right to strike of people in Scotland or elsewhere? If the STUC's proposals for workplace devolution come back on the agenda, will she ensure that the UK Government's proposals have no future in Scotland?

**The First Minister:** I very much agree; indeed, this morning I gave an assurance to the STUC that it would have the backing of the Scottish Government and my party in resisting any erosion of trade union rights.

I do not believe that that UK Government policy is a priority in Scotland, and I do not believe that a majority of people in Scotland want efforts to be spent on it. As First Minister, I want instead to work with the STUC to ensure that we are doing what needs to be done to increase productivity, to extend fair work, to get more people on to the living wage and to deal with exploitative zero-hours contracts. Those are the priorities that we should be focusing on, and we need to work together to meet them. I and this Government will stand against any attempt by the Conservative majority Government to crack down on trade union rights, and I hope that we in this chamber—perhaps with the exception of the Scottish Conservatives, although I live in hope—will be united in saying no to such attacks.

**Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** Does the First Minister agree that if the Prime Minister is successful in bringing forward an early European Union in/out referendum, a double majority must be required to ensure that Scotland is not taken out of the EU against its will?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I agree with that. The indications are—we will have to wait to see how solid they are—that we may see an EU in/out referendum being brought forward from 2017 to as early as next year. Let me make it very clear that the SNP opposes an in/out referendum. We think that it is, if there is to be one, absolutely unacceptable and indefensible that any constituent part of the UK could be taken out of the European Union against its will. Therefore, if an EU referendum bill is placed before the House of Commons, our MPs will table amendments to it to introduce what Chic Brodie rightly described as the double-majority rule.

In order for the UK to come out of the European Union, it is not enough simply for the UK as a whole to vote for that; each and every member of what we must remember we were told is a “family of nations” must also do so. I would hope for support for that from every quarter of the chamber.

**Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab):** I, too, congratulate those who won the right to represent Scotland in the Westminster Parliament. I also thank those who stood down for all their public service to this country.

It is clear that there will be areas in which we will continue to disagree, but the election revealed areas of agreement, including on the need to tackle food poverty in Scotland. The First Minister believes that we could do more if we had more powers in this Parliament, but does she agree that we could do more using the powers that already exist here? If so, what actions does she intend to take over the next few years?

**The First Minister:** I echo Ken Macintosh's comments about those who stood down. I have commented on those who won and those who lost, but the point was well made that there were also MPs who did not stand for re-election. We wish them well, too.

In the interests of genuinely trying to build agreement, I agree with Ken Macintosh. Notwithstanding the disagreements that we have across the chamber, I believe that the Scottish Government's record, in using every power and resource that we have to seek to mitigate the impact of the cuts that have come at us from Westminster, stands close scrutiny. Every year—the finance secretary will correct me if I get the figure wrong—we spend over £100 million mitigating the impact of welfare cuts. We will continue to do that, and we will continue to look for ways in which we can do it more and better.

As part of that, we are investing money in supporting food banks and efforts to tackle food poverty. I will always listen to anybody who comes to me with ideas about how we can do that better and more effectively, but I will also always caution that there is a limit to what we can do to mitigate UK Government welfare cuts from within the fixed budget that we have. Everybody has to understand and realise that. We will do what we can to mitigate, but I will also always continue to argue that the most effective thing that we can do is get the powers out of the hands of Westminster and into the hands of the Scottish Parliament.

**Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP):** A number of third sector organisations, including trade unions, have said that the Smith commission proposals fall far short of their aspirations for Scotland. I welcome the agreement between the Scottish Government and the STUC that was

signed today. Does the First Minister consider that today's agreement goes beyond the Smith commission proposals, which should now be seen as the starting point for more powers, as she indicated in her statement?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I agree with that. Members will recall that when the Smith commission proposals were published, the STUC—I hope that I am not putting words into its mouth—was one of the biggest critics of the proposals as they stood, and said that they do not go far enough.

We have reached an agreement with the STUC today. The Scottish Government and the STUC do not agree on absolutely everything in terms of where we should go next in devolution, but there are key areas in which we agree, and we have agreed to make those calls jointly. All those areas would take us beyond the starting point of the Smith commission proposals.

I hope that I will meet the Prime Minister later this week. There are two points that we need to establish. First, is there agreement from the UK Government to move beyond the Smith commission proposals? There has to be, but I need that confirmation from the Prime Minister. If there is that agreement—I hope that there is; I think that people in Scotland will be appalled if there is not—what process will we put in place to decide and determine the extent to which, and the areas in which, we will move beyond the Smith commission's proposals?

That process has to be robust and transparent, it has to be made in Scotland and it needs to give organisations such as the STUC and other civic society organisations the opportunity to input their views. Those are the issues that I will take up with the Prime Minister. I have no doubt— notwithstanding Willie Rennie's objections—that I will in due course report back to Parliament on progress.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** Does the First Minister agree that it would be a democratic affront if any politician who was rejected by the electorate were to return to Westminster by appointment to the House of Lords? In particular, given that the Liberals have 101 members there—more, even, than the total number of people in the United States Senate—does she agree that, now that they are down to eight MPs, it is time for some 80 or 90 of the existing lords to consider resignation?

**The First Minister:** I would go slightly further. I think that the House of Lords is a democratic outrage in and of itself. [*Applause.*] I look forward to the day—which may not come within this session of Parliament, now that the Tories are back in office—when the House of Lords is no

more, because people with no democratic mandate should not be writing the laws of our land.

To address Stewart Stevenson's point directly—yes, I do think that it would be deeply democratically wrong for MPs who were defeated in the election to find their way back to Westminster via seats in the House of Lords. My party is in a unique position in that we did not lose any seats in the election this year, so we do not have defeated MPs, and in that we do not appoint to the House of Lords anyway. However, I hope that Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats will each give a clear commitment that they will not seek to get round the democratic will of the Scottish people in that way, and that no defeated candidate from last week's election will find their way into the House of Lords.

**Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP):** When the First Minister meets the Prime Minister, will she make it clear that it is not acceptable for the UK Government to seek to repatriate powers from the European Union to the House of Commons while acting as a roadblock to the legitimate transfer of the further additional significant powers that this country was promised in the closing days of the referendum campaign—powers that the people of Scotland have now demanded loudly and clearly in the election result last week?

**The First Minister:** As I made clear in my opening statement, I will be seeking to have that conversation directly with the Prime Minister. Let us be calm and rational; we have our differences of opinion and we will not all agree on what powers should come to this Parliament, but one thing that we can say clearly is that there is now substantial opinion in Scotland that the Smith commission proposals—however well meaning and well brokered they were—do not go far enough. That is the first point that we need to establish. We need then to put the process in place to determine how and in what areas we go forward.

I will end with a simple point; it is a point that I have made several times already this week. The Conservatives, led by David Cameron, simply cannot act as if it is business as usual in Scotland. They cannot carry on as if nothing changed in Scotland last week, because everything changed in Scotland last week, and Westminster must listen.

**The Presiding Officer:** That ends the statement from the First Minister. Before we move to the next item of business, I remind members that we are probably going to have to drop at least one speaker from the next debate, because I have allowed all those who wanted to ask questions on the statement to ask them.

## Scottish Apprenticeship Week

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

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-13112, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on Scottish apprenticeship week. Members who wish to speak should press their request-to-speak button now.

I call Roseanna Cunningham to speak to and move the motion. Cabinet secretary, you have a maximum of 13 minutes.

15:19

**The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I see the look in your eye and I will try to finish my speech in a little less time than that.

Today is an opportunity to promote the forthcoming Scottish apprenticeship week and celebrate the success of Scotland's modern apprentices and everyone who is associated with the programme, which has become a key element of our approach to economic development and youth employment.

The prominence of apprenticeships across the manifestos for the recent general election illustrates cross-party understanding of their importance. They are unique in the way that they support young people into sustainable and rewarding careers and contribute to meeting our businesses' skills needs. Modern apprenticeships not only support young people but are open to people of all ages, which is right, given the diverse needs of the businesses that use them. Today I will focus on the important role that they play in supporting our ambitions for youth employment.

The overall success of Scotland's modern apprenticeship programme is undeniable and its contribution to our economy continues to evolve. This Government has grown the programme from 15,000 starts in 2007 to more than 25,000 new places each year for the past three years. The opportunities span the Scottish economy, from sectors with a long tradition of training apprentices, such as construction and engineering, to growth in newer sectors for apprenticeships, such as financial services. We are now committed to increasing the target to at least 30,000 new modern apprenticeship opportunities each year by 2020. That is a central part of our ambition to develop a world-class vocational education system that matches our world-class—and free—higher education system.

We must ensure that, like all parts of our education system, work-based learning is valued by employers and offers opportunities to all young

people, irrespective of their background. We must ensure that more employers—particularly small employers—engage with the programme, and we need to align modern apprenticeship opportunities with emerging growth sectors across our economy.

I want to say something about the upcoming week. I congratulate Skills Development Scotland on its work to deliver Scotland's modern apprenticeship programme. I also congratulate the network of delivery partners, including private training providers, local authorities, third sector providers and colleges, which work every day with thousands of apprentices and employers across the country. Scottish apprenticeship week, which SDS is co-ordinating across Scotland, will highlight the reach and impact of the programme. I will take part in a range of events, including a business conference with the Scottish Council for Development and Industry and a visit to GTG Training to meet some of the apprentices it has in training. The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment is also undertaking a number of visits. I understand that SDS has invited members to local apprenticeship week events around the country and I strongly encourage everyone to see for themselves the benefits that the programme delivers.

Over recent years, Scotland has made significant progress in addressing youth unemployment. It is important to acknowledge the crucial role played by employers, training providers, colleges and third sector organisations in supporting our young people towards and into work throughout an extremely challenging period of recession. A return to pre-recessionary levels of youth unemployment is an important milestone, but we must maintain our commitment to going further.

In partnership with local authorities, we have embarked on the implementation of an ambitious strategy to reduce youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021. That will take Scotland to a level that will match the top-performing European countries, and expanding our modern apprenticeship programme will make a key contribution to that. The strategy is as much about promoting to school pupils, and those who influence them, the fact that there are many routes into a wide variety of good jobs.

The world is changing rapidly and jobs are evolving. We need to develop the collaboration and crucial links that exist between schools, colleges and business, across children's broad general education and senior phase, in exciting new ways in order to make that vision a reality. One way in which we are doing that is through the introduction of foundation apprenticeships, which offer young people the chance of work-based

learning as part of an existing modern apprenticeship framework in the senior phase of school.

Any expansion in modern apprenticeships must be driven by employer demand. We already prioritise the funding contributions for modern apprenticeships towards key and enabling sectors of the economy, and we will continue to do that. Skills investment plans and regional skills assessments are important elements of Scotland's skills planning system. Developed in partnership with industry, they provide a detailed insight into the current and future skills needs of Scotland's economy, allowing our education and skills system to align with employer needs.

We want to persuade more employers to participate in the programme, so it is important that the quality of training that is being delivered remains at a high standard. This year, we are introducing a pathfinder project to independently quality assure the training that is delivered through the modern apprenticeship programme.

In its report, the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce—the Wood commission—highlighted key equality challenges across vocational education. I know that there are many members in the chamber who have particular concerns in that area. Those equality challenges are also evident in our labour market and, indeed, in our society, so we all must take those challenges seriously.

Through our youth employment strategy, we committed to bring forward new initiatives to encourage more people from underrepresented groups to take part in the modern apprenticeship programme. As cultural norms do not change quickly, some of that activity will need to address wider societal issues in the long term. However, we must also look to make improvement now, where we can.

To implement that commitment, we provided SDS with additional funding in 2014-15 to develop a range of equality activity, and I would like to highlight examples of some of the work that that supported.

It is important that we recognise that progress has been made on occupational segregation within the modern apprenticeship programme. In 2013-14, 41 per cent of modern apprenticeship starts were women, compared with 27 per cent in 2008-09. That is good progress but there are still significant gender imbalances that need to be addressed. We need to widen young people's perceptions from an early stage to ensure that they make more informed choices.

SDS is already working with leading gender equality organisations and local authorities to challenge and tackle gender segregation. Through

the recent SDS campaign—you work, you learn, you earn—we promote modern apprenticeships as a career option for young women, encouraging them to consider modern apprenticeship roles in sectors that are traditionally regarded as male dominated. The minister and I have met a number of those young women in areas of the labour market that would not normally be associated with women's employment. Women are beginning to move into those areas, and it is good that those role models now exist.

SDS is working with a number of wider partners, including Engender, Close the Gap, Equate, the Institute of Physics and the Construction Industry Training Board, to identify and address some of the most difficult and ingrained issues that are preventing young women from considering non-traditional areas of employment.

During 2013-14, only 0.4 per cent of all modern apprenticeship starts declared themselves as having a disability. I know that that is a matter of concern for a great number of people. That figure is based on self-declaration, with evidence of some underreporting. Nonetheless, disabled people are underrepresented within modern apprenticeships, just as they are in the workforce. We need to work on a number of fronts to change the perceptions of employers, parents and young disabled people themselves. Some of the steps that SDS is currently taking to achieve that include working with Barnardo's and Remploy on specific targeted pathway projects to help, through the employability fund, more than 100 disabled young people to enter a modern apprenticeship. That aligns with the help that is available through community jobs Scotland, which is already providing support and job training opportunities to unemployed young people aged 16 to 24, including those who face additional barriers to employment.

However, increasing the participation of disabled people in work goes beyond the modern apprenticeship programme, obviously. The Department for Work and Pensions access to work programme plays an important role in helping disabled people in Scotland to remain in work. I would be concerned if reported proposals to limit the support that is available through access to work adversely impacted disabled people in Scotland.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** What the cabinet secretary said about having to overcome societal norms is correct.

The cabinet secretary will be aware of the fairly significant discrepancy between the number of disabled people who are involved in modern apprenticeships south of the border and the number north of the border. The same issues of underdeclaration probably exist on both sides of

the border. Has the Government done any work to get a better understanding of why that discrepancy exists?

**Roseanna Cunningham:** We are looking at the issue very carefully because the difference is significant and we need to understand how it has come about. It will not have happened overnight, and there are some real issues there. One element may be that Scotland has traditionally had a jobs-led apprenticeship programme, so there may have been a bigger challenge with some employers. However, I do not want to make a gross assumption that that is the only thing that has been happening. There may be more going on.

We are building capacity across the skills and training landscape, and SDS is taking concrete steps, through a programme of continuing professional development, to ensure that its staff and training providers are better able to support disabled people into modern apprenticeships. We want to take a range of actions. SDS has set up an equalities advice line and is developing an additional support needs resource guide for training providers. It is also working with employer bodies to highlight the benefits to employers of recruiting from a more diverse population, including young disabled people, and is helping employers to access support for disabled employees.

The group of young people who are broadly classified as black and minority ethnic are less likely to participate in certain vocational pathways for a number of complex reasons—including, in some cases, the cultural attitude of their parents. Changing perceptions of the value of modern apprenticeships will play a key role in increasing the number of BME young people who consider a modern apprenticeship to be the right option for them.

SDS is currently working with a number of organisations to engage directly with BME communities to change those perceptions and to raise awareness. It is undertaking research to better understand the barriers—real and perceived—and is building an evidence base on which to base an improvement plan.

I am conscious of the time, and I want to make sure that I get this point in. We want to commit to taking real, tangible action—this follows on from what Liam McArthur said—to improve the accessibility of modern apprenticeship opportunities to all young people in our society. I can announce an allocation of £500,000 to SDS specifically to support the final development and early delivery of an equalities action plan, which will look across the various areas.

I am proud of how far we have come since 2007. I am proud of the work that we are doing and the targets that we are setting ourselves for 2020 for apprenticeships and for 2021 for reducing youth unemployment. I hope that everybody in the chamber will join me in celebrating the success of the programme and will go to one of the many Scottish apprenticeship week events that will take place next week.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament recognises the success of the modern apprenticeship (MA) programme and how it contributes to addressing youth unemployment while allowing young people to earn while they learn; encourages employers to consider workforce development and higher workforce skills that support long-term sustainable growth; supports the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce's ambitions for a world-class vocational education system; further supports the Scottish Government's ambitions for the expansion of the programme to provide 30,000 new MA starts each year by 2020, and joins the Scottish Government in celebrating this success by supporting the activities taking place next week through the fifth annual Scottish Apprenticeship Week.—  
[Roseanna Cunningham.]

15:33

**Siobhan McMahon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary and the Government for holding this debate to celebrate Scottish apprenticeship week, and I welcome the money that the cabinet secretary has just announced—although, after my remarks, she will probably understand why I perhaps do not welcome the fact that it is SDS that will deliver the plan. However, I welcome the money and any help that will address issues that Labour has raised.

The debate gives me a great opportunity to offer the Labour Party's support in working with the Scottish Government to help as many young people as possible in Scotland to access apprenticeships. The belief in our young people's potential and in their capacity to excel if we empower them to do so is undoubtedly one that is shared across the chamber and across Scotland. The Parliament works best when we come together in the chamber and work towards improving opportunities for our constituents.

My colleagues and I welcomed the Government's commitment in December 2014 to take forward the recommendations of Sir Ian Wood's commission for developing Scotland's young workforce. I hope that the Government is successful in its aim of cutting youth unemployment by 40 per cent. Apprenticeships, as highlighted by apprenticeship week, are obviously a key part of that.

Throughout our public sector, decision makers and staff on the front line make a tremendous effort to ensure that opportunities are open to as

many young people as possible. I know that several colleagues have worked in and around local government and they will not need me to remind them of some of the leading-edge schemes that our councils have come up with. The efforts of both Falkirk Council and South Lanarkshire Council to facilitate apprenticeships in their communities have merit and are worthy of recognition. However, given the time constraints, I will mention only one scheme, which is in my native North Lanarkshire.

Schools in North Lanarkshire offer their pupils real, practical opportunities. During the 2013-14 session, the in-school vocational education delivery model enabled more than 2,000 senior students to undertake vocational training courses alongside traditional subjects in 63 custom-made facilities across 24 mainstream schools and eight specialist schools. The subjects were varied, ranging from construction crafts to beauty care, and are Scottish Qualifications Authority certified.

Two North Lanarkshire schools have pioneered a programme in which young people are offered the opportunity to learn the trade of professional cookery while working with North Lanarkshire Council for a period of one year, gaining practical work experience while they undertake a vocational qualification. Our councils are on the front line in tackling youth unemployment, and I have always held the view that those who deal with such issues every day are best equipped to know how to tackle the same issues at the national level. It is important that our Government continues to empower councils to improve their offer to young people at the local level.

I know that the Government says that one of its key aims is to enshrine equalities in every aspect of its legislation. I feel—perhaps as a result of the years that I spent as a member of the Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee—that it would be remiss of me not to mention the real concerns that I have about the Government's success in meeting that aim for its apprenticeship programme.

I acknowledge the Government's efforts to offer the opportunity of an apprenticeship to all, regardless of background. I welcome the fact that the number of young women entering apprenticeships increased significantly by 2012-13, at which point there were almost four times as many female apprentices as there had been in 2008-09. However, a March 2015 Audit Scotland report indicated that the Government's flagship modern apprenticeship programme had served only to reinforce gender segregation. As I am sure many members will know, in 2012-13, 98 per cent of construction apprentices were male and 97 per cent of childcare apprentices were female.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission states:

“The uptake of Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland is typified by significant gender segregation, with ethnic minorities and disabled people also appearing to have low levels of access to all forms of apprenticeships.”

It is a depressing fact that less than 0.5 per cent of all modern apprenticeship placements are taken by someone with a declared disability.

Skills Development Scotland has been tasked with addressing the gender imbalance that exists in sectors such as construction and health and social care, yet it seems to have had little impact. SDS's own figures indicate that, as of December 2014, only 4 per cent of engineering apprentices in Scotland were women.

It seems rather optimistic to ask SDS to take the lead in tackling a societal issue such as occupational segregation and expect it to make great strides. It should be incumbent on SDS to encourage young women to seek out alternative careers, but that seems to be outwith the organisation's abilities and remit.

During my time on the Equal Opportunities Committee, gender segregation in Scotland was discussed time and time again. In compiling its “Women and Work” report, the committee heard evidence that indicated that uptake among young women at school of science, technology, engineering and maths subjects was not high. SDS itself has indicated that only 15 per cent of those doing information technology courses, for instance, were female.

If we are serious about breaking through glass ceilings, that problem must be tackled at a much earlier stage. We need to hear the experiences of successful women in those fields and listen to their views on how we can foster a new generation of young female apprentices in those areas.

**Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** As the person—I think—who trained the first female joiner in Argyll well over 20 years ago, I note, as I am sure Liam McArthur will confirm, that Orkney Islands Council now employs a female stonemason as a young apprentice. Is there an opportunity for employers to realise that there are significant benefits in introducing women into their workforce?

**Siobhan McMahon:** Yes, I totally agree, but, depressingly, the example that the member gave is just one in 20 years. I know that that was supposed to be positive, but we have to do a lot more than we are doing just now.

I do not want to have a prolonged discussion about the Government's cuts to colleges during a debate on apprenticeships, but I cannot fail to mention them and their disproportionate effect on women. There has been a drop of 41 per cent in the number of women at college in Scotland since 2007-08. How can we expect women to reach

their potential if we are pulling the ladder out from underneath them in that way?

Following the publication of the Government's response to the Wood commission, I wrote to the minister and asked her about the Government's plans to tackle occupational segregation in the workforce more broadly. I was heartened by her response, in which she outlined some of the pilots that the Government was sponsoring, and I hope that similar schemes will prove to be effective in challenging gender segregation in the workplace.

I have received correspondence from SDS about the concerns that I have raised in Parliament that the modern apprenticeship programme does not deliver—and not only for women but for protected groups in general under the Equality Act 2010. I do not doubt the sincerity of the commitment of those at SDS to protecting our vulnerable groups, but I think that the organisation could do more.

In October 2013, I asked the then minister Angela Constance how many of the people participating in the programme identified as being part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. The letter that I received from Mr Danny Logue, SDS director of operations, made it clear that the organisation does not gather that information. For a public body that is tasked with ensuring that a programme is representative to neglect gathering that most basic information is unacceptable.

Similarly, in December 2013, I asked the Government how many people in the modern apprenticeship programme had a learning difficulty. The response that I received from SDS was that, although it asks about disability, it does not differentiate between physical and mental challenges. The only question that is asked of applicants is:

“Do you have a mental or a physical impairment which has a long term and adverse effect on your ability to perform normal day to day activities?”

There is no opportunity for candidates to elaborate—a yes or no is all that is required. Given that the challenges facing those who identify as having a physical disability and those who have a complex mental health issue are so different, by any standard they should not be lumped together. No useful information can be gained from such a narrow and standardised test.

We have to look at protection for apprentices who are currently serving their time and whose employers are facing redundancies. I know that the issue has been spoken about before, but a lot more could and should be done in the area.

I recently had the pleasure of attending the young Scotland's got talent Lanarkshire event in my region. The event was a great example of third

sector and private sector groups coming together with local authorities to help young people with complex conditions achieve their potential. The event appealed to the aspirations of those who attended and encouraged employers to offer an opportunity, through a job or an apprenticeship, to motivated young people with conditions such as autism. Among the attendees, there was agreement that, if support networks are in place and opportunities are available, young Scots of various backgrounds could reach their potential. There was a sense that, if we work together, we can achieve so much more.

I believe that, across the chamber, there is much in the way of common ground and common purpose on the issue. We on the Labour benches are happy to support the Government's motion. However, more work needs to be done to increase the number of apprenticeships that are taken up by women and by LGBT and black, Asian and minority ethnic people. That is why, if we are serious, we must support Labour's amendment.

I move amendment S4M-13112.3, to insert at end:

“; further believes that the Scottish Government should use Scottish Apprenticeship Week as a platform to draw attention to the findings of the Equality and Human Rights Commission report, *Modern Apprenticeships, Equality & The Economy: Spreading the Benefits*, which raised concerns regarding low levels of disabled people in modern apprenticeships, and recognises that more work needs to be done in raising the number of apprenticeships being taken up by women and LGBT and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people”.

15:42

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

I will continue on the theme of common purpose and agreement. We, too welcome the debate, which takes place as we approach Scottish apprenticeship week and which gives us a chance to highlight the work that has been done, the opportunities that have been gained and the life chances that have been enhanced, and to look at how much more we can do. That includes ensuring that modern apprenticeships are open to all who can benefit from them. I, too, will be doing a visit next week. We support the Government motion and the Labour amendment, and I trust that our amendment will be taken positively and constructively, as it is written. The intention is to improve the accessibility of modern apprenticeships for all.

I will mention the number of male and female apprenticeships, and not just in relation to occupational segregation. At level 2, the numbers of male and female apprentices are almost equal; at level 3, there are about 50 per cent more males than females; at level 4, there are three times more males than females; and, at level 5, there



are 10 times more males than females. That needs to be looked at. The issue is not just about culture or occupational segregation; it is about the level of achievement.

I heard what the cabinet secretary said about the disabled, and I welcome the £500,000 to address equality of opportunity. In England, almost 8 per cent of apprenticeships are undertaken by people with a declared disability, whereas the figure in Scotland is less than 1 per cent—in fact, it is 0.7 per cent. I welcome the fact that that issue will be looked at. I also welcome the commitment to consider what support can be given, where appropriate, to ensure that modern apprenticeships are open to disabled people.

There can be no doubt that the abolition of employers' national insurance contributions for apprenticeships aged under 25 is a significant positive step towards incentivising employers to recruit more apprentices. I expect that members across the chamber will welcome that initiative.

At last week's meeting of the cross-party group on colleges and universities, we heard of considerable good practice, including the articulation from apprentice training and higher national certificates to second-year university. That can be achieved by colleges and universities working more closely to ensure that second-year students who come from further education and apprenticeships are at the same starting point in terms of knowledge, experience and qualifications, and means that training does not always end with an apprenticeship and can continue.

Edinburgh College's briefing paper highlights its aim to introduce apprenticeships in growing industries such as IT, energy, life sciences and finance, and in management. I welcome that, particularly given last year's Audit Scotland report, which stated that there was very little correlation between modern apprenticeships and the growth industries in Scotland. I welcome that from Edinburgh College; I also think that SDS could do more.

In its briefing, Lockheed Martin stated that there is currently a shortage of young people entering the digital technology industry. That came with a warning that Scotland could lose out on huge economic benefits to our nation if it does not have a stream of well-qualified young people going into the industry. We have to listen to employers.

I have to say that I especially like Asda's briefing, which stated that

"we hire for attitude and train for skill".

We should do more to value apprenticeships and, indeed, jobs in the retail and hospitality sectors, given the huge numbers that those sectors employ. The fact that Asda's chief executive, Andy

Clarke, began his retail career aged 17 as a supermarket trolley attendant is proof that Asda does not just train for a few months but provides a proper career path.

Much good work is being done—on foundation apprenticeships, for example—but there are also concerns. One of my concerns is that, in Scotland, 93,000 young people aged between 16 and 24 are not in education, employment or training. We need to know what is being done to target that group, whose number increased by 3,000 in 2013.

**The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing):** Will the member take a brief intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** The member is in her final minute.

**Mary Scanlon:** I am running out of time—sorry.

Another concern is that, although I welcome the Government's announcements on modern apprenticeship starts, we need to look at modern apprenticeship achievements. If we look at 2014-15, we can see that there were 19,500 modern apprenticeship starts, but 13,500 achieved a modern apprenticeship qualification. In other words, out of 19,500 MA starts, 6,000 did not achieve a qualification—the number who achieved a qualification was down by 6 per cent on the previous year. The point is we should not measure just enrolments in the programme, because success should be judged by the number who complete the programme successfully. A 28 per cent rate of non-achievement is not acceptable.

I move amendment S4M-13112.2, to insert at end:

"; urges the Scottish Government to have a renewed focus on delivering more higher level apprenticeships as promised in its response to the final report of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce in June 2014; recognises that there is a gender imbalance in the delivery of modern apprenticeships, both across the frameworks and the levels, with significantly fewer women training to levels 4 and 5 and in subjects including construction and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) industries; understands that less than 1% of apprentices in Scotland have a declared disability, compared with 7.8% in England, and considers that this disparity should be reviewed as a priority, and believes that the decision by the UK Government to abolish employers' national insurance contributions for apprentices aged under 25 from April 2016 will enable businesses to employ more apprentices".

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate with six-minute speeches. I call on Gordon MacDonald, followed by Iain Gray. We are very tight for time today.

15:48

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** The focus for too long, across not just

Scotland but also the United Kingdom, has been the view of some parents and educationists that the only path to a successful career or a good job prospect is the academic route via university.

Many job opportunities for trained craftsmen and women pay higher salaries than university graduates can expect. For instance, according to one recruitment website, bricklayers can expect to earn 50 per cent more than the average national wage.

Choosing a vocational career, and in particular deciding to be an apprentice, can bring instant benefits for many young people. They earn a salary and gain a recognised qualification while working, there is on-the-job training that provides real work experience, there is funding to help meet training costs, and for many it is a shorter route to a well-paid job than university would be.

The City of Edinburgh Council and the CITB organise construction career taster sessions to give potential candidates who are interested in construction careers the opportunity to come along and experience a real project, talk with apprentices and project managers, and experience a construction site. That is important because, as the economy improves, there is more and more demand for skilled individuals across the construction industry. Some of that demand will be met by people returning after the recession but, for workforce planning reasons, the sector needs apprentices.

It is not just in construction where there are apprenticeship opportunities. The Skills Development Scotland website highlights just some of the opportunities that are currently available in the Edinburgh area, ranging from the modern apprenticeship vacancies at Heriot-Watt University in my constituency for mechanical technicians to install, maintain and operate research equipment including instruments, electrical equipment and robotics, to landscape gardening and horticultural modern apprenticeships with a small company.

The briefing from Edinburgh College highlighted that it currently employs 148 modern apprenticeships across key sectors including engineering, hospitality, automotive, hairdressing, childcare, highways maintenance and security. The college has indicated that, next year, that number will increase, with up to a further 50 modern apprentices.

Edinburgh College works with employers and training providers to deliver apprenticeship training in additional areas including construction trades, care, business administration, accounting and sport and leisure, with more than 1,000 apprentices training there each year.

Over the past three years, the Scottish Government has delivered more than 77,000 modern apprenticeship opportunities, exceeding the set target of 25,000 each year. The Government has announced that that number will increase to 30,000 new modern apprenticeships by 2020. That is nearly double the number of modern apprenticeships that were in existence in 2007-08. In addition, the new opportunities will be focused on higher-level apprenticeships, which will equip even more of our young people with the skills that they need for the jobs of the future.

In order to attract young people to apprenticeships, we need to provide an incentive so that any decision that they make about employment is not coloured by short-term judgment—in other words, “How much am I going to get paid?” It surely cannot be right that somebody can hold down a job and be paid only £2.73 per hour. Despite the increase in the minimum wage for apprentices that was recently announced by the United Kingdom Government, apprentices are currently paid 72 per cent of the young person’s rate and 42 per cent of the adult minimum wage of £6.50. We already know that the adult minimum wage is inadequate, hence the calls for paying the living wage. How can it be acceptable to pay only £2.73 per hour to an apprentice?

The cabinet secretary has already called for the UK Government to bring payment for apprentices into line with the other bands of the national minimum wage. The apprentice rate was introduced on 1 October 2010 by the Conservative Government, reducing pay for those apprentices who previously would have been paid the higher young person’s rate. The Scottish Government has called for the devolution of the minimum wage, so that this place can set the level that helps our economy to grow.

Many companies pay higher wages to apprentices in order to retain them when they complete their training. It is in the organisation’s interests, having invested time and resources to train the apprentice, to meet their specific needs.

From my own experience, I am aware that many companies have for many decades trained apprentices and have generous pay scales in place. First-year apprentices are paid a third of the tradesman’s rate; second-year apprentices are paid a half; third-year apprentices are paid two thirds; and fourth-year apprentices are paid three quarters of a qualified tradesman’s rate. If we can set apprenticeship rates at similar levels in accordance with the best practice that already exists in many companies and organisations, young people and their parents will see the benefits of a vocational career.

Vocational education means that the young person is learning work-related practical skills and the knowledge that they need to understand how to use them. Many companies across the UK have signed up to the 5 per cent club charter, which encourages companies to employ 5 per cent of their workforce as apprentices and graduates. In national apprenticeship week next week, would it not be good for all small and medium-sized enterprises to aim for that target?

15:54

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** The story of my family and of what happened in the generation between my father and me is—I think—a pretty typical one for the time. My dad left school at 14 and did an apprenticeship at the SMT as a motor mechanic. His brothers did the same thing and had similar apprenticeships in engineering of one kind or another. Then, a generation later, I was the first one to go to university, to graduate and then to become a teacher—a professional career.

That is the story of so many families in the Scotland of that time, and yet it is not as simple as it seems. Although my dad was a motor mechanic, he spent his time with me teaching me maths for fun. My mother gave me a love of the written word and books, and my dad gave me a love of mathematics. It was that motor mechanic who sparked the interest in me that eventually led, if only fleetingly, to an ability at university to solve equations in Hilbert eigenspace.

My dad did that because he never stopped learning himself. When he was teaching me logarithms in the living room before bed, it was because he was working through those problems in the night-school classes that he was attending in order to continue to raise his levels of skill and qualification. As a result, he did not end his career as a motor mechanic but, rather, as a relatively senior civil servant and the manager of one of the biggest goods vehicle testing stations in Scotland. He ended up in a professional career by the route of an apprenticeship and I ended up in a professional career by the route of a university degree. We ended up pretty much in the same place, although the route was different.

That is not the only thing that was different, as there were other differences. One is that I threw it all up for this, which I think he never would have done. In terms of the other difference, the truth is that, although he was a motor mechanic, he could do much more than that: he could strip and rebuild a car his whole working life, but he could also rewire and replumb a house, and design, draw and make anything that we can conceive of in wood. As for me—I can just about change a plug.

My point is that, somewhere, someone in society somehow decided that I was better than him because he had been an apprentice and I had been to university. Somewhere, someone decided that my degree was better and worth more than his apprenticeship, which took him just as long to achieve as my degree did at university. That is nonsense, and it is a nonsense that has distorted the lives of too many young people in this country. It is a nonsense that does not exist in countries such as Germany, and it is a nonsense that we have to change. If apprenticeship week is about anything, let us not make it simply about celebrating apprenticeships; let us make it about beginning to rehabilitate them to rebuild the parity of esteem that they once had with academic qualifications.

Many things about the election disappointed me, but one of them was in the leaders' debate when the First Minister was asked about a budget debate when we did a deal with the Scottish National Party in order to get a budget through—it was in 2009. When the First Minister was asked about what the deal was, she said that she could not remember the detail. However, the detail was an increase in the apprenticeship programme. She never forgot her university track record but she did forget that apprenticeship agreement, and that is disappointing. The truth is that it is not just time to remember apprenticeships but time to get real about them.

The cabinet secretary said that this SNP Government inherited 15,000 modern apprenticeships and now it has 25,000, but that is not true. Over 9,000 of those 25,000 apprenticeships are level 2 apprenticeships, which existed in 2007 but were not called apprenticeships. The truth is that, in 2006-07, there were 15,869 apprenticeships starts at level 3 or above and in 2013-14 there were 15,655. We have not actually increased the programme at all and the number of apprenticeships is lower than the high point back in 2004-5, when it was over 21,000. We need to get real about those apprenticeships.

When I met the previous First Minister in 2009 to negotiate that deal, he said, "We mustn't let this become a numbers game where you pursue us about how many apprenticeships we've created. You have to accept my commitment to try to deliver on them." I have never turned it into a numbers game, but the problem is that the Scottish Government itself has done that, and the numbers do not actually look that good.

It is true that all apprenticeships in Scotland are job related, but it is also true that, in England, there are 440,000 starts—far more than 10 times what we have—and there has been little or no progress on ideas such as hosted

apprenticeships, agency apprenticeships or an articulated apprenticeship route.

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

**Iain Gray:** It is also true that the route through night school that my dad followed is now completely closed because of the changes in our college sector.

If we really want to do something for apprenticeship week, we should learn to understand apprenticeships, love their power to change lives, value them properly and stop just counting them and patting ourselves on the back.

16:00

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I welcome this debate, which takes place in the build-up to next week's Scottish apprenticeship week.

Over the years, I have met many of the training organisations in my constituency and many of the young people who are training towards a future career. Vocational training is important to me just as it is important to Iain Gray because, if my father had not become an apprentice at 15 with Balfour Kilpatrick in Paisley, his life and, in turn, my life might have taken a completely different turn. He was a young man from Ferguslie Park and he faced the many challenges that that community faces to this very day. He failed his 11-plus exam and was put on the academic scrap heap until he walked into the old burro office in Paisley and was told to go and talk to that company. Later, he ran his own business in the field and he employed many of his friends from his own community.

The shorthand version of that very long story is that that was a defining moment in my father's working life. That is not unusual, as Iain Gray told us, and no doubt there are many similar stories about how important vocational training and apprenticeships can be. I will skip the part of the story where he tried to pass his engineering skills on to his son, because that does not have quite as happy an ending. Because of his experience, however, I am aware of how important vocational training is and the opportunities that it offers young people in Scotland, and that is why I back the Scottish Government's vision to develop a world-class vocational education system that matches our world-class higher education system.

There are many challenges, however. The interim report of the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce states:

"we must move on from our ingrained and frankly ill-informed culture that somehow vocational education is an inferior option."

That issue keeps coming up during the evidence that we are receiving at the Education and Culture

Committee in our inquiry into educational attainment. There appears to be an uneven playing field with regard to academic achievement and vocational achievement. Many schools are focused purely on the academic and are not showing the necessary leadership in offering other careers for our young people.

When during one of the committee meetings I asked some of the business representatives about the inequalities in attainment and in the workplace, Phil Ford from the Construction Industry Training Board Scotland said:

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

Terry Lanagan of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland said:

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

That is the challenge that we are dealing with. Many parents see the academic route as the only way forward for their child. I have had parents come to me whose son wants to go on to a practical engineering course but, because he is quite bright and academic, he has been encouraged to go down the academic route. We need to find the right balance to improve the situation.

As the chairman of the commission for developing Scotland's young workforce states in the foreword to its final report, another challenge is that only 30 per cent of Scottish businesses have any contact with education establishments. The Scottish Government has agreed to take on board many of the things that are said in the report, but that is still an issue—we still have a situation in which many schools and education establishments will not let third sector organisations or partner organisations of the authority in to help with attainment or, in this case, vocational education.

When we visited the Wester Hailes education centre, we were told that it had a connection with local colleges and about how it worked in the area to ensure that young people could go down a vocational route in secondary school. That is impressive, and it is the way forward.

The evidence that we have received also shows that there is a problem with the modern apprenticeship programme because many small businesses need to see a value in the training. They need to see not just that the young person is

being taken away from their workplace but that they are getting something back as well. Although that may be only a perception, it is something that we need to address, because we need to support the small businesses that are involved in the modern apprenticeship programme and all forms of training. There are many businesses to which the programme could make a difference, but it needs to be relevant to them.

Last year, when I was involved in apprenticeship week, I went along to Muir Slicer in Paisley. The company has more than 300 modern apprenticeships across a range of sectors, and it boasts an achievement rate of over 90 per cent. While I was there, I met a young woman called Chelsea McGregor who might have dropped out and might not have had a job if it had not been for the modern apprenticeship programme. She told me what a difference it had made to her life and how it had moved things on. We must take on board what a lot of companies are saying, and we need to ensure that their perception is not the reality. We must work with them so that everyone has access to the opportunities that vocational training and apprenticeships offer.

In a similar way to Iain Gray, I can say that if my father had not walked into that buroo office I might not have been here today.

16:07

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on Scottish apprenticeship week. The commission on developing Scotland's young workforce rightly highlighted the need for us to do all that we can to ensure that apprenticeships and vocational education receive the parity with other forms of education that they deserve. Not everyone is suited to further or higher education, and not even all those who are want to pursue that career pathway. It is, therefore, right that we take the opportunity this afternoon and throughout the next week to do all that we can to show how important and valuable an apprenticeship is.

In Scotland, there seems to be a level of snobbery when it comes to the aspirations that we have for our young people. When children are growing up, their parents or guardians dream of their going to university one day. I went to university after completing my sixth year at school, along with a number of my friends. When we were in second year at uni, only halfway through, our friends who had left school after their fourth year to start an apprenticeship were fully qualified and had been earning for four years.

I do not know anyone who did not complete their apprenticeship, but I know plenty of people who dropped out of university in the first couple of

years. I do not know anyone who completed their apprenticeship who is not still working in their chosen industry, but I know plenty of people with degrees who have struggled to get a job in their chosen area. I do not know a single person who I grew up with and who went to university who now runs their own business, but I know plenty of people who completed their apprenticeships and are now successful small business owners.

Given how successful young people who complete apprenticeships can be, we need to redouble our efforts to ensure that there is equality of access for women, for people from our BME community and for disabled young people. There are clear gender inequalities in vocational education and apprenticeships. A 2013 report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that,

"Although men are increasingly moving into 'traditionally female' apprenticeship programmes, there is no evidence of an increase of women entering 'traditionally male' apprenticeships".

That is a worrying statement. If the trend continues, the only possible outcome will be that the gender gap between male and female apprenticeship entrants, which sits at 59 per cent male and 41 per cent female, will grow wider.

There is also a massive disparity in the number of disabled young people who start an apprenticeship. Around 8 per cent of the population is disabled, but the percentage of modern apprentices reporting a disability has not even reached a single per cent in any of the past five years. I ask the minister in her closing speech to say how Skills Development Scotland plans to grow that number in order to encourage disabled young people, and how it will encourage employers to hire more disabled people.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission also commented:

"we need to harness the talents of all of Scotland's people ... we are missing a trick by failing to maximise the potential of all Scotland's people. We believe that the Government needs to demand greater effort from their contractors to drive up the representation of ethnic minorities and disabled people".

The focus needs to shift from what young disabled people cannot do to what they can do, to take advantage of their talents and skills.

It has become clear to people in my generation, when we see how successful our peers who have completed apprenticeships have been, that we will not be dreaming purely of academic futures for our children, but we will be telling the stories of our friends who have completed apprenticeships and gone on to be successful business owners. We must do the work right now to ensure that our young women as well as our young men are encouraged to pursue an apprenticeship in any

field, and that we are not locking out disabled or BME young people from one of the best opportunities that they will have in pursuing a career.

I support the motion and Siobhan McMahon's amendment.

16:12

**Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP):**

It is amazing how quickly apprenticeship week comes around each year. I am looking forward once again to hosting an event in the Parliament. It takes place next week, with the help of the Scottish Training Federation and Skills Development Scotland. I hope to see many members there. The event is not just an opportunity to talk about apprenticeships; it is an opportunity to meet some of the apprentices and to recognise some of their extraordinary skills. It is also an opportunity to hand out an award, so I hope that members will be there to see that.

Clearly, the Scottish Government is doing the right things. I was interested in Iain Gray's comments about what happened in the past and the comparisons of the numbers. I do not want to get into that debate. What is important is that Skills Development Scotland is making sure that it knows what skills are required and doing its best to match the apprenticeships with the required skills. That is a pretty obvious piece of management across the nation, and I am grateful for it.

A number of businesses in my constituency take on apprentices. I will highlight two of them to the chamber and to ministers. Whittaker Engineering is a large, very specialised and very skilled business just outside Stonehaven, which provides extremely clever and well-engineered bits of kit to the oil industry. It has, I think, 23 modern apprentices, which gives members an idea of the scale of the operation. Whittakers is clued up on what to do with the apprentices. It is an extremely good and innovative employer, which I had the privilege to meet a few weeks back.

Even more recently, I went to a smaller business called Blaze Manufacturing Solutions in Laurencekirk. It, too, is a very sophisticated and skilled business, which provides fire and safety solutions largely, again, to the oil industry. When I asked about apprenticeships, Blaze made the point that, for a small business, it is difficult to find the information on apprenticeships. It just does not do that. It makes clever bits of kit; it does not have a large human resources department. Given the Government's aspiration to get apprentices into small and medium-sized businesses, it might be wise for it to consider how the information is provided to businesses that are better at making

widgets than they are at looking to see how such matters can be handled.

I heartily endorse Gordon MacDonald's comments about pay rates, to which I have nothing to add, but I would like to bring to members' attention the comments of the Civil Engineering Contractors Association with which, as convener of the cross-party group on construction, I have quite a lot to do. CECA is enthusiastic about foundation apprenticeships, which are being piloted in two regions. It feels that they are good, because they enable even younger folk to get involved. It seems to me that foundation apprenticeships offer a real opportunity to ensure that youngsters at school can get some real workplace experience and some understanding of what that industry might be about and of the opportunities that might exist in it by going somewhere once a week during their last two or three years at school rather than just when they leave school. Foundation apprenticeships will allow them to understand where such experience might lead and to gain some of the personal skills that are so important in getting on to an apprenticeship.

I note the comment that one of the supermarkets made that it recruits on the basis of personality and attitude, and that skills come afterwards. The ability to understand the workplace is important. Someone might have the right attitude, but they might not understand the workplace. Understanding what the world of work is about is extremely important to our youngsters. As an aside, I note that when my two children went on work placement as teenagers at school, they did not learn very much at all and it was not a terribly useful experience. I hope that foundation apprenticeships will turn out to be much more useful.

I turn to a subject that is a bit of a parliamentary hobby-horse of mine—research. In a relatively recent report, Audit Scotland made the point that it was quite difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of apprenticeships and, indeed, of many other of the training opportunities that we provide. Perhaps we need to encourage the Government to do more longitudinal studies on what happens in our society. Only by following a group of people—which will, necessarily, be relatively small; such a process costs money—through their teens, their 20s and maybe even into their 30s will we discover how effective such well-meaning and well-organised programmes are. Only by learning from that will we do better in the future.

In the meantime, I encourage the Government to carry on doing what it is doing. I think that foundation apprenticeships represent a serious opportunity and that they are to be commended. We need to promote gender balance, as has been

mentioned; we need to improve as best we can the liaison between schools and industry; and we need to recognise that all apprenticeships build skills, build confidence and build our economy for the future.

16:18

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** As other members have done, I welcome the fact that we are having this debate in the run-up to Scottish apprenticeship week. In that context, I very much look forward to paying a visit to a local company in my constituency next week—Orkney Builders—to see at first hand the work that it does in providing apprenticeship opportunities for young people on the islands that I represent.

Orkney Builders is just one of a number of local building firms that, working alongside Orkney College, SDS and other partners, have shown a genuine commitment to apprenticeships and skills development over recent years. All those businesses recognise that such investment is in their interests and the interests of their sector, as well as the interests of the young individuals who take advantage of the high-quality, work-based training that is on offer.

There are undoubtedly good and positive stories to tell that illustrate the life-changing difference that apprenticeships can and do make, and which demonstrate the energising effect that apprenticeships can have on the businesses that take them on. Sophie Turner, the young apprentice stonemason who, as Mike MacKenzie mentioned, has been taken on by Orkney Islands Council, is a perfect illustration of that.

The commitment to step up the number of apprenticeships from 25,000 to 30,000 is one that Scottish Liberal Democrats genuinely support. However, as I have said previously and as Iain Gray pointed out earlier, it is not purely a numbers game. Overall numbers are important, but the quality of what is provided, where those opportunities are being created and—just as important—where and to whom they remain elusive are equally important.

I am sure that the cabinet secretary and the minister will have no difficulty in accepting that. As a result, although my remarks are set in the context of a general welcome of what has been achieved with modern apprenticeships and the commitment to going further, I feel that it is more valuable to spend my brief time this afternoon on those aspects that are still not working as they should.

A clear example of where opportunities are simply not being created is young people who have a disability, who were, in fact, the focus of my amendment for this afternoon's debate.

Although it was not selected, I am pleased that the issue has been picked up by Siobhan McMahon and Mary Scanlon in their amendments, which I am happy to support, and that it featured prominently in Roseanna Cunningham's opening speech.

Both the Scottish Children's Services Coalition and Inclusion Scotland have spelled out in stark terms the extent to which young disabled people are being let down when it comes to the creation of education and training opportunities. We all accept that that is simply not good enough. In a recent parliamentary answer to me on that very subject, Ms Cunningham explained:

"As all apprentices in Scotland must be employed and recruitment is, rightly, a matter for employers, we do not have figures that tell us how many disabled people have applied for a Modern Apprenticeship opportunity."—[*Written Answers*, 8 May 2015; S4W-25385]

However, Skills Development Scotland's figures show that the overall percentage of modern apprentices who are disabled is less than 0.4 per cent. Over the past five years, there has been no improvement in that situation, despite a dramatic increase in modern apprenticeship places. By no reckoning can that be considered acceptable, particularly when one considers that around 8 per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds are disabled.

In England, around 8.7 per cent of modern apprenticeships are being taken up by those with a disability. Even allowing for differences in the schemes north and south of the border, such a discrepancy in performance is hard to fathom, much less justify, and I very much welcome the cabinet secretary's willingness to drill down further and get a better understanding of why the discrepancy exists, particularly given the Scottish Children's Services Coalition's conclusion that

"Scotland fares worst of any of the Home Nations, indicating that major and concerted action is required."

The consequences should come as a surprise to no one. As the SCSC goes on to say,

"young disabled people have a similar level of career aspiration at the age of 16 to their wider peer group. By the time they are 26, they are nearly 4 times more likely to be unemployed."

Of course, the Government will argue that "concerted action" is taking place, with, for example, the allocation of £3 million following the publication of the Wood report, which identified progress in this area as essential. Although I join others in welcoming the cabinet secretary's announcement in her opening remarks of a further £500,000, it is not clear what proportion of the overall funding will be allocated to the sorts of interventions that are likely to increase the numbers of disabled young people who successfully apply for modern apprenticeships.

Perhaps the minister can address that matter in her summing up.

I suspect that ministers might also be reluctant to set targets for what Ms Cunningham called in her recent parliamentary answer “a matter for employers”. However, Sir Ian Wood was very clear in his call for

“a realistic but stretching improvement target to increase the number of young disabled people”

taking up modern apprenticeships to be introduced and reported on annually. Indeed, ministers appear to have accepted the principle of targets by agreeing to increase the number of modern apprenticeship starts from minority ethnic communities. It would be interesting to hear from Annabelle Ewing whether the Government is willing to take a similar approach to those with a disability and care leavers and, if not, why not.

Sir Ian Wood also recognised that there was nothing to be gained by willing the ends but not the means. He therefore recommended that:

“Funding levels to colleges and MA training providers should be reviewed and adjusted to reflect the cost of providing additional support to young disabled people, and age restrictions should be relaxed for those whose transition may take longer.”

Such steps are practical and sensible.

I was intrigued to read Inclusion Scotland’s comments about access by those with a disability to the Government’s employability fund. As the aim of the fund is

“to support activity that will help people to develop the skills they need to secure a job or progress to more advanced forms of training”,

one would be forgiven for thinking that the proportion of starts by people with a disability would be relatively high. In fact, the figure is only 2.5 per cent and, again, it would be helpful to hear from the minister about what “major and concerted action” is being taken to deliver the scale of change that we obviously need.

Although there are other issues that I could have highlighted, I think that on this occasion it was right to focus my brief remarks on how to increase the opportunities for those with a disability.

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

**Liam McArthur:** The Government has a decent story to tell on modern apprenticeships, but as the Equality and Human Rights Commission has observed:

“we are missing a trick by failing to maximise the potential of all Scotland’s people.”

Nowhere is that more evident than in relation to those with a disability, which is why Scottish

Liberal Democrats will support the motion and both amendments later this afternoon.

16:24

**Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP):** We are here to celebrate the opportunities for people who are going into apprenticeships. I have listened very carefully to other members on areas in which opportunities are perhaps not as equal. There is a perception out there that people with disabilities perhaps cannot achieve the same as those without a disability. However, we have to look at the opportunities that exist.

In my constituency, there is a wide and varied range of opportunities for people in the apprenticeship programmes. To be perfectly honest, the majority of those opportunities would be open and available to people with a disability. I am thinking about the hospitality sector, for instance; there are not many areas of work in the hospitality sector that people with disabilities could not achieve. There are opportunities in the outdoors. I accept that there may be health and safety issues to prevent people, depending on their disability, from doing some work in forestry, but there are opportunities. For instance, the Foxlane social enterprise in my constituency provides opportunities for people in market gardening.

Let us have a conversation with people about what jobs they would like to do. I know that the Royal National Institute of Blind People, for instance, has an employment officer and that it has had people working in different parts of Scotland for many years; in fact, I used to work alongside them prior to coming to Holyrood. Despite that, we still do not seem to get the numbers into employment. Why is that? Is it to do with perception?

I believe that there are opportunities and that there are jobs for people from all sectors and all walks of life. The Scottish Parliament’s apprenticeship programme, for instance, looked very carefully at selection to ensure that people from different socioeconomic backgrounds were given opportunities. People from ethnic or disability backgrounds were considered. Those opportunities exist, but it is up to the employer to make them available and to go through a selection process.

Much has been said about degrees and vocational training. I do not have a degree or vocational training. Mr Gray mentioned his ability to change a plug. My ability to change a plug always depended on the availability of my daughter when she was three to tell me the colours of the wires—thankfully, she knew her colours. It is not that the opportunity was not



available for me to do certain things; I simply chose a different pathway.

At one point, I worked in an engineering factory. A health and safety person came in and said, “I’m sorry—actually, we think that it is too dangerous for you to be here.” I believe that there are now measures in certain factories that mean that people who are blind or have different disabilities can work in those sectors. That is fine, but we have not moved a great deal in the past 40-odd years in creating places for people with disabilities.

The cabinet secretary mentioned access to work. Access to work support is available when a person is in work. It becomes available when a person is in employment, but we need to ensure that it is also available while people are looking for work, are going through training or are on an apprenticeship programme. If a person needs a particular piece of kit to ensure that they can do the job just as well as someone else can, that kit should be made available. The person may well be able to do the job, but if they do not have the right facility to enable them to do it, the opportunity will be denied.

It comes down to fundamentals. We are always letting ourselves down because we do not look at the basics, the start, the opportunity and what the barriers are.

Siobhan McMahon was quite right to mention women in work, which is something that we looked at when she and I were on the Equal Opportunities Committee. I was talking recently to one of the construction directors at the new Alford school campus in my constituency, which is still undergoing construction. He told me that he was pulling his hair out because he needs people to come into the construction industry and is offering apprenticeships, but when he goes to schools to speak to young people, none of the girls wants to come and work for him. That is not because he is not a nice guy but because they just do not want to go into the construction industry.

Sometimes the jobs and opportunities are there, but we need to ensure that the right technology is there and that certain perceptions are knocked on the head so that people can go into different types of jobs and get away from the stereotyping that we still seem to have.

16:30

**Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to talk about Scottish apprenticeship week 2015. I am glad to see that the target set for 20,000 modern apprenticeship starts each year is on track and may be exceeded this year. The young people involved see the programme as a positive experience, with 98 per cent saying that they found it useful.

The role of Scottish apprenticeship week is to celebrate the success of the scheme, but we should also be able to reflect on the things that can be done better. Instead of only increasing the number of modern apprenticeships, we need to start looking at quality and equality. I have been in discussions with Skills Development Scotland, which has informed me of the progress in modern apprenticeship starts from minority communities, with the proportion rising from 1.1 to 1.4 per cent. As ethnic minorities make up 6 per cent of the population aged between 18 and 24, that is still a major underrepresentation. Analysis by the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights of apprentices in training on 31 March 2014 found that a young person from an ethnic minority background was eight times less likely to be in a modern apprenticeship than a young white Scottish person was.

I welcome the creation of the key performance indicators to increase the number of modern apprenticeship starts from minority ethnic communities to equal the population share by 2021. However, that is a long-term target and I want to see evidence of the political will to achieve it. I want to know what the Scottish Government will do in the next six months, rather than in the next six years.

I understand that Skills Development Scotland is beginning to work with BEMIS—Black & Ethnic Minority Infrastructure Scotland—to increase participation by ethnic minorities. In my discussions with SDS, I raised my concerns that BEMIS does not currently have the capacity or ability to deliver such a challenging target, especially on a Scotland-wide basis. I do not mean any disrespect to BEMIS as an organisation when I say that.

I am not going to let it be a box-ticking exercise. I will not allow the Scottish Government to get away with giving some money to one ethnic minority organisation so that it feels as if it has done something in that area. I do not want to see a few events around Scotland, inviting the usual suspects from mosques and community associations to eat and be talked to, with no real engagement, no real change and no real outcomes. Those symbolic samosa events are no longer acceptable.

I want the Government to be proactive. There is no point in just asking people to apply. What we need is support for minority ethnic people to get the skills that they need to apply for apprenticeships or jobs in the first instance.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** I listened carefully to Hanzala Malik’s comments and I understand that, although he welcomes some things, he has some concerns and criticisms. I would like to hear one

concrete thing that he thinks we could be doing that we are not.

**Hanzala Malik:** I could give the cabinet secretary so many. If the Presiding Officer gave me the time, I could give her examples all day.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** Can he give me one thing?

**Hanzala Malik:** To satisfy her appetite I will give her one thing that the Government can do. It could create an organisation with a structure that speaks to young minority community people, to train them to be able to apply for jobs, go for interviews and go for promotion. There are so many ethnic minority people unemployed just now that it is unreal.

The fact that only 1.4 per cent of people who get places on apprenticeships are from ethnic minorities, when 6 per cent of the young population is from an ethnic minority, is shameful. I can give other figures: 1 per cent of police and less than 1 per cent in the fire service. Shall I go on, or is that enough?

Let me try to help the Government, if I may. I want the Scottish Government to be proactive. I want it to give me interim targets and quarterly reports, to show me what ethnic minority people are achieving in those organisations. I want to see Scotland do better for its minority communities. For example, there is no infrastructure in places such as Aberdeen or Fife. Why not? Why are we not creating that? When will the Government do that? How long will we have these pakora and samosa meetings with no results? I want to see results. Please, for God's sake, do something for the minority community.

16:37

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I reiterate our support for the Scottish Government's motion and the priority that is placed on this very important issue. I add my support for Mary Scanlon's amendment, which raises some important additional issues, and for the Labour amendment.

Some interesting discussions are taking place in apprenticeship policy just now, in the context of both the changing economic and educational environment, to which the cabinet secretary referred in her opening remarks, and the analysis of the available data and how the success to date of the modern apprenticeship programme is measured, which is important. That was very much the topic at the recent meeting of the cross-party group on colleges and universities, at which those in the front line of the provision of apprenticeships were very clear that there must be a change of approach.

There must be a qualitative dimension to the apprenticeship programme, rather than just a concentration on increasing numbers. Iain Gray raised that point, as well. Mary Scanlon rightly pointed to the achievement side of modern apprenticeships, which is a qualitative dimension. Nigel Don made an important point about the provision of the skills that are important to the demands of the economy, which is also part of the qualitative dimension, rather than part of the numbers games.

Tony Coultas and Diane Greenlees of SDS argue that much better and deeper engagement between employers and learners is necessary to ensure that learners are much better prepared for the world of work. They strongly argue that that must take place at an earlier age. I note that Jim McColl said the same thing earlier this week.

The general feeling is that the curriculum for excellence and the establishment of a new regional college structure are good things, but it was pointed out that one of the most important things that the larger colleges can do is ensure that they can deliver when it comes to the demands of the very specific local economies. If you listen to college principals just now, you can hear that they stress that point. There are a few question marks around that.

Assessment of the value of different levels of apprenticeship is important, as is assessment of the different skills-based learning that they entail and how to articulate between different schools, colleges and universities.

Generally speaking, it is a good picture. There was great praise for the ambition to develop the 28 pathfinders across the five sectors by August 2015, and for the fact that that will benefit 28 cohorts of pupils, which matches the ambition to involve all local authorities. As I understand it, the Scottish Government's target in that regard is August 2016.

There are clearly successful examples of local authorities working with education establishments and with business and industry. Those who spoke to the cross-party group told us about West Lothian, Fife and the Forth valley and spoke strongly about the innovative aspect of that.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** We have not covered all the relevant issues, because there has not been time in this debate about apprenticeships, but would the member accept that the growth in the regional invest in young people groups, which will be specifically employer-led, will help to deal with some of the more localised regional issues that she is referring to?

**Liz Smith:** I accept that, but the point that has been made by two or three college principals is that the larger colleges have to cover a much

wider area, and they are anxious to retain the individual aspects of their local colleges, particularly in areas that are removed from Edinburgh and Glasgow. Naturally, they are concerned about the level of cuts to courses that provide education in particular to people who are further removed from the workforce. That view came through strongly at the cross-party group.

The point about disability has been mentioned by several members, including Siobhan McMahon and Liam McArthur, and I believe that the cabinet secretary was questioned on the matter by Gavin Brown in a debate at the end of April. Not only do we have to address the gap between what is happening in Scotland and what is happening elsewhere, we need to address why that situation has arisen.

The other important issue concerns the lessons from abroad. Iain Gray was right to say that there are different approaches in countries such as Germany, Denmark and Switzerland, which have been flagged up by employers as successfully delivering long-term sustainability in apprenticeship involvement. The issue of cultural change is relevant in that regard, too.

Overall, this issue is important. I will finish on the point that George Adam made about the need to ensure that there is not a divide between vocational and academic training. The two go together. Increasingly, given the changing nature of the economy and education, they must complement each other, because they are not separate. The more we can do that, the better we will be able to get over the unfortunate divide that arises when people view them as different things.

We are happy to support the Scottish Government's motion and the Labour amendment.

16:42

**Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab):** I am pleased to report that I am in the comfortable position of supporting the Government's motion, Mary Scanlon's amendment and, of course, my colleague Siobhan McMahon's amendment.

Many members have talked about their experience of a relative gaining access to an apprenticeship. Unfortunately, my experience is that my father was never offered an apprenticeship. As a result, his working life was hard, brutal and poorly paid. In that context, I applaud the efforts of everyone who is involved in the provision of modern apprenticeships and apprenticeships of all types.

I identify myself strongly with the points that were made by Siobhan McMahon and Hanzala Malik about equality, fairness and access. As Iain Gray outlined in his speech, in Scottish

apprenticeship week it is important that we realise the true worth of apprentices to our society and our future development. I also acknowledge that Nigel Don outlined the benefits that we gain from apprentices, and the contribution that they make in later life. Other members outlined more fully that experience.

What can we do to develop a better environment for our apprentices? The cabinet secretary mentioned that she has encouraged employers. I know, having gone around South Scotland and elsewhere in the country, that both medium-sized and larger employers have said that they need confidence that they will, when they take on an apprentice, be in business long enough to see that apprenticeship commitment fulfilled. In that regard, the cabinet secretary could spend some time looking at how local procurement processes operate to the disadvantage of local companies; if those companies could compete better and obtain contracts, more apprentices would be taken on.

Those same employers have also shared their views on the notion that apprentices can be shared between companies in order to offer some form of support to the young people—men and women—who seek to complete apprenticeships. Many employers resist that notion and feel that by sharing apprentices, they will not deliver the quality of experience and the breadth of knowledge that are required to develop apprentices for the future.

The employers also questioned the level of preparation among young people who come forward to be considered for apprenticeships, in particular, in building and engineering. The latest statistics on Scottish attainment that reveal a dip in literacy and numeracy performance are a challenge. More work needs to be done by the Government to ensure that our young people are prepared for employment.

The Government has, understandably, focused on funding apprenticeship opportunities for young people. Employers have reported to me that, as a result of that focus, funding goes primarily to people who are under 21. Increasingly, the experience in the employment environment is that people over the age of 21 have developed a background and so—to use the vernacular—the penny has dropped and they want to contribute to working life and so seek to access apprenticeships. Unfortunately, the support and grants that might enable that are not present to the extent that they are for people under 21.

There has been much comment from small and large employers about the inability of people who come forward. Young people have skills, but they have not been developed in relation not only to their technical ability but to the element of work

that is about selling ideas and products. A great deal has been said by employers about needing schools and education to pay attention to development of the character of future employees so that they can play their full part.

There is a real desire among employers for the Government to prepare our young people for work by promoting the range of apprenticeship opportunities—particularly, as was mentioned earlier, the traditional apprenticeship opportunities. We need to do more within the building and engineering context.

The minister would do well to encourage employers to play their full part by mentoring in schools and by offering work experience in order to increase their involvement in developing employment opportunities for our young people in the future.

At the end of the debate, the importance of apprenticeships for the future has been acknowledged throughout the chamber. This is not only about ensuring that young people do not have the kind of experience of work that my father had; it is—which is just as important, and more important for many—about needing our young people in Scotland to participate fully in the employment environment. We need to develop our competitive edge in a fast-changing economy and a fast-changing world.

We should not have any complacency about how well we are currently doing; we could do much better. In the year that lies ahead of us, Parliament seeks from the minister and the cabinet secretary a hunger to acknowledge the shortcomings in our current service delivery and stronger development of promotion for the future.

16:49

**The Minister for Youth and Women's Employment (Annabelle Ewing):** The first thing that I should do is move the Government's motion, which the cabinet secretary omitted to do earlier—I am happy to do so on her behalf.

The debate has been positive and constructive, and I thank all members for their contributions. Many suggestions, broad-brush and technical, have been made. Ministers, along with officials, always look closely at what was said, and we will be happy to pick up anything that seems to suggest a sensible way forward.

I take this opportunity to say that we are happy to support the Labour amendment. We are, however, not in a position to support the Conservative amendment, not because of any substantive issues that it covers but from a technical perspective regarding how the amended motion would read.

Modern apprenticeships are vital to our ambitions to offer young people the opportunity to gain the skills that they need to take up rewarding and fulfilling jobs. Modern apprenticeships are also vital in delivering the skilled workforce that our employers need in order that we can secure long-term economic growth.

Over the past three years, we have supported more than 77,000 modern apprenticeship starts; I am proud of this Government's record of growing the programme since 2007. Our commitment to expanding the modern apprenticeship programme aligns with the wider reform of vocational education across the entire learning and skills landscape.

**Iain Gray:** The minister has repeated the Government's claim about expanding the programme. I pointed out the numbers in my speech and said—as I say now—that it is evident in comparing like with like that the programme has not really expanded. I do not mean that as a criticism; it is the reality from which we must seek to move forward. Will the minister acknowledge that that is the case?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I say to Iain Gray—indeed, he made this point in his contribution—that the previous skillseekers programme at level 2 was a non-employed programme. The people who are in level 2 modern apprenticeships are all employed. That is the crucial difference and that is what we are talking about when we talk about the success of our modern apprenticeship programme.

In our refreshed youth employment strategy “Developing the Young Workforce”, which was published in December last year, we set out our ambition to improve employment prospects for all our young people. Linking the needs of young people and the needs of our employers is central—as many members have said today—to the seven-year change programmes that will seek to remove the structural problems that led to the high levels of youth unemployment that we have seen in the past. However, we cannot deliver that strategy on our own, so we will continue to work with employers, training providers, local authorities, colleges and third sector organisations to deliver on our ambition of a 40 per cent reduction in youth unemployment by 2021.

There has—quite rightly—been a lot of discussion today about equalities and how the modern apprenticeship programme is not currently working for some groups of people. The commission for developing Scotland's young workforce highlighted the fact that underrepresentation impacts on the modern apprenticeship programme, as it does across vocational education and the wider labour market. Those are complex issues, so simply changing provision will not fully address the underlying

issues in our labour market. However, I am sure that the funding that the cabinet secretary announced today to support the final development and implementation of a modern apprenticeship equalities action plan will be welcomed, because we need to build consensus on what all partners must do to address underrepresentation across vocational education.

**Dennis Robertson:** I certainly welcome the funding. Does the minister agree that, in trying to address the equality circle, we should look more closely at the education and careers advice on the opportunities that are available for young people when they are leaving education and moving into work?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I thank Dennis Robertson for his constructive intervention. We certainly intend—it is part of our strategy—that young people will be given much better information while they are at school about what the world of work entails. That information will be provided to all young people, including those who may require particular support, and we would wish it to happen at a much earlier age, including—as Sir Ian Wood strongly recommended—in primary school.

With a broad brush, I believe that, from a structural perspective, which is the background to our endeavours, we are already starting to see a bit of success in the breaking down of the old distinctions between vocational and academic learning. Many members made forceful points on that issue, including Iain Gray, who spoke about the importance that his father placed on education when he was growing up. That is a trait common to many households the length and breadth of Scotland. It is incumbent on all of us to do what we can to continue to break down the long-standing bogus distinction that somehow the vocational and the academic are in competition with each other; rather, they complement each other.

We are committed to doing all that we can to make it clear that the offer of a modern apprenticeship to a young person so that they can get a job and be paid while gaining an industry-recognised qualification is a win-win—it is a win for the young person or apprentice concerned, and it is a win for the employer.

This morning, I had the pleasure of visiting CCG, which is a construction manufacturing company in Cambuslang. In speaking to many young apprentices, I was struck by their enthusiasm to do a good job and their appreciation that they have been given an opportunity to gain the skills that they need to start to make their way in the world of work, while—importantly for them—earning a wage. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Just a moment, please, minister. There is far too much

noise in the chamber. Could members who have just come into the chamber please do the minister the courtesy of listening to her?

**Annabelle Ewing:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

In response to the many important points that have been made about gender segregation, I say that, among the excellent young people whom I met this morning—I promised to say this, so I am going to say it—were Hannah Muir, who is a third-year apprentice plumber, and Nadia Swift, who is a second-year apprentice plasterer. They both prove very well that there are no longer such things as boys' jobs and girls' jobs. I wish both those young women the best of luck in their future careers. I recognise that there is much work still to do in tackling stereotyping of whatever kind, although I hope that we are moving in the right direction.

I will pick up on a few other points that were made. Siobhan McMahan mentioned the kind of delivery partners with which it is appropriate to work, but my view is that it is important to work with a range of partners, as we are doing. We work with all those who have a role in ensuring that we do the best for young people by ensuring that they have the opportunities that should be available to them.

Mary Scanlon mentioned the societal issues that we face with regard to gender segregation. It is important to stress that the developing the young workforce programme focuses on promotion to young people of a diverse workforce. As I said earlier, that includes promotion in primary schools.

**Mary Scanlon:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Annabelle Ewing:** I am afraid that I have very limited time and I wish to get through a few other comments.

Gordon MacDonald highlighted the good work that is going on in his constituency in Edinburgh. George Adam emphasised the importance of ensuring that small businesses are involved in the modern apprenticeship project—a point that was echoed by many members, including Nigel Don. We are working with local authorities and small businesses to try to ensure that they have the information that they need to decide whether they are in a position to take on a young apprentice. The regional invest in young people groups will also have a role to play.

Much has been made of the position with respect to underrepresented groups. As I have said, the cabinet secretary's announcement of the intention to proceed with an equalities action plan will, I hope, help to address the many real concerns of members. I undertake to keep

Parliament advised of progress on the equalities action plan.

With respect to Hanzala Malik's point about our determination to improve the position of black and minority ethnic communities, I say gently to him that we work with a range of partners including BEMIS and other groups. I recently met Davidson Chademana, who is a representative of the black workers' committee of the Scottish Trades Union Congress. We take the issue most seriously, and are working to make the necessary progress.

In conclusion, I say that I very much look forward to celebrating apprenticeship week with other members. I hope that members will engage in the process and take the opportunity to see for themselves how modern apprenticeships are benefiting our young people.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes—

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

Given that we are all about to vote on amendments, can the minister explain the technical reason why the Government is unable to accept my amendment? I think that that will be helpful to all of us.

**The Presiding Officer:** It is entirely up to the Government whether it wishes to accept the amendment. That concludes the debate.

## Business Motion

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-13119, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 19 May 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Allied Health Professionals, Enabling Active and Independent Living

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 20 May 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Portfolio Question Time  
Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights  
Fair Work, Skills and Training

*followed by* Scottish Labour Party Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 21 May 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Devolution (Further Powers) Committee  
Debate: New Powers for Scotland: An  
Interim Report on the Smith Commission  
and the UK Government's Proposals

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 26 May 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business  
 Wednesday 27 May 2015  
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Portfolio Question Time  
 Finance, Constitution and Economy  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business  
 Thursday 28 May 2015  
 11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 11.40 am General Questions  
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions  
*followed by* Members' Business  
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-13118, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S4M-13117, on the designation of a lead committee.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Climate Change (Additional Greenhouse Gas) (Scotland) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Community Justice (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

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

## Decision Time

17:01

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

The first question is, that amendment S4M-13112.3, in the name of Siobhan McMahon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-13112, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on Scottish apprenticeship week, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S4M-13112.2, in the name of Mary Scanlon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-13112, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on Scottish apprenticeship week, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)

Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)



(SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 52, Against 61, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-13112, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, on Scottish apprenticeship week, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises the success of the modern apprenticeship (MA) programme and how it contributes to addressing youth unemployment while allowing young people to earn while they learn; encourages employers to consider workforce development and higher workforce skills that support long-term sustainable growth; supports the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce's ambitions for a world-class vocational education system; further supports the Scottish Government's ambitions for the expansion of the programme to provide 30,000 new MA starts each year by 2020; joins the Scottish Government in celebrating this success by supporting the activities taking place next week through the fifth annual Scottish Apprenticeship Week; further believes that the Scottish Government should use Scottish Apprenticeship Week as a platform to draw attention to the findings of the Equality and Human Rights Commission report, *Modern Apprenticeships, Equality & The Economy: Spreading the Benefits*, which raised concerns regarding low levels of disabled people in modern apprenticeships, and recognises that more work needs to be done in raising the number of apprenticeships being taken up by women and LGBT and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-13118, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Climate Change (Additional Greenhouse Gas) (Scotland) Order 2015 [draft] be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S4M-13117, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Community Justice (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

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

## Mental Health Awareness (See Me in Work)

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

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-13077, in the name of Liam McArthur, on supporting the see me in work programme.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that Mental Health Awareness Week 2015 runs from 11 to 17 May; supports all efforts during that week, and throughout the rest of the year, to stamp out stigma and discrimination regarding mental health issues of whatever kind; welcomes in particular the campaign, See Me in Work, which aims to end stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health issues in the workplace; understands that, while many businesses and organisations understand the impact of mental health in the workplace, it can be challenging to develop a mentally-healthy working environment; believes that See Me in Work, which has a programme that is designed to support staff and improve working environments, can make a positive contribution to improving conditions for people with mental health issues; understands that one in four will experience a mental health illness at some point in their lives; considers that such initiatives have the potential to be of real benefit to a great many people when they need it, and notes the calls for employers in Orkney and across Scotland to get involved with the programme.

17:05

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** With mental health awareness week running from 11 to 17 May, I am delighted to be leading this latest debate on the issue of mental health. I thank all those members who signed my motion, particularly those who did so with unseemly haste, allowing it to secure the requisite cross-party support by the allotted deadline. I am grateful to those who have stayed on to participate this evening, and I look forward to hearing their contributions.

The issue of how we improve services to, and the quality of life of, those who suffer poor mental health is one that I know commands broad and heartfelt support among members across the chamber. That is very much to be welcomed as we continue our collective efforts to ensure that mental health is better understood and more effectively treated, and that the stigma surrounding it is tackled head-on.

Without wishing to detract from this cross-party consensus, which I know is highly valued by those working in the sector as well as by those campaigning for improvements on behalf of sufferers, I take particular satisfaction from the priority that Liberal Democrats have attached to the issue over a number of years. As the minister is aware, we have consistently called for equal treatment of mental and physical health to be put

on a statutory footing in Scotland, as is the case south of the border. In conjunction with the measures that have already been set out in the Government's mental health strategy, we believe that that would send a powerful message. In practical terms, it would also ensure that the needs of those suffering poor mental health are reflected more fully when decisions about the allocation of funding are taken.

Of course, given the enormous pressure under which the health service in Scotland is currently operating, simply drawing funds away from the treatment of physical health would only compound the problems. That is why I was so proud of the specific commitment made by the Liberal Democrats to invest £350 million more in mental health services in Scotland—£3.5 billion across the United Kingdom—as part of an £8 billion real-terms increase in funding for our national health service.

Sadly, the focus of the recent election campaign appeared to be rather more on who was willing to do deals with whom than on the niceties of specific policy positions. Nevertheless, I think that the commitment was and remains absolutely the right thing. Distressingly, given the outcome of the election last Thursday, the chances of it actually now happening seem vanishingly small.

Although there are many aspects of the debate around mental health that I could have chosen to focus on, I felt that the efforts that are being made to stamp out stigma and discrimination in the workplace deserved our attention this time round. Colleagues will not need reminding, I am sure, that, as well as affecting one in four of the overall population at some stage in their life, mental illness remains the dominant health problem for people of working age. It damages careers, relationships and lives. The financial costs—let alone the human costs—are colossal. In Scotland alone, the cost to employers is estimated to be around £2 billion.

I therefore welcome the current programme that is being undertaken by the Scottish Association for Mental Health and the Mental Health Foundation under the banner of see me in work.

As an aside, I was a little surprised that those at see me appeared to be slightly less than enthusiastic about the prospect of me lodging the motion and allowing Parliament an opportunity to debate these issues today. See me has always enjoyed strong cross-party support and has been very open to working with colleagues from all parties. I know from previous debates that we have all benefited greatly from the expertise and advice that has been available from within the organisation. That approach has been one of see me's real strengths. I sincerely hope that, as it moves from its campaign to its programme phase,

see me will not make the mistake of seeing itself—or being treated by ministers—as somehow a creature of government.

As part of the current programme, see me has helpfully taken soundings on workers' attitudes to mental health in the workplace. Some of the findings are fascinating, if alarming. Just under half of people think that someone in their workplace would be unlikely to disclose their mental health problem for fear of losing their job. More than half of people thought that fear of missing out on promotion would encourage a work colleague to conceal any mental health issue.

Those findings echo comments that I have heard at a local level in Orkney. The Orkney Blide Trust has suggested that its members are often reluctant to declare a mental health problem in applications, as they fear that it will lead to an immediate knock-back. That is perhaps unsurprising, as research indicates that one in four employers would not employ someone with a mental health problem, particularly in a role that involves contact with the public or customers.

The case study cited in see me's briefing illustrates that point perfectly as it is about Gemma Patterson, who was denied her dream job in the navy despite passing the entrance exam and fitness test. Gemma's history of mental ill health was used to fail her on medical grounds, despite her doctor, counsellor and psychiatrist all testifying that she had come out of her mental health problems stronger and more able to cope. The figures that I have quoted might be out of date, but I would hope that see me in work can help address the sort of damaging misconceptions that held back Gemma and discourage others from being open about their own mental health.

Certainly, the local mental health strategy being developed in Orkney is looking to place a heavy emphasis on working with local employers and educating them about mental health. I hope that that work can draw on some of the resources, training materials and positive case studies being developed by see me to back up its four-stage engagement strategy with employers. That staged approach seems very sensible, getting buy-in first of all and providing basic information about how employers can support their workforce in terms of mental health. Through a process of finding out more about staff attitudes to, and understanding and experience of, mental health, employers can then develop plans for improvement, the success of which can be tracked over time and continuously improved.

At this point, I wish to put in a brief word on behalf of the independent advocacy sector and the role that it can play in helping deliver the sort of changes that we wish to see in the workplace. Very often in employment welfare matters an

individual will be advised that they can be supported by a colleague or a trade union representative. That is absolutely appropriate in many instances, but under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 anyone with a mental health diagnosis has a statutory right to an independent advocate.

Advocacy Orkney's Andy Spence-Jones explained to me recently that

"early intervention of advocacy can stop an employment matter progressing, culminating in disciplinary procedures or suspensions."

Andy talks of using Advocacy's expertise in mental health to work with employers, helping them to recognise that employees with a mental health condition

"need support to process their options and clearly articulate their thoughts."

She argues that that can help an individual remain in employment, benefiting both the employee and the employer.

Other good work taking place that deserves a mention in this context is the clubhouse service run through the Orkney Blide Trust. Since the service started four years ago, 26 clubhouse members out of a total membership of 90 have moved into employment, both full and part time. Although transition into employment is not the primary purpose of the clubhouse, it demonstrates that where appropriate support is available, both to individuals with a mental health problem and to potential employers, real advances can be made.

We have made important progress in raising awareness and understanding of mental health over recent years. I am convinced that that has helped reduce stigma, but there is so much more to do. See me estimates that just less than a quarter of people think that their workplace has a good understanding of employee mental health. More encouragingly, almost nine out of 10 surveyed by see me want a better understanding of the issues so that they can behave appropriately.

I look forward to hearing what others, including the minister, have to say, and I hope that we can all play our part in encouraging as many employers and businesses as possible across Scotland to make a firm and long-term commitment to engaging with a programme that can make a real difference to the lives of the very many people who suffer poor mental health.

17:13

**Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP):** I thank Liam McArthur for bringing this very important debate to the chamber, but I was a bit disappointed that he decided to bring politics into

it. I will not rise to that bait, though, because I think that what we are debating is too important an issue.

I remember that, as a responsible employer—I believe and hope that I still am—in social work, one of the things that I was very keen to do and which we did do was to bring in external organisations to equip the employees with mental health awareness so that they could identify that stress, anxiety and early signs of depression were maybe more common than people realised. We also wanted to equip them with the skills and confidence to come to their line managers and discuss what could be, or might be perceived as, a mental health issue.

It is important that such training is brought into workplaces so that line managers fully understand and comprehend that, if someone comes to them with a perceived mental health problem, they must be listened to and understood and the appropriate support must be given at that time. When we give that support and ensure that it is confidential, the person will generally come back.

When we looked at the issue through staff analysis and we worked things through, we noted that those who had come with issues early were more empowered later and they spoke openly to their peer group in the staffrooms. They openly said, "I had a problem and I spoke to someone." That gives others confidence to do the same. It is not always easy to do that. Liam McArthur was right to say that there is still a stigma around mental health and mental illness. We need to move away from that. There is nothing wrong with having an illness, and there is nothing wrong if that illness happens to be a mental health issue.

I lived for many years through mental health issues. One of the examples from see me was someone with an eating disorder, and that reminded me so much of my daughter. Her employer, at the time when she was going to work, had no idea and no recognition of her specific or special needs. It is very important that, when an employer recognises such things, they are able to be more flexible. A person with a long-term condition—it could be someone who requires dialysis—may be a fantastic employee, but for the fear of losing their job they may develop a mental health problem on top of the physical problem. That might be due to uncertainty that is created by their peers or by line management.

It is important to raise awareness and equip employers to deal with the issues of mental health at work, but we also need to ensure that we equip employees to be able to trust their employer and to be able to go to them without fear that they could lose their job just because they say, "I have an illness."

17:17

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):** I join Liam McArthur in welcoming this year's mental health awareness week, which offers us a chance to challenge the stigma that still surrounds mental health issues and to focus on the particular issue of the effect of stigma in the workplace. I am glad that we also have an opportunity today to highlight the efforts of see me over many years to tackle the lack of understanding surrounding mental health issues.

The see me campaign was launched in October 2002, and over the past 13 years it has worked tirelessly to protect the rights of those who live with mental ill health and to bring an end to the discrimination that so often excludes them from the everyday activities that we take for granted. Work is such an activity. The ability to contribute and feel included and, more important, accepted as an individual is a fundamental human need. This starts with tackling ignorance towards mental health conditions and encouraging a more tolerant workplace where employees feel able to discuss any emotional issues with colleagues.

As the UK charity Mind points out,

"employment is more than just a way of earning a living: it provides identity, contact and friendship with other people, a way of putting structure in your life, and an opportunity to meet goals and to contribute."

See me's most recent campaign, see me in work, aims to ensure that workers have more positive experiences when relating problems to their employer, thus changing the internal culture of the workplace to one of compassion and support. The programme will support organisations to improve practice on mental health and provide an environment in which staff are able to talk openly rather than living with their problem in silence, which not only leads to a decreased quality of life for the person but impacts negatively on the wider workplace.

In a YouGov survey of Scottish workers that was commissioned by see me, 48 per cent of Scottish workers stated that people do not tell their employers about mental health problems for fear of losing their job, and the same poll found that 55 per cent thought that employees would be unlikely to disclose a mental illness for fear of being passed over for promotion or moved to another post. The research makes a persuasive case for encouraging a compassionate workplace where feelings of isolation caused by poor mental health are discussed as part of establishing a resilient workforce. From the first job interview to promotion and training, employers must be given the necessary information to ensure that all their employees reach their full potential.

There is also the economic case. SAMH figures from 2011 suggest that mental illness costs Scottish employers over £2 billion every year. Figures from studies that were published by the UK Faculty of Public Health estimate that sickness absence due to mental ill health costs around £8 billion per year and that there are 70 million working days missed each year—an average of 2.8 days a year per UK employee.

The see me in work programme works because it puts the necessary information in the hands of employers and makes a convincing case for a better, more compassionate workplace. A number of employers are already working with see me to develop new programmes, including Network Rail, the City of Edinburgh Council and the Edinburgh agency LEWIS Creative Consultants. I hope that anybody who is watching today will look into the benefits of working with the programme and visit the see me in work website for links to the four steps that they can take towards a better, more mentally aware workplace. See me will support organisations through that process and provide updates, resources and essential reports that actively include staff in building a more understanding culture. That is a practical, proactive step that I know we will all welcome, as it will have many beneficial wider impacts.

There is no space for discrimination in an economy that must work for everyone. I support the motion and congratulate Liam McArthur on securing the debate.

17:21

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I, too, thank Liam McArthur for giving us the opportunity to debate mental health. I will not rise to the bait of political debate, but I offer a wee bit of advice as someone who has more grey hair than Liam McArthur has: he should wait a little bit longer than a week before he passes judgment on the Conservative Government at Westminster.

The debate gives us another opportunity to acknowledge the excellent work that is done by the mental health charities in Scotland, which contribute a powerful and well-informed voice on behalf of patients. Scotland is rightly given the accolade of being LGBT friendly, but in mental health we see the raw statistics that 48 per cent of Scottish workers think that telling a manager about a mental health problem could result in their losing their jobs and that only 22 per cent think that their co-workers have a good understanding of the importance of mental health. I think that we all need to take responsibility for those statistics.

I acknowledge the journey of Gemma Patterson and thank Liam McArthur for raising that matter.

The Parliament has gained an excellent reputation for equality and anti-discrimination in employment, last week receiving an award for supporting the needs of deaf people in the Parliament, whether they are visitors or staff. I call on the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, of which I was a member, to sign up to the see me in work programme, to undertake an online mental health check of its staff and to take action based on the results under commitment 2 of the programme.

**Dennis Robertson:** Did the Parliament not undergo a programme with its staff similar to the see me in work programme two years ago, when Mary Scanlon was a member of the SPCB?

**Mary Scanlon:** I do not remember there being an online mental health check, but Liam McArthur, who is currently an SPCB member, may be able to answer that question.

**Liam McArthur:** Dennis Robertson's point agrees with my recollection, but I undertake to follow up the matter with the SPCB and confirm that.

**Mary Scanlon:** I certainly do not think that there was an online mental health check.

I was delighted to be part of the Scottish Parliament delegation, led by our Presiding Officer, that attended Scotland week in New York and visited Chicago. I chose to have meetings on mental health with the health commissioner for New York state, as well as a meeting with Alderman George Cardenas, the chairman of the Committee on Health and Environmental Protection in Chicago.

If we can strip away the finances and the insurance companies that back US healthcare and Obamacare, we can learn from the American approach to mental health. Healthy Chicago focuses on mental health. Every City of Chicago employee completes a questionnaire on their mental health at least once a year. That has led to a higher demand for services, because Obamacare has identified mental health as an issue. The questionnaire is also used as an incentive for people to address lifestyle issues.

A similar process is in place in New York. We often think about physical health or mental health, but I learned in New York that it has been discovered that if people have good mental health, they can cope much better with physical ill health and long-term chronic conditions.

Work is being done in New York to look at support for childhood trauma, with support for the whole family. I was impressed by the priority work in Chicago to provide services to the prisoners in the county jail prior to release, which continues on release. There is also a mental health programme

that helps families to stop the repetition of violence.

If we put to one side all the finances behind American healthcare, we can learn from how mental health issues are tackled there.

Presiding Officer, I am probably going over time so I will say one more thing and leave my remaining two pages of speech for another day. We still work in silos in mental health. Dennis Robertson made a very good point on that. Indeed, many general practitioners do not have any training in mental health—some GPs have had some training, some have had significant training and some have had no training. If they are lucky, a person who goes to their GP may be referred after a few visits to a specialist, which may mean a 26-week wait. In America—I am not saying that its healthcare is all good—the psychiatrists and the psychologists work with primary care. We need to do more to break down barriers and ensure that, as Dennis Robertson said, we have early diagnosis and intervention. With that would come much more respect for the patient and the issues.

17:27

**Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab):** Good afternoon, Presiding Officer. I thank Liam McArthur for securing the debate.

Most people find it difficult enough if they have one problem at work, but if they suffer from mental health issues they have so much more to deal with. One in four people experiences mental ill health, so we all need to change how we think about people with mental health problems.

At some point, most people will suffer from mental health challenges and will struggle to cope. Mental health awareness week, which is in its 15th year, aims to encourage the conversation around mental health in order to fight discrimination and stigma and to promote good mental wellbeing.

Last year alone, more than 11 million working days were lost due to stress, anxiety or depression. The economic cost of poor mental health in the UK has been estimated at £100 billion. Businesses and organisations know the impact of mental health in the workplace but struggle to develop a mentally healthy working environment.

On attitudes to mental health in the workplace, it concerns me that only 22 per cent of people think that their workplace has a good understanding of employee mental health, while 88 per cent want to have a better understanding of their colleagues with mental health problems so that they can behave or support them appropriately. Therefore,

the see me in work programme is definitely needed.

The see me in work programme works with employers to develop resources, training and materials and effective case studies, and provides other support to employers. The programme also works with people with experience of mental health issues to further understand what activities can support the changes that are needed in workplaces to transform culture and make work safe for people with mental health problems.

The overall aim of the see me in work campaign is to support employers in making changes to their work practices to improve the working lives of employees with mental health problems. I encourage organisations to help with the development of this important new initiative, and I join Liam McArthur in supporting see me in work and wish it every success in encouraging employers to foster better awareness in the workplace and to help support people with mental health issues.

Mental health issues do not affect only one group of people—they affect people with disabilities, people from minority communities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds; I could go on. They affect at least one in four people. If those people have an additional mental health burden to deal with, the effect is quadrupled. They have so much to deal with that they break down, which affects their family and the environment that they live in, and they find it extremely difficult to cope.

**Liam McArthur:** The point that Hanzala Malik makes is underscored by recent research by SAMH, which identified that in the case of people with mental health illnesses from ethnic minority communities, and those in rural communities, the social structures worked against them being open about their illnesses, with the result that the chances of them seeking the support that they needed were even more limited. I strongly echo what Hanzala Malik says.

**Hanzala Malik:** Liam McArthur has summed up the point that I was trying to make better than I was managing to do.

I am over my time, Presiding Officer—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is all right—I will give you extra time for the intervention.

**Hanzala Malik:** That is so kind of you; thank you very much.

Mental ill health is a concept that is very poorly understood, and people do not understand the implications of it. People sometimes feel that they do not need support, but that could not be further from the truth. They do need support. Therefore, it is crucial that initiatives such as see me in work

are supported so that they can help our communities.

17:32

**The Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health (Jamie Hepburn):** I join other members in thanking Liam McArthur for bringing his motion to Parliament for debate. As others have mentioned, this is mental health awareness week, so it is right that we are holding a debate on the see me campaign on work and mental health.

The debate continues the attention that our Parliament has paid to mental health—I think that I am right in saying that this is the fifth debate that we have had on mental health so far this calendar year. I am proud that we have had so many debates on mental health. Given that it is estimated that a quarter to a third of the population are affected by mental health disorders every year, it is right that it is a topic that occupies us. We need to be as comfortable talking about mental ill health as we are talking about physical ill health. It is important that we ensure that the Parliament—which is, of course, the focus of political life in Scotland—is engaged in debating mental health issues.

However, it is not just talk that is needed. The Scottish social attitudes survey shows that mental health awareness activities are still necessary. The interest in mental health that is shown in the Parliament and elsewhere demonstrates to me that there is a thirst for such activities, and I welcome that.

Sadly, people still experience negative attitudes because of their mental health problem. See me's survey on attitudes in the workplace shows that fear is an issue. People fear that they might lose their job or not get promoted, and they fear that they will struggle to get a job if their mental health problems are known about.

That said, there are some bright signs. Nearly three quarters of the people who took part in see me's survey thought that someone at their work with a mental health problem would be supported by colleagues asking what they could do to help, and more than half thought that someone at their work with a mental health problem would be supported by the workplace to make adjustments to their workload to allow them to remain in work. People are keen to understand mental health issues. Many people want to do the right thing, and there are workplaces, colleagues and friends who are keen to learn.

Members have mentioned the YouGov poll—I have just alluded to it. Mary Scanlon was absolutely right to highlight that 48 per cent of people thought that someone at work would be unlikely to disclose their mental health problem for

fear of losing their job and that 55 per cent thought that people would be unlikely to disclose for fear of being passed over for promotion or moved to another job. More has to be done in that regard.

However, it is also important that we report the survey's more positive aspects. For example, 88 per cent wanted a better understanding of colleagues' mental health problems so that they could behave and respond appropriately. I think that that shows a willingness among the workforce to help tackle and reduce stigma.

People can be helped by the see me campaign's activities, which rightly focus on changing behaviours. As Malcolm Chisholm pointed out, the campaign was launched in 2002 with funding from the then Scottish Executive, and we still contribute £1 million per annum to it. It quickly established a reputation as internationally groundbreaking in its scope, ambition and delivery, and it has put the issue of mental health stigma firmly in the public arena.

The see me in work programme aims to help employers develop a mentally healthy working environment, which is important for those who are in work and the families whom they support as well as for people who are looking for work. Being in the right work is good for people's health; remaining in work aids recovery from a mental or, indeed, a physical health condition; and returning to work after illness improves health. On the other hand, long-term unemployment is associated with poorer health in general and, as we know, more psychological distress.

**Dennis Robertson:** Does the minister agree that a mental illness is sometimes caused by the workplace itself and that, in some cases, an adjustment needs to be made to enable the person in question to move on?

**Jamie Hepburn:** Yes. As well as articulating that being in work is good for a person's physical and mental health, I observe that, if things are not done properly and if there is too much stress in the workplace, there can be a negative effect. Nevertheless, the overall pattern shows that those in employment have better mental health than those in long-term unemployment.

Improving the working lives of people with mental health problems is the right thing to do, both on an individual basis and on a national basis, and developing mentally healthy working environments can support people into work and help them stay there. It makes sense to tackle the issue in a range of ways. Indeed, going back to Mr Robertson's intervention, I point out that tackling the issue is important for workplaces that might not be doing so well in that regard, and the see me in work toolkit contains a set of steps for employers to work through. Moreover, the see me

campaign has resources, training materials and case studies to support employers. I emphasise that, as the Scottish recovery network has made clear,

"people can and do recover from even the most serious and long-term mental health problems",

Employment and support in the work environment can play a role in recovery.

Structural changes in workplace attitudes help, but individual attitudes also need to change. Tackling stigma and discrimination should make people feel more comfortable seeking treatment for a mental health problem. The issue requires a structural response. Scotland was the first nation in the United Kingdom to introduce a target for access to psychological therapies for all ages, and the target for health boards is that patients must get a referral to treatment for psychological therapies within 18 weeks. Between October and December 2014, more than 30,000 referrals were made to psychological therapies compared with more than 25,000 in the previous quarter. More people are coming forward for treatment, and NHS boards are responding. Indeed, according to the latest data, the average adjusted waiting time for psychological therapies is eight weeks, and 81.4 per cent of people were seen within 18 weeks. That is some progress. I know that some boards are doing better than others, but I thank all the staff in all the boards who are working to help people get access to the treatment that they need. That said, I recognise that we need to go further still.

We are investing an additional £15 million over the next three years to improve—

**Mary Scanlon:** Will the minister give way?

**Jamie Hepburn:** Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes, indeed.

**Mary Scanlon:** How can a general practitioner refer someone for psychological therapy without being able to make a 100 per cent accurate diagnosis of the mental health issue in question? Psychological therapies do not work for several mental health conditions.

**Jamie Hepburn:** A range of options is available and a GP would not necessarily refer a person for psychological therapies. However, it is an appropriate option.

I want to pick on a point relating to primary care that Mary Scanlon made in her speech; she also mentioned it in that intervention and in the chamber last week. I recently had a meeting with the Royal College of General Practitioners in which we discussed the issue. GPs are, of course, trained in mental health; that is part of their core

training. They must constantly upskill and continue that training, and there is support for that.

We are investing an additional £15 million over the next three years to improve mental health services. The money will be targeted at a mental health innovation fund and used to boost staff numbers to address the mental health needs of children and adolescents. That spending is part of NHS expenditure on mental health, which was nearly £900 million in 2013-14.

Mental illness is one of the top public health challenges in Europe, and our work in Scotland across the sectors is key in meeting that challenge. We need the support of the NHS and the third sector. I am pleased to support the role of the see me in work programme in that regard.

*Meeting closed at 17:40.*

## Correction

Angela Constance has identified an error in her contribution and provided the following correction.

### **The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance):**

*At col 12, paragraph 4—*

*Original text—*

For the record, it is important to recognise that there has been no reduction in bursaries and, when we compare average student loan debt in Scotland with that in the rest of the United Kingdom, the average for Scotland is £7,500, compared with £20,000 in England in particular.

*Corrected text—*

For the record, it is important to recognise that there has been no reduction in the level of overall living cost support and, when we compare average student loan debt in Scotland with that in the rest of the United Kingdom, the average for Scotland is £7,500, compared with £20,000 in England in particular.



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