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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 7 December 2022

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

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture. Members who wish to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak buttons or type “RTS” in the chat function during the relevant question. I make the usual plea for brief questions and responses—I underline that request and give fair advance notice that I will intervene when it is not observed.

Cinemas and Edinburgh Film Festival (Closures)

1. Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any progress that has been made in finding a solution to save the Belmont Filmhouse in Aberdeen and the Edinburgh Filmhouse and Edinburgh International Film Festival from permanent closure. (S6O-01644)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Only a few days have passed since St Andrew’s day, which was marked formally in the Scottish Parliament for the first time, and with events elsewhere to promote Scotland at home and abroad. I take the opportunity to thank everyone who was involved and hope that all parties will associate themselves with particular thanks to our international representatives, who deserve our appreciation.

I turn to Foyso Choudhury’s question. Since the Centre for the Moving Image entered administration, the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland have been engaging with partners to explore options for cultural cinema programme activity in Edinburgh and Aberdeen, as well as for a 2023 edition of the Edinburgh International Film Festival. As the member may be aware, Screen Scotland has recently acquired the intellectual property rights to the film festival and is exploring the potential for a 2023 event.

Foyso Choudhury: I appreciate all the efforts that have been made through various avenues to

find solutions to the problem for Edinburgh Filmhouse, in particular, but its closure illustrates that the culture sector faces a much wider problem. The perfect storm that the sector faces this winter means that significant parts of Scotland’s cultural landscape are in danger of being lost—perhaps permanently. As I highlighted recently, that would be a great shame after the considerable effort that was made to get them through the Covid pandemic.

Will the cabinet secretary work to see that other institutions like the Edinburgh Filmhouse are not in danger of failure in the coming months?

Angus Robertson: In relation to the Edinburgh Filmhouse and the Belmont Filmhouse in Aberdeen, the administration process is on-going, so it would not be appropriate for the Scottish Government to comment on the proceedings. However, I assure Foyso Choudhury that the Scottish Government is continuing to engage with key partners on the matter and, more generally, in relation to the perfect storm that he rightly described—the pressures that the culture sector and sectors further afield are enduring.

I am meeting representatives of the culture sector literally every week to try to deal with this particular challenge, which the member is right to raise.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the United Kingdom Government’s shameful economic mismanagement, which the Office for Budget Responsibility predicts will lower living standards across the UK by 7 per cent over the next two years, is putting the recovery and survival of our cinemas and other culture sector businesses at risk?

Angus Robertson: I absolutely agree with Kenneth Gibson. The challenges that the sector faces, which are not unique to Scotland, exist as a result of spiralling inflation and a cost crisis that is hitting the culture sector, in particular. The UK Government has failed to get to grips with the issue. In addition, the pandemic has hit the culture sector harder than it has hit almost any other sector, so the UK Government’s decision to prematurely end financial support means that the sector is still feeling the effects.

Until now, I have not had the opportunity to speak personally with either the previous or the current Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. I look forward to meeting the latter next week to bring up those very points.

Heritage Sites (Reopening)

2. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to Historic Environment

Scotland to ensure that heritage sites are fully reopened as soon as possible. (S6O-01645)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government has substantially increased resources to Historic Environment Scotland in recognition of the impact of the pandemic on Historic Environment Scotland's commercial income. Over 2022-23, we will support Historic Environment Scotland with £60.6 million to maintain Scotland's heritage and historic environment—an 80 per cent increase on pre-pandemic levels of funding.

Historic Environment Scotland is working hard to reopen our heritage sites as soon as it is safe to do so.

Finlay Carson: I thank the cabinet secretary for his response. Given that he is rarely in the country these days, he might not be aware of the scale of the issue—of the great number of historic tourist attractions that remain closed to the public.

In my constituency of Galloway and West Dumfries, popular sites including Threave castle, Carsluith castle and MacLellan's castle, have failed to reopen since the pandemic, as have many others across the wider Dumfries and Galloway area, including Caerlaverock castle. It defies belief that so many of these historic sites—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please ask a question.

Finlay Carson: —suddenly pose a safety risk and do not make Covid the excuse. Given their huge importance to tourism and local businesses such as bars, restaurants and shops that rely on them—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ask a question.

Finlay Carson: —will the cabinet secretary provide a firm commitment to do everything that he can to ensure the accelerated opening of these buildings?

Angus Robertson: It is a curious thing, on one hand, to call for support for tourism and, on the other hand, to condemn those who make an effort to promote it internationally. [*Applause.*] That is a very odd approach to take. With regard to giving assurances about ensuring that Historic Environment Scotland is funded, and about the speediest possible reopening of historic and cultural sites, I give Finlay Carson the assurance that I, and my colleagues, are working extremely closely with the agencies involved to do just that.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): Is the minister aware that Linlithgow palace, in my constituency, which is the birthplace of Mary Queen of Scots and which, of all the closed sites, is the most significant in its national importance,

was previously fully staffed and had high visitor numbers? Can he confirm that it will be a priority for high masonry repair to enable it to reopen as soon as is safely possible?

Angus Robertson: I recognise the immense value of significant historic sites such as Linlithgow palace to local communities as well as to our national heritage and tourism. I confirm that a full inspection of Linlithgow palace is under way to inform the subsequent repair programme, which is likely to be significant at that site. Historic Environment Scotland anticipates that the inspection will conclude by the end of January.

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine regularly engages with Historic Environment Scotland about that issue. I will ask him to ensure that Fiona Hyslop is kept up to date on progress.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): What assessment has been carried out of the impact of the long-term closures on our national and local economies and, in particular, on our tourism sector, in terms of loss of finance and reputation?

Angus Robertson: Those issues are kept constantly under review. I think that the member appreciates that the safety of visitors to sites is the paramount consideration for Historic Environment Scotland, but I totally agree that the speediest possible safe reopening of sites is what we should all be aiming for. I am happy to write to Sarah Boyack to update her on any specific questions that she has in relation to the economic impact.

“Building a New Scotland”

3. Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when its prospectus “Building a New Scotland” will include a detailed plan regarding the economic practicalities of introducing a border with the rest of the United Kingdom. (S6O-01646)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government will continue to set out, through the “Building a New Scotland” prospectus series, what could be done with the full powers of independence. That reflects our 2021 programme for government commitment to provide the people of Scotland with the information that they need to make an informed decision on Scotland's future.

Carol Mochan: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer. Thousands of jobs across South Scotland, as well as millions of pounds' worth of business activity are dependent on fluid and unencumbered travel into England day after day. Explaining that and presenting a firm plan for any sort of border relations should surely be absolutely

paramount in the prospectus. Will the Government explicitly commit to presenting a detailed plan for how that will work before any further claims to hold referendums, or de facto referendums, are made? When can we expect that?

Angus Robertson: It is important that the record shows that the only new economic border in the United Kingdom is being introduced by the UK Tory Government, between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I note that the Labour Party has no plans to change that. I look forward to the lifting of border controls between Scotland and 27 European Union countries through our rejoining the EU, and I look forward to retention of the common travel area between the home nations, to friction-free trade in services with the rest of the UK, and to all necessary measures that will facilitate Scotland's membership in the biggest single market in the world.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the "Building a New Scotland" papers have, so far, clearly shown the scale of the damage that is being done to Scotland by Westminster's Brexit obsession—an obsession that is, apparently, now endorsed by the Labour Party in the UK?

Angus Robertson: The damage from the UK Government's Brexit obsession continues to mount. The Office for Budget Responsibility expects UK gross domestic product to be 4 per cent lower as a result of Brexit, in the long run. That equates to about £100 billion in output and £40 billion in public revenues being lost as a consequence of Brexit—which the Labour Party has no plans to change.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Very briefly, I call Willie Rennie.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): It was the cabinet secretary's First Minister who raised the prospect of border checks with England only a few weeks ago. We need answers from the cabinet secretary—not more bluster. The Centre for Economic Performance estimates that the Brexit border costs £210 extra per household. Has the minister calculated what the cost of an independence border with England would be?

Angus Robertson: I really look forward to debating all those issues with Willie Rennie when we begin the referendum campaign next year, which the people of Scotland returned a majority of members to this place to hold. I know that Willie Rennie has limited influence, but perhaps he would, nonetheless, use it to persuade all political parties, including his own, to allow democracy to take its course. I will then look forward to debating that and any other issue with him.

Independence Referendum (Supreme Court Ruling)

4. **Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government following the Supreme Court's verdict on the ability of the Scottish Parliament to legislate for an independence referendum. (S6O-01647)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): We have heard nothing from the UK Government since the Supreme Court judgment, but we would encourage it—again—to stop denying democracy and agree to Scotland holding a referendum to allow the people of Scotland to choose our own future. Not only was the largest-ever majority with a mandate to hold a referendum returned to this Parliament in last year's Scottish Parliament elections, but today we see in the latest Ipsos MORI poll that support for independence itself has jumped to 56 per cent.

Siobhian Brown: The Supreme Court verdict provides clarity on the question of Scotland's place in the United Kingdom. If a section 30 order from the UK Government is the most democratic route that is available to the Scottish Government to honour its democratic mandate, will the cabinet secretary join me in calling on the unionist parties in this chamber and in Westminster to stand by the principles of their own joint statement from June 2014, which said that

"Power lies with the Scottish people and we believe it is for the Scottish people to decide how we are governed."

Angus Robertson: Absolutely. Responsibility for the outcome lies with Westminster legislation and the design of the devolution settlement. As the First Minister has made clear, we stand ready to engage with the UK Government at any point to begin talks about the change to the Scottish Parliament's powers that would allow the Scottish people to choose their future. To continue to deny that is to continue to deny democracy.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Following the Supreme Court's ruling last month, there is no legal justification to continue to spend £20 million on planning a referendum that the Government does not have the authority to hold. Will the cabinet secretary therefore commit to redistributing that £20 million to support public services and those who need it most?

Angus Robertson: I like Donald Cameron personally, but politically I find it a bit difficult to be lectured by the losing party in the last Scottish Parliament election on what people did or did not vote for.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): You lost the referendum.

Angus Robertson: The Conservative Party lost the election saying that it opposed a referendum, and the Scottish National Party won the election.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): You lost the referendum. We said “No” in 2014.

Angus Robertson: We will continue to make all necessary preparations for a referendum on Scotland’s future, because that is what the people voted for. That is how democracy works.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that I am trying to get in as many supplementaries as I can, which means that there should be no shouting from sedentary positions. Members can press their buttons if they want to ask a supplementary.

Devolution Settlement (Equality)

5. Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether the current devolution settlement has led to a position in which Scotland is considered an equal partner. (S6O-01648)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): It is clearer than ever that Scotland is not considered an equal partner under the current devolution settlement. No matter how we vote or whether we elect Parliaments that support certain policies, we can be overruled or simply told no by the United Kingdom Government. Since Brexit, the Westminster Tory Government has taken back powers from Scottish ministers and the Scottish Parliament, and the trend continues.

Natalie Don: Now that it is clear that Scotland is not, and might never have been, an equal partner in this so-called voluntary union of nations, it is more important than ever that Scotland has a choice over its place in the UK constitution. Will the cabinet secretary comment on Gordon Brown’s recent rehashed proposals to make Brexit Britain work for Scotland? Does the cabinet secretary believe, as I do, that that underwhelming scheme falls very far short of the fairer, greener future that we could grasp with independence and restored European Union citizenship?

Angus Robertson: Many of the criticisms of the current constitutional set-up that are made by the report in question echo the Scottish Government’s criticism of the Westminster Government’s failure to respect the Scottish devolution settlement, the limitations of the existing devolved powers, the inadequacies of the existing structures of intergovernmental relations and the scale of regional inequality. All of that critique is absolutely correct.

However, I remember Gordon Brown saying in 2014 that, if Scotland voted no, we would live in a federation. That has not happened, and he is now promising even less.

Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill

6. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what response the constitution secretary has had from the United Kingdom Government to his recent letter calling for the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill to be withdrawn or significantly amended. (S6O-01649)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I have received no response from Grant Shapps, the secretary of state who is responsible for the bill, despite writing to him on two occasions. In a letter on 8 November, I set out the Scottish Government’s rationale for recommending that the Scottish Parliament withhold consent for the bill. I wrote to him again on 15 November, calling for the bill to be withdrawn but proposing amendments to limit the damage to Scotland, should it proceed.

I have been assured by the UK Government on several occasions that the Sewel convention will be observed in respect of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill, yet the minister has not replied and our proposed amendments were voted down in the House of Commons.

Jackie Dunbar: During last week’s debate on the bill, the Parliament agreed overwhelmingly that the Tories’ bonfire of European Union law threatens vital protections, creates enormous uncertainty and undermines devolution, and should therefore be scrapped. Will the cabinet secretary assure members that he will highlight the Scottish Parliament’s rejection of the so-called Brexit freedoms bill when he deals with his UK Government counterparts?

Angus Robertson: I will, and I have done so at every possible opportunity. I take the opportunity to welcome the Scottish Parliament’s support for our rejection of the bill. The bill and the attitude of the UK Government pose an existential threat to devolution and will wreak havoc across a swathe of vital sectors. It should be withdrawn.

The UK Government has chosen to introduce the bill, but the Scottish Government does not want it, and following last week’s vote, it is clear that the Scottish Parliament does not want it, either.

Scottish Independence (Support)

7. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to build support for Scottish independence. (S6O-01650)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Recent polling is very encouraging—in fact, today’s polling is extremely encouraging—and suggests that there is greater support for independence than there is for the union. We should not forget that the independence issue was fully aired in last year’s election, when the people elected to the Scottish Parliament a majority of members who are in favour of another referendum—a majority that is greater than the majority for a mandate in the 2011 election.

Through the “Building a New Scotland” prospectus series, the Scottish Government will continue to set out what could be done with the full powers of independence.

Graeme Dey: Has the cabinet secretary considered casting his eye inwards to this place and the potential that exists here, in Parliament, to grow support for independence beyond the 56 per cent of people that today’s poll reveals are in favour of it? A parliamentary motion that was lodged by a Labour MSP in September to mark celebrations in Scotland of the 75th anniversary of Indian independence was supported by seven Conservative members and four Labour members. Another parliamentary motion that was lodged by the same member back in March to mark the 51st anniversary of Bangladesh gaining its independence from Pakistan was signed by nine Conservative members and eight Labour members.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is beyond belief that those members, who would rightly celebrate independence for India and Bangladesh, oppose Scotland even having the chance to vote on the matter in a referendum?

Angus Robertson: I take the opportunity to congratulate India and Bangladesh on their independence. While I am at it, I congratulate another northern European nation of 5 million people—Finland—which celebrated its independence day yesterday.

I am very much in favour of our trying to reach colleagues in other parties and voters from other parties. When the referendum starts, I am sure that there will be a great number who voted no in the most recent Scottish independence referendum who will vote yes when the referendum comes.

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): There is global inflation and a cost of living crisis. Families, workers and businesses are struggling with bills. Our public services need investment, our hospitals need support and our schools need funding. Those are the top priorities for people across Ayrshire and all of Scotland, and another referendum is the last thing that people need right

now. Will the cabinet secretary scrap the £20 million of funding that the Government has reserved for a referendum next year and focus instead on people’s real priorities? *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would appreciate it if colleagues would respect those who are asking questions as well as those who are giving the answers.

Angus Robertson: I say with the greatest respect that all the current economic and social challenges that are being faced are actually arguments for Scotland becoming an independent country.

The Conservative colleague and I are going to disagree in our views on this matter. However, as I have done a number of times in this place, I would appeal to colleagues, as fellow democrats: do not stand in the way of people having their say. The people voted in an election last year to return to this place a majority so that a referendum could take place. Let us agree as democrats that the people should be able to have their say. We may be on different sides of the argument on whether to vote yes or no, but in a democracy, and as democrats, we should agree that the people should be able to decide. They should have their say.

Ukrainians in Scotland (Support)

8. **Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it is supporting Ukrainians in Scotland, in light of the war with Russia entering the winter months. (S6O-01651)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): With more than 21,500 arrivals from Ukraine with a Scottish sponsor, Scotland continues to provide sanctuary to more displaced people from Ukraine per head of population than any other part of the United Kingdom does. We continue to support the thousands of displaced people who are already here, and those who continue to arrive. That includes taking action to provide displaced people with a range of information, as early as possible, to help to inform their employment decisions. We are also working with local authorities and partners to understand the needs of Ukrainian children and ensure that they can access appropriate education.

Bob Doris: I thank the cabinet secretary for outlining Scotland’s significant contribution to international efforts to support families from Ukraine. That includes the temporary use of a cruise ship, the MS *Ambition*, on the Clyde, to accommodate more than 1,000 Ukrainians, many of whom are children. Although I understand that

matters may be improving, I have corresponded with minister Neil Gray over concerns about access to services from the national health service and transport for children who are attending schools in Glasgow. What update can the cabinet secretary provide on that? How are such matters monitored?

Angus Robertson: For guests on board the MS Ambition, our priority is to ensure that they get the support and access to services that they need ahead of moving into appropriate longer-term accommodation. In relation to general practitioner services, we have issued guidance to health boards setting out our expectation that displaced people from Ukraine have access to GP practices.

It is vital that Ukrainian children and young people access education, which is why we work closely with Glasgow City Council and the ship's management to ensure that a reliable system is in place to transport Ukrainians to a variety of schools across Glasgow.

If the member has any further questions or issues that he wishes me to raise, I will make sure that the minister responsible, Neil Gray, answers them as a priority.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a couple of supplementaries that I am keen to get in, but they will need to be brief, as will the responses.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Several cases of scarlet fever have been reported aboard the MS Ambition in Glasgow, which, as we have heard, is currently housing up to 1,750 Ukrainian refugees. That is a serious risk to the health of the people who are now forced to remain in what was intended to be temporary accommodation. What urgent action will the Scottish Government take to address that?

Angus Robertson: My understanding is that the issue has been fully addressed and that there are no current health issues of the type that the member outlined. If the member wishes Neil Gray to reply to her with greater detail about the case, I will be happy to ask him to do so.

In this kind of context, it is important that unwarranted fears about health or any other issues are not raised. The provision of health and other support services to people in times of need and duress are very sensitive matters. My understanding is that there are no current health concerns of the type that the member outlined, but I will make sure that Neil Gray writes to her, so that she is fully assured on the matter.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I share cross-party colleagues' concerns about Ukrainian refugees in cruise ships and reported cases of illness. How will the Scottish Government

ensure effective infection control to protect refugees from disease? What action is it taking to secure suitable housing for refugees as soon as possible?

Angus Robertson: In a previous answer, I drew members' attention to a range of interventions in relation to health and education. If the member wishes to highlight specific issues that I did not cover, I encourage her to get in touch with my ministerial colleague; he will reply to her as a priority.

I hope that everyone appreciates that doing everything that can possibly be done to help and support Ukrainian refugees is the aim of this Government—as, I believe, it is the aim of all members in this Parliament. Together, we will try to ensure that all the appropriate services—and safeguards; the member raised health safeguards—are put in place to help and support those people in their time of need.

Justice and Veterans

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to portfolio questions on justice and veterans. I make the same plea that members who wish to ask a supplementary question press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. Again, there is a lot of interest, so I would appreciate succinct questions and succinct responses, as far as possible.

Police Officer Numbers (Edinburgh)

1. **Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps are being taken to increase the allocation of police officers in Edinburgh. (S6O-01652)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government remains committed to working closely with the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland to support delivery of the joint policing strategy, to ensure that we continue to have safe, protected and resilient communities.

Although local deployment is a matter for the chief constable, Scotland's national police service allows local divisions across the country to access specialist expertise and resources at regional and national levels, depending on demand.

Local police divisions across Scotland have a core complement of officers who are dedicated to community and response policing.

Miles Briggs: Scottish Government figures show that, in the third quarter of 2022, the number of police officers in Scotland is at its lowest level in 14 years. In Edinburgh, there are estimated to be more than 100 fewer officers than there should be, given Edinburgh's population share.

Does the cabinet secretary recognise the situation in the capital, which has some of the lowest police levels that we have ever had? Will Edinburgh receive its fair share of police resourcing, to help to turn the situation around?

Keith Brown: We have ensured that not just Edinburgh but the entire nation has received the appropriate level of resourcing from Police Scotland—indeed, above the levels that the Conservative Party has demanded in the past.

It is worth noting—because a cross-border comparison was drawn last week by Miles Briggs’s colleague Jamie Greene—that we have far more police officers per capita than there are elsewhere and that police officers are better paid here than they are elsewhere, with a starting constable earning £5,000 per year more. We have a record low number of homicides, and we have some record low levels of crime.

To me, all of that is a mark of success. It would be good if, for once, instead of constantly denigrating Police Scotland, members acknowledged Police Scotland’s achievements in driving down crime and acknowledged the higher levels of policing and police pay that we have in Scotland.

Women and Girls Experiencing Sexual Violence (Glasgow)

2. **Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it can take to help women and girls experiencing sexual violence in Glasgow. (S6O-01653)

The Minister for Community Safety (Elena Whitham): Violence against women and girls is a fundamental violation of human rights and is totally unacceptable. We will continue to prioritise support for victims of sexual crime and to strengthen the rights and improve the experiences of survivors in the criminal justice system.

We will also continue to work to prevent such offending in the first place, through implementation of our equally safe strategy.

Our delivering equally safe fund provides £2.7 million over the next two years to services in Glasgow, to enable an integrated response to women and girls who are affected by sexual violence and abuse. Those services include Glasgow and Clyde Rape Crisis, Say Women and the Sandyford clinic, as well as the Glasgow East Women’s Aid, Glasgow Women’s Aid and Hemat Gryffe centres.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I recently visited Glasgow and Clyde Rape Crisis. Such service providers need proper funding to enable them to help as many women and girls as possible. I welcome the indication of the funding that the

minister gave, but most funding that such services receive is project based and often does not cover the cost of transport for women who need to access services, or the cost of interpreters for migrant and refugee women.

Services also say that a lack of funding means that there is an impact on waiting times for services. There is now a six-month wait in Glasgow.

Will the Scottish Government commit to addressing those concerns for organisations that provide vital services for women and girls who are experiencing sexual violence?

Elena Whitham: Like Pam Duncan-Glancy, I recognise the funding issues. The Scottish Government has committed to increasing multiyear funding for the third sector and, where possible, we will do so. Our ability to fulfil our devolved responsibilities remains a significant challenge due to the United Kingdom’s budget approach, but we want to ensure that the funding that is provided works most effectively to improve outcomes for women who use those vital services. We have therefore engaged in an independent strategic review of funding to tackle violence against women and girls, which is chaired by Lesley Irvine. The review is currently under way and we will report on its recommendations by mid-2023.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Police Scotland recently smashed a sex-trafficking gang, with four members jailed for more than 30 years. It is shocking to hear of women being sold on a Glasgow street for £10,000, but, today, in Glasgow and across Scotland, vulnerable women continue to be treated like commodities. What is being done to tackle that evil trade, and what would the minister say to the men who fuel it?

Elena Whitham: We have to look at misogyny in its entirety. That is a driving force behind how we will tackle these issues. The UK Government’s approach to migration is to create a hostile environment, which promotes trafficking people across borders. We have to look at the issue in the round across Scotland and the UK, because, fundamentally, we have to challenge men’s demand and provide services for women who find themselves in that situation.

Jury Service (Support for Parents)

3. **Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports parents who are required for jury service with childcare. (S6O-01654)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): Court operational matters, including the system and arrangements for jury service, fall within the remit of the

independent Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service.

Jury service is a public duty that many people in Scotland may be called upon to perform, and I am grateful to those who perform that important civic duty. Jurors in Scotland may be entitled to a range of expenses, including childminding and dependent adult carer expenses, travel, subsistence and loss of earnings. Further detail on those allowances, including any limits, can be found on the Scottish Courts and Tribunals website.

Neil Bibby: We all recognise our responsibility to make our legal system work despite the inconvenience that jury duty can cause people in their busy lives. It can put a particular strain on parents who are juggling childcare. A constituent of mine was asked to attend court for jury duty in the week before Christmas, at the start of school holidays, and was told that their childcare costs would be covered only up to £6 an hour for a registered childminder. That is less than the minimum wage. At a time when families are struggling and the childminding workforce has declined by 34 per cent, can the minister tell my constituent how she and other parents are supposed to carry out jury duty without adequate childcare support, and does the minister agree that that support should be reviewed?

Keith Brown: Neil Bibby will have heard me say in my original answer that that is a matter for the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, which is independent of Government. If jurors do not normally employ a childminder or other child carer for the period of their jury duty, they may submit a claim to SCTS to recover those costs. If they normally employ a childminder or carer, SCTS will pay the allowance if court attendance means that jurors have to employ them for longer than usual. *[Interruption.]* If Neil Bibby wants to listen to the answer, I am happy to continue to try to provide more information.

I am sure that his question has been heard by, or will be passed on to, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, and I am happy to ask it to provide a further response. The issue that the member raises is a matter for the SCTS. I am happy to involve myself in any correspondence on any issue that the member wants to ask further questions on, but he might be best to take the matter up directly with the SCTS.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): Accessibility is a core feature of justice reform. With that in mind, what changes is the Scottish Government making to the justice system to make it more accessible for families and children?

Keith Brown: One example of how we are trying to do exactly that is the revised “Bairns’

Hoose—Scottish Barnahus: vision, values and approach”, which sets out how Barnahus should be implemented in Scotland. That is about making sure that, when children enter the justice system, we have the appropriate model for the delivery of justice, care and recovery for children who have experienced trauma. The bairns’ hoose will build on the Scottish child interview model for joint investigative interviews, which is being rolled out across Scotland, and is supported by £2 million of Scottish Government funding. That promotes best practice to secure children’s best evidence at the earliest opportunity, and it minimises the risk of further re-traumatisation.

Asbestos Exposure (Compensation)

4. Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it continues to review the effectiveness of the legal route to compensation for people who have been affected by asbestos exposure. (S6O-01655)

The Minister for Community Safety (Elena Whitham): The Scottish Government constantly keeps the law under review. On the specific issue of compensation for asbestos victims, the Scottish Law Commission recently closed its consultation, which explored the matter of provisional damages in personal injury cases. That included specific questions on the difficulties around raising legal proceedings in cases of asbestos-related disease. The Scottish Government will give due consideration to any recommendations that the SLC may make once it reports.

In the programme for government 2021-22, the Scottish Government has already committed to giving consideration to implementing any recommendations in this parliamentary session.

Marie McNair: The minister will be aware that a failure to lodge a claim for pleural plaques within a three-year time limit may bar subsequent claims relating to more serious and life-threatening illnesses such as mesothelioma. Does she share my concerns about the potential for many asbestos victims to lose out and be denied the justice that they deserve? There is evidence to support a different approach to the time bar being considered in these cases. Will she meet me, the Clydebank Asbestos Group and others to hear about their experiences and to discuss how to address the obvious injustice?

Elena Whitham: I recognise the difficulties involved when raising legal proceedings in asbestos-related injury cases. The Scottish Law Commission has done an excellent job in setting out those difficulties and consulting on a number of potential solutions.

I am happy to meet the member and others to listen to their experiences. Like many, I have

family connections to the Clyde shipbuilding heritage and know only too well the lasting impact that asbestos can have.

Security Cameras (Companies Subject to Chinese National Intelligence Law)

5. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is regarding the impact in Scotland of the United Kingdom Government decision to restrict the use of security cameras made by companies subject to Chinese national intelligence law. (S6O-01656)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): It may be useful to set out the exact decision of the UK Government, which was to restrict the use of surveillance technology made by companies subject to Chinese national intelligence law. That decision applies to sensitive UK Government sites.

The Scottish Government is in the process of replacing and upgrading security equipment across its estate as part of a multiyear improvement programme. All existing CCTV kit and equipment, including Hikvision and other companies' products, is being replaced with a new integrated system to improve and future-proof the security of the Scottish Government estate.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Scottish Liberal Democrat research that was conducted in September found that Hikvision CCTV cameras are being used across 13 councils in this country. The cameras are also installed on the Police Scotland estate and the Scottish Government estate.

Two weeks ago, the UK Government security group ordered Government departments to stop installing cameras manufactured by Chinese firms, including Hikvision, because they pose a threat to national security. Will the Scottish Government now accelerate this refresh of CCTV equipment so that we can remove these cameras from sensitive sites as soon as possible?

Keith Brown: The member referred to local authorities and to some Police Scotland sites. Of course, he will know that Police Scotland operational decisions are taken independently of the Government. It will be a matter for Police Scotland to take that decision. Also, given our common view of the autonomy of local authorities, it is an issue for local authorities to take forward as and when they see fit and in accordance with local priorities. We will continue to provide such advice and information as we are able to provide to local authorities and to Police Scotland, but it will be a decision for those bodies.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Senior Lib Dems in leadership positions dating back to the coalition Government days have

long had close connections to the Chinese Government and companies hired to promote its belt and road initiative, which is intended to extend and consolidate its global influence.

Does the cabinet secretary welcome the new Lib Dem focus on human rights, and will he encourage the Lib Dems to further distance themselves from China's oppressive Government?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am not sure that that is relevant to the substantive question at all. [*Laughter.*] Cabinet secretary, if there is anything relevant to the original question, you can answer.

Keith Brown: I am not sure what the hilarity is about. The Scottish Government has serious concerns about the appalling human rights situation in China, particularly in Xinjiang, and we will continue to raise those concerns directly with the Chinese Government. We are clear eyed about all its international engagement and keep all our policies under review.

We welcome and support co-ordinated international action to address the serious issue of human rights violations, such as the action taken by the UK Government to help to ensure that UK businesses and the public sector are not complicit in human rights violations in Xinjiang province and in China more generally.

HMP Cornton Vale (Replacement)

6. Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the construction of the new women's prison facility to replace HMP Cornton Vale in Stirling. (S6O-01657)

The Minister for Community Safety (Elena Whitham): The Scottish Government remains committed to modernising and improving Scotland's prison estate, with current infrastructure priorities being the completion of the female estate and the replacements for HMP Barlinnie and HMP Inverness. The contractor is in the final stages of completing the construction of the new women's national facility, HMP Stirling, which is due to open in the summer of 2023.

Evelyn Tweed: Can the minister provide an update on the success of the new community custody units in Glasgow and Dundee since their opening, and can she say whether any changes to the approach have been identified prior to the opening of the new facility at Cornton Vale?

Elena Whitham: The community custody units are the first of their kind in the United Kingdom, and I saw those transformative new facilities first hand when I visited the Bella centre last week. To date, feedback from staff and those in the care of the units has been very positive, and I can attest

to their holistic approach and trauma-informed nature. They adhere to our “Strategy for Women in Custody”, which was published in the summer.

I can also advise that a formal evaluation of the two community custody units has been commissioned and that any outcomes from that will inform future decisions on the women’s estate.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): On the subject of constructing new prisons, His Majesty’s chief inspector of prisons has said, quite openly, that if conditions at HMP Greenock do not improve by her inspection in March 2023, she will not hesitate in sending in the Health and Safety Executive to recommend its closure, which would come with devastating consequences. What immediate action is taking place to improve conditions at the prison to avoid the scenario where the prison will have to close?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Both supplementary questions veered somewhat from the original question, which was on HMP Cornton Vale. Minister, please respond if there is anything that you can usefully add in response to that question.

Elena Whitham: I am happy to engage with the member on that issue. I recognise that we need to look into it and do some immediate work on it, so I will write to him.

Veterans First Point Fife

7. **Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its work with Veterans First Point Fife. (S6O-01658)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that veterans have access to appropriate mental health support wherever they live in Scotland. This year, the Scottish Government provided funding of £658,000 to Veterans First Point to provide mental health and wellbeing support to veterans and their families. That funding is matched by national health service boards. Veterans First Point is also closely involved in work to implement the veterans mental health and wellbeing action plan, and it is represented on the veteran-led implementation board that was established by the Scottish Government, which is chaired by Dr Charles Winstanley.

Annabelle Ewing: The cabinet secretary’s official opening of Veterans First Point Fife, which is in the Rosewell centre in Lochore, in my constituency, was very welcome indeed. However, to help as many veterans as possible, permanent contracts need to be on offer to attract more clinicians. What can the cabinet secretary do, working with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and

Social Care and with NHS Fife, to ensure that that happens?

Keith Brown: I do, of course, recall the opening; it was a tremendous event, and it was much valued by the veterans in that area.

Veterans First Point is an NHS body that is staffed by an alliance of NHS clinicians and veterans. Veterans also have access to NHS services that are available to the broader population. Health and social care ministers and I are committed to continuing and enhancing mental health and other support for veterans across Scotland, and we are working closely together at ministerial and official levels across a range of issues.

In her first progress report since taking up office, the Scottish veterans commissioner, Susanna Hamilton, recognised the importance of, and the progress made to date in implementing, the veterans mental health and wellbeing action plan. Although it is for local NHS boards to determine clinical priorities and resources, I am happy to ask Dr Winstanley what discussions the implementation board is having about access to clinical provision as part of wider proposals for a new national service to support veterans’ mental health and wellbeing. That will also include third sector provision from organisations such as Combat Stress.

Police Officer Numbers (Target)

8. **Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it expects police officer numbers to be restored to the previous target of 17,234 officers. (S6O-01659)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): Policing is, and will continue to be, a priority for the Government. The latest data, from 30 September, shows a higher number of officers in Scotland than there were in 31 March 2007. There are now 30 officers per 10,000 of the population, whereas there were 24 officers per 10,000 of the population in England and Wales on 31 March.

The chief constable has the flexibility to develop his workforce in a way that responds to challenges by ensuring the right workforce mix. Decisions about recruitment are for him to take within that broader context, and I am pleased to note that Police Scotland welcomed around 900 new recruits this year.

Douglas Lumsden: Earlier this year, Superintendent Murray Main retired from Police Scotland and called on health and wellbeing services to “step forward” and ease the strain on Aberdeen police officers, whose time is considerably taken up by mental health concerns.

Due to the national health service crisis, police in the north-east are now the first and last resort for people with mental health issues and addiction issues and for those in need of hospital care. Is it any wonder that there are 884 fewer police officers than there were a decade ago? When will the devolved Government start listening to our police force and have the proper support structures in place, so that our police force can get back to policing?

Keith Brown: I assume that Mr Lumsden was not listening to my previous answer, which pointed out that we have far more police officers in Scotland, who are far better paid and have been more successful in reducing crime, and that we have record low numbers of homicides. The member has raised a question about what more can be done, which I accept. If the United Kingdom Government had not cut its police force to the extent that it has and we had therefore received consequential funding, we would have had more money to further increase the advantage that we have in terms of the number of police officers and their pay. I remind the member that a starting constable in Scotland is paid £5,000 more than one in the rest of the UK.

A superb job is being done by our police. I do not deny the pressures that Covid, the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—or the royal funeral have brought to bear on them. However, they do a tremendous job and are properly compensated and remunerated in Scotland, which is more than the member can say happens in Tory England.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary has outlined in several replies—which the Tories do not seem to want to hear—police officer numbers in Scotland remain well above officer numbers in England, where the Tories are in charge. Would he agree that the fact that Scotland has the most officers per capita, significantly higher pay ranges for officers, and high levels of investment shows that policing is a clear priority for the Government?

Keith Brown: It is obvious to anyone who is willing to look that, if we pay police officers more and we have more of them, we attach a higher priority to policing them some of our counterparts do. *[Interruption.]* I know that some members do not like to hear that policing is much more underfunded in the rest of the UK than it is in Scotland.

I have mentioned some numbers, but we have higher levels of remuneration right up to the rank of assistant chief constable. We have also increased police funding, year on year, since 2016-17, and we have invested more than £10 billion in policing since the creation of Police Scotland, in 2013. We greatly value the vital role

that our police officers play. In recognition of that, as I have said, we have ensured that they are the best paid in the UK, with starting salaries of around £5,000 more per year for a constable than elsewhere in the UK. The latest data shows that we have 30 officers per 10,000 in population in comparison to 24 officers in England and Wales. That shows the priority that the Government attaches to policing in Scotland.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): As the cabinet secretary knows, the modelling that has been carried out by Police Scotland on how it could implement the proposed justice cuts suggests a reduction of 4,400 in police officer numbers. At a meeting of the Criminal Justice Committee, the cabinet secretary indicated that he would not allow such cuts on his watch. Will he confirm that? Will he also confirm that those cuts will not be passed on to civilian support police staff, as has happened in the past? That will also have a significant impact on the service.

Keith Brown: Exactly as the member said, I did say that we would not be overseeing a reduction of around 4,000 police officers in Scotland. We have no intention of doing that. I do not recognise the point that the member has made about justice cuts. It would be useful to have that specified—what cuts to justice have taken place? We intend to ensure that there is a good budget settlement. Of course, we will find out more next week when the Deputy First Minister outlines the budget for Scotland.

It would be useful to have the Labour Party acknowledge the constraints under which we are having to operate. It is the same in Wales because of the UK Government's austerity policies, which are affecting our ability to do as much as we want to in relation to vital public services. We have no intention of overseeing a cut of the magnitude that the member has mentioned, and we do not want to see cuts to the justice budget.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): An internal police survey highlighted a lack of resources, a lack of recognition and a need for career progression as key reasons behind officers quitting the police service, often after less than a decade's service. Strain on the police force is compounded by proposed cuts to the justice budget. How will the Scottish Government ensure that officers have the support and resources to do their jobs and ensure that there is staff retention?

Keith Brown: A number of the points that Beatrice Wishart raised in the first part of her question, such as those about career progression and opportunities in the police, are matters for the chief constable, which we do not get involved in. The underlying point to her question is, as ever, about resources—that is perfectly legitimate. I am saying that my intention is to ensure that we do

not have to suffer as a result of the cuts that are coming from Westminster, the impact of inflation, which has reduced our budget this year by £1.7 billion, and the hugely increased cost of wage settlements this year. Everyone recognises that those are huge pressures. It is our job to do as much as we can to mitigate the impacts on our vital public services, and I am sure that that is what the Deputy First Minister will do when he delivers the budget next week.

Urgent Question

14:50

United Kingdom Climate Change Committee Reports

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Climate Change Committee's reports, "Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland: 2022 Report to Parliament" and "Scottish Emission Targets—first five-yearly review."

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): The reports that the Climate Change Committee published earlier today were produced under the provisions of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, and both were laid in the Scottish Parliament today.

I am grateful to the CCC for its latest advice, which makes clear the scale of the challenge of meeting the emissions reduction targets that have been set by the Scottish Parliament. As recognised by the committee, those targets are among the most stretching in the world, but it is right that we continually act in an ambitious way to ensure that we are effective in reducing our overall emissions.

The provisions of the act require the Scottish ministers to respond to the Climate Change Committee as soon as reasonably practicable. As soon as possible after we have considered the advice fully, I will lay a copy of our response before the Parliament.

Liam Kerr: Since the 2009 act became law, the Scottish Government has failed to achieve seven out of 11 interim targets. In 2018, the Scottish Government put more than 200 policies and proposals into a climate change plan, which it updated in 2020. However, when I asked whether it had costed achieving its net zero ambitions by 2045, the cabinet secretary told me that it had not and would not until a new plan was published at an undisclosed date.

I and many colleagues around the chamber have been warning the Government for years about the lack of evidence, data and financial planning around this issue. What has the cabinet secretary done prior to this devastating report, and what will he do now, to ensure that the Government's targets are realistic, backed by clear delivery plans and fully costed prior to launch?

Michael Matheson: I will set out the process that is already in place. The member made reference to an unspecified timeline. He might be aware that, legally, we are bound to publish an

updated climate change plan by the end of next year. That work has already started. It will set out in detail the policies that will be taken forward, taking into account the advice that we have received from the CCC today, and will clearly demonstrate the link between the policy and the outcome that it will achieve in helping to reduce overall emission levels.

The member will be aware that the CCC has also been challenging Governments across the UK. The report that he mentions is similar to the report that the committee issued with regard to the UK Government's climate change plans, which asked for much more detail on delivery.

I will give the member a practical example of our efforts to put those delivery mechanisms in place. In October 2021, we published our heat in buildings strategy for the decarbonisation of domestic heating, and, in the past few months, we have published a delivery plan that is directly associated with that, so that we can demonstrate the measures that we will take forward.

The member asks about overall costs. The overall cost of decarbonising domestic heating could be more than £30 billion, some of which will come from the public purse and some of which will come from the private sector. Work is developing in all those areas, and actions are being taken forward to deliver that.

I assure the member that the work that we take forward to deliver the new updated climate plan, as we are required to do, will take into account the Climate Change Committee's advice, and we will provide the level of detail that it is looking for.

Liam Kerr: I thank the cabinet secretary for his answer, but I noted the inevitable and rather predictable pivot to blaming the UK Government. The Climate Change Committee is clear that the Scottish Government has the powers to take action on decarbonising buildings, transport and farming, but it has not used them, so responsibility for the failures lies squarely at its door, no matter how much the cabinet secretary tries to suggest otherwise.

Given that the cabinet secretary brought up the issue, let us examine decarbonising heat in buildings. In the context of a £2 billion underspend and the biggest financial settlement in the history of devolution, will he tell us how cutting £37 million from the energy efficiency capital grants budget and £45 million from the heat in buildings capital grants budget will help to achieve the targets that have been missed so catastrophically?

Michael Matheson: The member might want to reflect on the comments that I have made. In my comments about the CCC's assessment of the UK Government, I was not blaming the UK Government; I was pointing out that the CCC

issued a similarly critical report about the lack of detail in the UK Government's strategy. That reflects the approach that the CCC has taken in pushing Governments to be much clearer about the delivery work that they are taking forward to meet their statutory targets. I have given a commitment to do exactly that, and that work has already started and is being taken forward.

The member specifically referenced decarbonisation of domestic premises. A number of factors are important in that regard. One is the decarbonisation of our natural gas system, and, given that the UK Government controls that system, it is as yet unclear when that will happen. *[Interruption.]* No, that is an important issue, and we are keen to resolve it with the UK Government so that we have clarity. That will inform the investment that we make in supporting the decarbonisation of people's domestic heating systems, so we need to have that alignment.

As the member will recognise, one of the report's key recommendations is the need for greater co-operation between the UK and Scottish Governments. We have been asking for clarity on the issue so that we can ensure that the £1.8 billion that we are investing in this parliamentary session in decarbonising domestic premises—a record investment—is used in the most efficient and effective way. That is why we need clarity on when we will switch to a decarbonised natural gas energy system. That type of approach will allow us to make the right informed decisions, so that we can make the progress that we—and, I am sure, the member—want to make in reducing our overall greenhouse gas emissions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Before I call members for supplementary questions, I note that we have spent six minutes and 53 seconds on three questions and answers. I have received a number of requests for supplementary questions, and whether I manage to take many of them is entirely dependent on there being brief one-question supplementaries and brief answers to match.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The report is utterly damning. Progress has stalled, seven out of 11 legal targets have been missed and a plea that was made a year ago for clarity and transparency has gone completely unanswered by the Government.

Let us take just one of many examples of failure: transport. The Climate Change Committee says that we will need 24,000 public charging points for electric vehicles by 2030. The cabinet secretary is proposing to provide just over 4,000 in total in the next few years. Does the Government even have a target for 2030, which is the date on which it says that Scotland will transition to 100 per cent electric car and van sales? When will the

Government set out a clear plan to meet that target for public EV charging points?

Michael Matheson: I am sure that the member will recognise that the Climate Change Committee acknowledged that, if we exclude central London, Scotland has one of the most extensive public EV charging infrastructures in the whole of the UK. As we have set out, we are investing more than £60 million—£30 million from the Scottish Government and £30 million from the private sector—on extending the EV charging network even further in Scotland to ensure that we build on the good progress that we have made in recent years.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): It is a hard and critical report, which assesses performance against hard targets that were set under pressure from, and supported by, all political parties in this Parliament. Will the Scottish Government set out which key priority decisions in reserved areas by the UK Government to reduce emissions in Scotland, together with its own required improvements in delivery, are needed to address the Climate Change Committee's concerns?

Michael Matheson: I can think of three immediate areas on which we need urgent clarity. The first is carbon capture, utilisation and storage—the Acorn Project needs to progress urgently. Not only is significant investment being put into that project now, it is mission critical that we meet our climate change targets here by 2030 and that the UK targets are met. Therefore, more dithering by the UK Government on that matter is not acceptable.

We also need further investment in areas that will support and ensure that we have in place the systems that will roll out our renewable energy programme much more effectively. That is why we need reform of the consenting regime, a key part of which is reserved to the UK Government, and why we also must ensure that changes are made to the way in which regulatory costs are applied to aspects of our renewables, which is acting as an inhibitor to further development.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Although the promises might be world leading, the report exposes glaring gaps in plans and progress being jeopardised by ministers' failure to co-operate at UK level or to give local councils a fair deal.

In the light of the CCC stating that aviation policy runs "counter" to targets, will the Scottish National Party-Green Government now revisit its support for Heathrow expansion?

Michael Matheson: We are developing an aviation strategy that will look at both domestic and international aviation. It will be published next year and will set out our approach to aviation policy.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): In the previous session of the Parliament, four parliamentary committees raised serious concerns that the climate change plan was not fit for purpose, so it was good to hear the CCC finally reflect many of those concerns in its report.

Undoubtedly, the new climate change plan must do better, so will the cabinet secretary accept that we urgently need to drive down the growth in aviation mileage and that no options should be off the table to do that?

Michael Matheson: Issues relating to aviation will be covered in the aviation strategy, which I have just referred to. I assure the member that the climate change update plan, which we have already started work on and which will be published next year in draft form, will make a much clearer link between policy and delivery outcomes and how that will impact our climate change policy overall.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the urgent question. I apologise to those members whom I was not able to call for the reasons that I made clear earlier. Before we move on to the next item of business, there will be a short pause to allow front-bench teams to change positions.

Scottish Education System

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-07111, in the name of Stephen Kerr, on the state of the Scottish education system. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

15:03

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): It is my privilege to move the motion in my name, which speaks to what I believe is the most important thing over which we have power in this Parliament—Scotland's education system and the future of our children and our country.

I have said before in the chamber that the gift of a Scottish education is the most prized gift that Scotland can give to her children, and that our education system is central to our national identity. Our education system gives confidence to our young people to move forward. It thrives on innovation, sparks entrepreneurship and extends equal opportunity to all—which is the very definition of levelling up.

We have an educational tradition that makes us feel proud of our Scottishness, which is why you, Presiding Officer, should expect to hear strong words and emotion from Conservative members this afternoon about how our education system has been maltreated by the Scottish National Party. Its end-of-year report card reads, "Must do better".

The Scottish Conservatives have education at the heart of our political philosophy because education must be a golden ticket for every individual to live the life that they desire to live. Equal opportunity to succeed in life is at the core of Scottish Conservatives' vision of the Scotland that we want.

Inspirational teachers are crucial to education, and the Scottish Conservatives are standing up for Scotland's teachers. I know how much I owe my teachers. Mr Mitchell, who was my history teacher at Forfar academy, fired my enthusiasm for history. Mrs Skinner, who was my English teacher, told us that, if we wanted to develop any kind of vocabulary, we should read *The Times* at least once a week. That was sound advice, indeed.

We owe so much to our teachers, but we also have a responsibility to them. For the first time in 40 years, teachers in Scotland are taking industrial action. They are frustrated. The teachers whom I speak to do not want to be on strike, but want to be in the classroom, doing what they trained to do and what they love to do—teaching our children.

However, they expect to be respected. They deserve to be treated fairly, and they have been waiting eight months for the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to get serious. Shirley-Anne Somerville has made a total mess of the situation. She has blamed the teachers, she has blamed the unions, she has blamed local councillors and she has even blamed the United Kingdom Government. According to the cabinet secretary, the only innocent party in the dispute is herself. A situation that should have been resolved months ago is unresolved, and the buck stops with Shirley-Anne Somerville.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Stephen Kerr has not yet said whether a better pay increase should be offered, although that is what he is implying. I understand that teachers have been offered a starting salary of more than £35,000, which seems to be reasonable. Will the member put a figure on what he wants their salary to be?

Stephen Kerr: If I was at the negotiating table, the dispute would have been resolved months ago—[*Interruption.*—]but the cabinet secretary with responsibility to be at the negotiating table has failed to resolve the dispute and is intent on blaming everybody else for the dispute, including the teachers themselves.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Stephen Kerr did not answer the question. If he was at the negotiating table, what would he offer, and where would he take the money from in the education budget?

Stephen Kerr: I think that the cabinet secretary might have got things the wrong way round. She comes to Parliament to be held to account by the members of this Parliament. I ask her: what exactly is she doing to bring the teachers' dispute to an end? That is far more pertinent than asking me what I would do. I ask, "What are you doing, cabinet secretary, to end the dispute?"

There have been nearly 75,000 reported incidents of violence or serious threat against teachers in the past five years, of which more than 20,000 were in the previous academic year alone.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): In February, I raised in the chamber a survey that said that nearly half of our dedicated hard-working teachers in Aberdeen were considering quitting due to the levels of violence that the member has just mentioned. A fortnight ago, I raised the issue of teachers at Northfield academy deciding to take industrial action for the same reason. While he was researching for today's debate, did Stephen Kerr come across any evidence that the Government is doing anything to help teachers in Aberdeen as a result of my questions?

Stephen Kerr: I think that my friend already knows the answer to that: there is no evidence of anything happening.

I will tell members what the current level of reported incidents of violence and threat amount to. There is an incidence of a teacher in Scotland being attacked or threatened every three minutes. By the time we finish this debate, 40 such incidents will have been recorded. Teachers who are striking at Northfield academy and Bannerman high school do so because they feel vulnerable, unprotected and unsupported by the Scottish National Party Government.

All that the cabinet secretary does is pass the buck. The SNP has cut deep into the resources of local government, and it is up to the SNP to reorder its political priorities, to properly fund resolution of the disputes, to end defunding of local government and to put resources back into the classroom.

There has been a 15.6 per cent cut in additional support needs teachers since 2012, despite there having been a 92 per cent increase in demand. Teachers are run ragged and are unsupported by the specialists that they need. What will the cabinet secretary do to protect and support our teachers? What will she do about discipline in our schools?

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Will the member give way?

Stephen Kerr: I will not give way. I have taken a number of interventions.

The SNP is leaving many newly qualified teachers without jobs. Of nearly 1,800 probationers from 2012, only 400 had a permanent contract last year, and 400 were so scunnered that they had left teaching altogether. That is a tragic waste of talent. How on earth does the cabinet secretary think newly qualified teachers can get on with the rest of their lives or plan for their futures when they do not even have a permanent contract? How does that make teaching in Scotland the attractive career that we all need it to be? Why is the cabinet secretary not banging the table to fix the problem?

The SNP likes to pretend that it is succeeding on attainment by focusing on the attainment gap, but, writing in *The Sunday Times* in June, Professor Lindsay Paterson criticised the SNP's approach and showed that the marginal gains in narrowing the attainment gap were only a reflection of

"a fall in attainment at the top end".

It is not so much about levelling up as it is about levelling down. He also said that today we know

"less ... about the performance of Scotland's schools than at any time since the 1950s".

The SNP has taken us out of the international comparison tables on attainment—it is so reluctant to face reality that it simply does not measure attainment. Therefore, I ask the cabinet secretary to commit today to putting Scotland back into those international comparators so that we can learn how we are doing for our young people and our children.

The First Minister said that her neck was on the line and that education is her "sacred responsibility". It is a shame that she did not even bother to turn up this afternoon for a debate on education, which is rare enough in the parliamentary timetable. However, it is no wonder, because what little data we have illustrates just how much the SNP is failing.

Fewer pupils at primary school are achieving the expected curriculum for excellence levels in reading, writing, numeracy, listening and talking than was the case in 2018. That is pretty much every subject area at primary school. That is not a debating point, or a matter to cover up or evade by dissimulation: it is a national disgrace and a scandal. Will the cabinet secretary tell us what she will do to address overall attainment in our schools, which has been made worse by her Government's inaction?

Another critical challenge that we face is availability of subject choice across all parts of Scotland. We are falling behind on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, with uptake of those subjects being at a five-year low. There has been a dramatic fall in the number of people studying modern languages, especially French, German and Spanish, compared with other parts of the United Kingdom. What is being done to recruit teachers in STEM subjects and modern languages? What is being done to promote and facilitate subject choice and to attract more pupils into those subject areas?

The First Minister decreed that Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority are to be scrapped. No one, least of all the leadership of those bodies, whom I have ever spoken or listened to in those organisations seems to be at all prepared to accept that they have failed. Now—surprise, surprise—those selfsame people are designing the new system. Only the SNP could create such a Lilliputian scenario.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Does Stephen Kerr agree that it was disappointing to see in the Scottish Government's announcement last week that the new body will retain awarding and regulation of qualifications? Where is the change and the hope for a better future?

Stephen Kerr: That is further evidence that the Government and the cabinet secretary do not listen. All the advice is to the contrary of what the Government announced last week.

What the cabinet secretary needs to understand is that being seen to do something is just not the same as doing it. I ask again: why are there 59 people on the reform delivery bodies—predominantly from the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and the SQA—but only three places for teachers? Why does that all sound vaguely familiar, like a game of musical chairs? Why is the cabinet secretary so afraid of new voices and new thinking in education reform? Did she even consider getting new people in?

Scotland needs teachers who are confident, held in high esteem and free to teach. It needs headteachers who are free to lead their schools and it needs pupils who are free to learn without disruption in the classroom. Scotland needs schools that inspire and uplift our young people to be all that they can be in life. If we get those principles right, we will succeed in vitalising our education system.

I hope that, when she stands to speak, we might see a cabinet secretary with some passion and reforming zeal, who will deliver an articulate vision of what Scottish education should be that goes beyond the normal SNP complacency and self-congratulation. Let us hear answers to the serious questions that I have asked in my speech and let her acknowledge the real challenges that we face. Then, let us work across Parliament to tackle them together.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that access to a first-class education is the right of all children; notes that teachers have been neglected and let down by the Scottish Government, that young people, from early years education to further and higher education, have suffered from failures in government, and that the people of Scotland have been let down by the undermining of an education system of which they were once proud; believes that, through badly-drawn reform, inaction and a failure to innovate, the Scottish Government has fundamentally undermined the education system in Scotland, meaning that action is required now to address these problems, and calls on the Scottish Government to urgently outline a new education plan with a focus on respect for Scotland's teachers, opportunities for its young people and growth for the whole sector, so that education in Scotland can once again be the best gift for its children.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Shirley-Anne Somerville to speak to and move amendment S6M-07111.3, for around nine minutes.

15:16

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Scotland's

learners, parents, carers and everyone who works in education have been through an extraordinary period over the past few years. They deserve our thanks and admiration for everything that they have achieved against the challenging backdrop of the Covid pandemic, the drive towards recovery and now the cost of living crisis.

Notwithstanding the significant challenges to our education system, I see first-hand examples, day in, day out, of teachers, childcare practitioners and lecturers who go the extra mile to support our children, young people and adult learners in their learning journey to ensure that they thrive and achieve positive destinations.

Scottish education is performing well and is continually improving, thanks to the hard work and dedication of the education workforce. Teacher numbers are at their highest since 2008, with the number of primary teachers at its highest since 1980. The pupil-teacher ratio is the best on record, and we have the highest spending per pupil within the UK nations. Moreover, the latest figures show that, at 93.2 per cent in 2020-21, we have more school leavers in Scotland in education, employment or training nine months after the end of the school year.

Progress is being made in closing the attainment gap and outcomes are improving. Scotland is the only part of the UK to offer the equivalent of 1,140 hours of high-quality early learning and childcare to all eligible children regardless of their parents' working status, putting children first.

Internationally, Scottish education is viewed as high performing by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which recently reviewed and endorsed curriculum for excellence. Meanwhile, the 2018 programme for international student assessment—or PISA—study ranked Scotland among the top-performing countries in young people's global competence.

Scotland leads the European Union in having the highest proportion of adults aged 25 to 64 who are continuing their education.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): On the PISA figures, does the cabinet secretary not recognise that there is a long-term trend of decline in literacy and numeracy in our schools?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I recognise that we are continuing to strive to do better in literacy and numeracy. The achievement of a curriculum for excellence level—or ACEL—statistics, which are coming out next week, will show how we have dealt with the challenge of Covid and how we are moving to recover from it. We need to do more in that area, particularly because of the Covid pandemic, but I hope that we will see improvement. In any case, we will need to wait for

the statistics to come out next week to see whether that is indeed the case.

We know that we can—and must—do better, which is why I have embarked on a wide-ranging and ambitious programme of reform. Even though we start from strong foundations, I know that there is no room for complacency if Scottish education is to improve and adapt to meet the challenges ahead. The world around us has changed beyond recognition over the past few years, and our learners and the people who support them deserve a system that is flexible enough to suit their needs.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): On that point, does the cabinet secretary not recognise the contention that people have made with regard to last week's announcement that the new exam body will both award and regulate qualifications? Where is the improvement in that decision?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: There is an important reason for that decision. Although I saw Ken Muir's point and where he was coming from, we must recognise that, in effect, his recommendation would have meant accreditation being moved within Government to be delivered by civil servants. Accreditation must be independent of Government. When we looked at the detail of the recommendation, we saw that some of that independence would have been lost.

Therefore, as we move forward on this, my challenge to everyone in the chamber is this: how can we make this more independent of Government? How can we take on the challenge that Ken Muir gave us? Unfortunately—and I say this respectfully—we will have to do it in a different way, because, if accreditation had been moved with regard to the new agency, as was recommended in the initial report, we would have lost that independence.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: If Mr Rennie will forgive me, I will make a bit of progress.

With the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, I co-convoked the national discussion on a vision for Scottish education, providing an opportunity for everyone who is passionate about education to shape a consensual vision for the future. I hope that Mr Kerr took the opportunity to take part in that; I do not know whether he took up the invitation, but it was made to party spokespeople.

I have been humbled by the number of children, young people, early learning and childcare practitioners, teachers, lecturers, support staff, parents, carers and others who took the time to

consider what they value about education in Scotland and to give their views. More than 5,400 responses were received, and 26,000 young people took part in online school assemblies, ensuring that the voices of learners will be at the heart of the reform.

However, although the national discussion is the biggest listening exercise that has ever taken place in education, listening is just the first step and, if we are to truly meet the needs and aspirations of our learners, we need to build a consensus for change. Therefore, although the national discussion will provide a compelling long-term vision for education, it is important that we immediately start to work towards that vision. As a result, when it is published next year, the vision will be accompanied by calls to action that set out short, medium and long-term activity, to allow us to start to bring the vision to life.

In October last year, it was announced that Professor Louise Hayward would lead an independent review of qualifications and assessments to ensure that our approach remains fit for purpose and to guarantee the best educational experience for learners. Understanding the views of everyone in the system will be vital in shaping the future of our approach to qualifications and assessments. Professor Hayward is engaging widely and a public consultation is under way. It is an important exercise, and I hope that as many people as possible will share their views. Professor Hayward will also consider carefully the views and ideas that have emerged from the national discussion and incorporate those, alongside her work, into a final report that I look forward to receiving next year.

The reform of our national bodies will ensure that our education system supports learners to thrive, providing them with the best opportunities to succeed. We are establishing three new national education bodies, and work is under way to design how those bodies will be structured. It is vital that the new national bodies reflect and deliver change in how our education system supports education staff and children and young people. For example, the independent inspectorate will be able to provide all those with a stake in education, including Parliament and ministers, with objective assessments and analysis of our system's strengths and opportunities for further improvement that draw on a sufficient baseline of inspections.

Stephen Kerr: Does the cabinet secretary accept the criticism that has been levelled at those piloting the reform bodies that this is the same crew who were in the key positions in Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and other bodies—and, indeed, in the Scottish

Government? Where are the new voices? Where are the new ideas? I also recognise that the cabinet secretary is seven minutes into her speech and she still has not mentioned the pressing issue of the teachers' dispute.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I have on numerous occasions made very clear to Parliament my position on the teachers' dispute. The last offer—the fourth offer—that was put to teachers was fair and affordable; the 10 per cent ask from teaching unions is unaffordable. Mr Kerr had the opportunity to suggest how the Conservatives would like to move forward with that and, funnily enough, he had absolutely nothing to say on the matter.

I will make the decisions about what happens in the reform process with regard to the national bodies, and I am determined to move forward with that. The target operating models that will be developed will, of course, be available to everyone for consultation before I make the final decisions on those matters.

For example, we will see a more accountable and more representative governance structure in the new public body that is responsible for education. We will see a new agency for education that will be about what teachers want rather than about what Government wants all the time. That is an important change that we will make.

There is also the consultation on our shared framework on the inspection of early learning and school-aged childcare settings, which is due imminently, and the work on the purpose and principles of post-school education. All of that, accompanied by the independent review of the skills delivery landscape, represents a package of reform, built around the national discussion, that will ensure that our education system is fit for purpose and fit for the future. Most important, it will have learners at its heart.

I sincerely hope that members from political parties across the chamber, particularly those taking part in today's debate, took part in the national discussion. They were all invited along to meet our co-facilitators and to take part in a consensual way so that we could deliver policy together. As I have said, I certainly hope that they took that opportunity. Instead of there being statements to Parliament alone, this is an ideal time for people to get involved and seize the opportunity to work together in a national discussion. I hope that members have done so.

I move amendment S6M-07111.3, to leave out from "that access" to end and insert:

"that all children, young people and adult learners have the right to a first-class education; recognises that there is much to be proud of and to celebrate in Scottish education; commends the hard work of all staff and teaching

professionals in Scotland's schools, colleges, universities and early learning and childcare centres, and welcomes the comprehensive programme of reform underway in Scottish education, which includes the National Discussion to shape the future vision for Scottish education, the independent review of qualifications and assessment, the establishment of a new independent inspectorate, a new national agency and a new qualifications body, plans to expand Scotland's early learning and childcare (ELC) offer, the introduction of a new shared inspection framework for early learning and childcare (ELC), the development of purpose and principles of post-school education, research and skills, and the independent review of the skills delivery landscape."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Michael Marra to speak to and move amendment S6M-07111.1.

15:26

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Today, we are debating Scottish education with schools across Scotland closed as part of the first on-going national teaching strike in 40 years. That disruption and loss of learning lands on a generation that has already lost so much to the pandemic, the real impact of which the Government continues to refuse to quantify and for which a new response is deemed unworthy of countenance.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Does Michael Marra agree that the achievement of curriculum for excellence level statistics that will be published next week, and the work around the health and wellbeing census, allow us to look at what has happened and see what action needs to be taken?

Michael Marra: Obviously, I have not seen those statistics. If the cabinet secretary wanted to talk about them in any detail, she could have brought them with her to Parliament today.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I could not. They are not published yet.

Michael Marra: Maybe the cabinet secretary has not seen them—let us wait and see what they say. I hope that there will be a statement on the statistics when they are produced and that we can have a debate in Parliament as a result, if she is promising that that discussion will happen.

Stephen Kerr: Hear, hear!

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is with the business bureau.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are three different conversations going on, which is two too many. Mr Marra, please resume.

Michael Marra: Strike action is a failure on the part of this Government. Its public pay plans and industrial relations are pitiful. They are characterised by bad faith and a lack of professionalism, which is illustrated by what was quite literally a last-minute offer—it was emailed to

the Educational Institute of Scotland at 4.29 pm when its pay committee was meeting at 4.30 pm. That offer had sat on the cabinet secretary's desk for three and a half weeks.

Nobody on the Labour benches dismisses the challenges of meeting public sector pay demands with inflation running at horrendous levels due to the grotesque economic incompetence of the Conservative Government. However, we should all expect those challenging negotiations—I understand that they are challenging—to be conducted professionally and in good faith. The cabinet secretary knows that a fair deal will have to be done, and the sooner that happens, the better for pupils across Scotland.

The warm words in the Government amendment about our teachers are not borne out in its actions, just as the list of working groups and reviews do not add up to a proper education policy that can transform the lives of our children and build the stronger Scotland that we need for the decades ahead.

In each budget cycle—we are in the depths of one right now—this cabinet secretary and her ministers comprehensively lose the argument for education inside this sclerotic Government. There have been cuts to school budgets, cuts to colleges and cuts to universities—and they comprehensively fail the test of leadership, too. Colleges are crying out for a decision of any kind whatsoever as to what they should be doing.

What do they get? A coherence review, to be followed by a statement of intent, to inform a purpose and principles plan—all impenetrable babble. What does it actually mean? I will translate: it means that the Government does not have a clue what it is doing.

That is illustrated by the fact that the skills review that is lauded in the Government's amendment is happening only because Audit Scotland was utterly damning of the lack of any ministerial direction. The Government does not have a clue about what it wants to achieve. The core STEM subjects that will provide the bedrock for any future prosperity are in long-term decline, with dropping teacher numbers, dropping student numbers and dropping levels of attainment. The situation is urgent—that is happening now. Where is the response? Unfortunately, the issue has been filed under "Too difficult".

The Government does not have a vision or a purpose for education in Scotland, so it is little wonder that the reform programme for our national education bodies that we have been discussing is collapsing into the rebranding exercise that we always suspected it would be. That process is being run by the managers of Education Scotland and the inspectorate and, of course, the SQA.

Maybe the cabinet secretary does not hear the young people of Scotland. I have been involved in the national conversation on a day-to-day basis—I have visited schools and spoken to teachers and pupils, and have engaged with them in the Parliament each time the opportunity has arisen. I can tell the cabinet secretary just how angry young people are about what happened to them over the pandemic. I am talking not only about the ones whose appeals for exceptional circumstances she chucked in the bin; I am talking about how they were all betrayed by their qualifications agency and by the incompetence of a Deputy First Minister who lurched from one mess to the next, time and time again.

Ken Muir was absolutely clear in his report, which we all said that we would honour, that public faith in the qualifications agency was of the utmost importance and that people must have confidence in the process and in the outcomes and the certificates that should be a passport to a better life. As Liz Truss learned to the cost of all of us, with any currency, confidence is everything. Ken Muir's key recommendation to rebuild confidence was to separate regulation and accreditation from the awarding body.

Therefore, the cabinet secretary's reaction, which she has laid out further today, is scarcely believable. Under pressure from the managers who are calling the shots, she bends to their will and refuses to take the key decision; instead, she backs the status quo and more of the same.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Marra: I will—in a second.

That betrays the same lack of understanding of what has happened that was displayed by her predecessor. They got it wrong—they got it all wrong, year after year, in the pandemic.

Stephen Kerr: I am astonished, as I am sure that other members will be, by the lacklustre speech that we heard from the cabinet secretary. Does Michael Marra agree that she seems to be a prisoner of the worst side of the Scottish education establishment?

Michael Marra: What I can say is that there is a real need for change. We must understand, as I think that everyone who looks at this in good conscience would understand, that the reform process that we are in cannot be a cosmetic fix. It cannot simply involve new logos being put on the business cards above the same old names. We cannot allow the new qualifications body to mark its own homework. The change must be real, and it could not be more needed.

Despite the Education, Children and Young People Committee's calls, there has been no

proper assessment by the Government of the impact of the pandemic, yet we see the consequences everywhere. Key groups of young people—pupils in P3 and P4 and in S2 and S3—are adrift, and teaching staff are struggling to cope. There have been riots in Kirkton in Dundee and Niddrie in Edinburgh and disruption across Scotland. Police have said directly that we have a cohort of kids who have lost years of structure and community, and love and care, as a result of lockdown and isolation. What have we had in response? There has been no concerted response and no support for our schools or colleges. We have heard not a word. Where is the plan?

Attendance is down across the country. Where is the plan to re-engage? East Lothian Council has started a programme with Edinburgh College to work intensively with families. What is the national response?

The future of this country depends on the decisions that our education ministers make. The greatest economic levers that are available anywhere are in their hands. We have a small window to make good the harm of the pandemic, but that window is closing.

I move amendment S6M-07111.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises that strike action by teachers continues across Scotland; calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that negotiations urgently progress to ensure a fair pay deal and minimal disruption to pupils' learning; notes the widespread disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic to education; calls on the Scottish Government to urgently carry out a full assessment of the impact of the pandemic so that pupils, parents and teachers can receive the support that they need; notes the increased absence rate of pupils from Scottish schools, and calls for an action plan to aid re-engagement; notes the decline in the number of STEM teachers in secondary schools, and asks for an update from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on what actions are being taken to reverse this decline, and believes that the Scottish Government should reform Scottish education by implementing the recommendations of the Muir report.”

15:34

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The poverty-related attainment gap is as wide as ever. Hundreds of teachers have been on zero-hours contracts for years on end and even more are leaving the profession for ever. We face an exodus of staff from private and voluntary nurseries because of Government-directed inequality of funding. There have been violent attacks on teachers. The number of pupils who are taking exams in STEM subjects is declining. There are big shortfalls in STEM teacher training recruitment.

Scottish universities are more dependent than ever on tuition fees from international students,

despite the vulnerability that comes with global turbulence, and they are losing hundreds of millions of pounds of UK research funding. The skills landscape is still being reviewed five years on. The higher education minister has been criticised by Audit Scotland for a lack of leadership on skills. Colleges still do not know what Government wants them to do. By having Thatcherite national testing and league tables, the SNP is ignoring teachers, the Greens and this very Parliament. The SNP still has not learned that one does not fatten a pig by measuring it.

We had a Covid exams debacle that undermined the judgment of teachers and condemned poorer pupils. Pupil equity funding has been used to pay the police, and we have underresourced reform of additional needs. The SNP is keeping the SQA and Education Scotland in all but name—they will now even share the same offices.

To top it all, teachers are striking on pay for the first time in 40 years. The last time was when the Conservatives ran Scottish education—four decades ago. It was that long ago—even I was at school the last time we had a strike.

The SNP is bereft of ideas. The vision that the education secretary set out today was a rosy picture, but it was so far removed from reality and the daily experience of teachers and pupils in this country.

All of that has taken place since Nicola Sturgeon made education her defining mission. Once the pride of the nation and highly regarded across the globe, our education system has, in the past 15 years, been slipping down the international league tables. Now the First Minister has made it a whole lot worse. The flagship education bill was ditched and replaced by a basket of contradictory and knee-jerk measures. The First Minister put her most senior ally in charge of education; now, John Swinney is back in his old job. Education was her number 1 priority; now, Nicola Sturgeon hardly even talks about it.

It is a terrible record, but it is not the Scottish ministers who have lost out—a generation of young people have lost out, and the SNP should be ashamed of that record.

Members know that I like to be positive. [*Laughter.*] We need an alternative approach to the miserable performance of the SNP Government. So, what to do? We must start by valuing teachers with decent pay, better working conditions and trust in their judgment with a new McCrone agreement: the same one that reformed the profession under the last Labour-Liberal Democrat leadership.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): The member mentioned

teachers' professional judgment several times. We are looking at a new national qualifications framework for attainment. How much should we move from exit exams to accreditation from teachers? Looking at that balance would be a positive, constructive contribution to make to this debate, rather than just offering soundbites.

Willie Rennie: It is hardly a soundbite to set out the atrocious record of the member's Government. He should be ashamed that he supports the Government day in, day out. I want to take part in the debate and I am listening very carefully to the approach that is being taken. There are innovative ways through which we can change how we do exams and qualifications and the years at which they take place. That requires decent consideration, but that is not a replacement for a proper strategy on the Government's wider responsibilities on education. We need to make the curriculum work with specialist advice and support for classroom teachers, which has been absent for years, since curriculum for excellence was established.

We must abolish national testing and reform exams and qualifications so that they match the curriculum. We must elevate the prestige of vocational qualifications, which we have tried to do for decades. We need to learn the lessons of Germany on those reforms.

We need to reform the age at which children begin formal education at school, in line with SNP policy—I seem to support SNP policy on that more than the SNP Government does.

We must create new national, independent education bodies, which have the trust of teachers because they are led by teachers, following the recommendations of the Muir review.

My colleague Beatrice Wishart would like the Government to explore making swimming a key part of the curriculum, just as has happened in England. That is incredibly important for our young people.

We must provide clarity for our colleges, with an urgent statement of intent that includes comment on their central role in training and retraining for the new, sustainable economy.

We must hold a national review of our universities and set a long-term, sustainable approach. We must create the new Scottish Erasmus without further delay, following the Welsh model—Taith—which is up and running and offering opportunities for young people.

We must reform the funding for early years, to ensure that all staff are paid fair and equal wages, no matter who their employer is.

Those are all positive proposals for our future. Liberal Democrats believe that education is the

great leveller, the opportunity provider, the economic driver and the society maker. That is why we need a Government that prioritises education—rather than the miserable record of the past 15 years. Let us have a change, with a new vision and new leadership.

I move amendment S6M-07111.2, to insert at end:

“; acknowledges the hard work done by teachers, support staff and all those working in Scottish education; affirms that this work must be properly valued, with teachers given fair pay and provided with better working conditions; believes that national testing for primary one pupils must be scrapped; further believes that pupil equity funding must be used to close the poverty-related attainment gap, not fund the police; considers that colleges urgently need strategic direction from the Scottish Government; further considers that universities need a national discussion to address current threats; takes the view that staff in private and voluntary nurseries deserve fair pay, and believes that Scottish education must be a new national priority to make it the best again.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Speeches of six minutes, please.

15:41

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When parents send their children to school, they want three things. First, they want their children to be able to read, write and count properly—and I will not let anyone tell me that that is old fashioned. Secondly, they want good-quality discipline, and, thirdly, they want their children to have a well-rounded education, inside and outside the classroom. Of course, all that depends on good-quality teaching.

I do not think that any of that is too much to ask, so, when Nicola Sturgeon told education leaders on 19 August 2015 that education was her number 1 priority, I agreed with her. I agreed even more when she reiterated that commitment six months later and told us that a new education bill was forthcoming, which would promise greater devolution to schools. Maybe—just maybe—the collective findings of the Donaldson, McCormac, Cameron and Bloomer reports into Scottish school education, which were all carried out between 2011 and 2016 by experts in their fields, were beginning to sink in.

Those reports had found that Scottish education, despite all the things on which it could pride itself, needed to be shaken out of its complacency and moved on. Incidentally, the Howie report had said exactly the same thing, two decades earlier.

Of course, the reports had appeared around the same time as the OECD, the Scottish survey of attainment, the programme for international student assessment—PISA—Reform Scotland

and Scottish Government statistics had all produced compelling evidence that Scottish attainment was flatlining and—worse—that the attainment gap between rich and poor was widening, thereby disadvantaging large numbers of young people, which was fundamentally at odds with the basic principles of good Scottish education that had once been renowned around the world.

Let us be clear. The principles of that Scottish education articulated well with curriculum for excellence, as set out by Peter Peacock.

I was even more encouraged in 2017, when Nicola Sturgeon proclaimed that, as part of the programme for government:

“A new education bill will deliver the biggest and most radical change to how our schools are run”.—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2017; c 13.]

In an article in *Scotland on Sunday*, Nicola Sturgeon went as far as to say that the London model of cluster schools was worth looking at, because it was delivering good results for more disadvantaged pupils.

John Swinney, reflecting on the poor performance of a particular local authority, told us that

“the status quo is not an option.”

What on earth went wrong in the SNP high command? Why, after the successive tenures of Fiona Hyslop, Mike Russell, Angela Constance, John Swinney and, now, Shirley-Anne Somerville, and after all the professional advice that we have received, are we failing to deliver better outcomes?

For me, it comes down, mainly, to three things. First, teachers have been significantly undervalued as key professionals. At the time of his review, Graham Donaldson had interesting things to say about that, particularly as he noted that too many teachers were reporting that they felt uncomfortable about gaps in their professional training. Of course, it does not help when the number of cases of verbal and physical assault is soaring, as Stephen Kerr has said.

Secondly, the Scottish Government has shown an extraordinary unwillingness to properly reform the education agencies. It should not just rebadge them—Michael Marra made some excellent points on that—or move the deck chairs around a bit, but properly reform them to reflect the support that is available to teachers. No one can argue that Education Scotland and the SQA have had a happy history in recent times. Indeed, when I was on previous education committees for a substantial number of years, hardly a parliamentary term went past without committee members’ attention being drawn to significant

problems in the agencies that meant that teachers felt remote from and frustrated by those agencies. That can never be a blueprint for a successful education system.

Thirdly, I want to mention lack of rigour, which comes back to the structure and delivery of the curriculum. Back in 1992, Professor John Howie reflected on the abiding strength of the breadth of Scottish education in relation to English education, but he also wanted to see a European-style baccalaureate that introduced much more depth and rigour to assessment in the Scottish system. We should have listened more to what he said.

The Scottish Government, through Mike Russell, attempted a Scottish baccalaureate, but it never took off, because of its weak structure and poor uptake by Scottish pupils. Part of that issue has manifested itself in the problems of subject choice, which was debated many times in previous Parliaments on the back of Professor Jim Scott’s work. In one of those debates, John Swinney told me that, if we counted the subjects that are on offer in Scottish schools, we would find that we have more now than we had before. He was right if he used that accounting method, but he cannot deny that subjects in arts, social sciences and science have been very badly squeezed, which has brought about further difficulties in the curriculum.

It is all very well having good skills—they are important—but, if people do not actually know things as well, those skills are not much use. There is no getting away from the fact that the quantitative and qualitative evidence tells us that Scottish schools are stuck in a rut when it comes to raising attainment across the board. That has happened on the SNP’s watch for a very long time, and the longer that the rut persists, the more it shows that there is a fundamental problem.

Far too many children remain functionally illiterate, which is a major concern to employers, and that is despite more public spending per pupil. However, it is not about the money; it is about the system. We have a huge opportunity to get our education system right. We need an all-round vision for Scottish education that will not only suit the economy but promote a fair-minded and ethical society in which pupils and teachers are valued for who they are. We need an education system in which every individual is encouraged to reach for the stars, and we need schools of ambition in which, every step of the way, we promote excellence rather than the lowest common denominator, which is far too often the trademark of education policy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that speeches should be up to six minutes long.

15:48

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I always welcome the opportunity to debate Scottish education in a constructive spirit, but I must reflect on the unremittingly negative approach of the Tory motion. There is such a lack of acknowledgement of the excellent work that is done by teachers, the incredible achievements of pupils around the country and the international standing of our further and higher education institutions. One must assume that the goal of such a motion is not to improve but to undermine, and not to support or sustain but to insult and injure.

As recently as 8 November, Stephen Kerr said in the chamber:

“We have one of the best-educated populations in the world”.—[*Official Report*, 8 November; c 79.]

He went on to say that we have always been at the forefront of innovation and development, but that is surely as a result of Scottish Government policy. I am not angry but very disappointed in the wording and tone, among other things, of Mr Kerr’s motion.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Kaukab Stewart: I am going to crack on for a little bit.

Education—in Scotland and the UK—is facing huge challenges, which have been made worse by soaring inequalities, the continuing effect of the pandemic, the appalling state of the UK economy and the devastating effect of inflation on Scottish Government budgets. No government can or should evade responsibility for delivering for its citizens but to ignore the context that a government is operating in, or the success that is being achieved in the face of it, is unacceptable.

The OECD values the Scottish education system highly, describing the curriculum for excellence as

“a holistic, coherent, and future-oriented approach to learning”.

Other countries are adopting that approach because of the value that it delivers. We must also remember that, across the board, exam pass rates have increased this year compared with the most recent exam diet in 2019, including A-grade passes; skills-based qualifications are close to the highest-ever figure; positive destinations for school leavers stand at 93.2 per cent; and nine out of 10 headteachers agree that improvements have been made in closing the poverty-related attainment gap despite the impact of the pandemic.

Michael Marra: The member rightly cites the challenges of the pandemic, to which I do not believe there has been any kind of coherent

response from the Government, but does she recognise the long-term decline in PISA outcomes for reading, mathematics and science that Scotland has faced for a decade under this Government?

Kaukab Stewart: I recognise that the poverty-related attainment gap is incredibly stubborn and requires measures that consider poverty as a whole, with social policy and health policy working with education.

I make no apology for listing policies that the Scottish Government has implemented to mitigate the effects of Tory austerity on education—

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Kaukab Stewart: I will continue.

The policies include attainment challenge funding of more than £1 billion over this parliamentary session; 1,140 hours of quality early learning and childcare; the roll-out of digital devices for every schoolchild; the expansion of free school meal provision; an increase in school clothing grants; and investment in the school estate. [*Interruption.*]

On the day that this year’s exam results were published, I read a tweet from my colleague, Michael Marra, who wrote:

“Congratulations to all young people receiving results today. Whether celebrating or slightly down at heart please know that there are endless possibilities out there for you.”

He went on to say:

“Your achievements are also masking real problems in our education system.”

I would suggest that young people’s achievements, far from masking problems, reflect their own efforts, the quality of our education system and all those who work within it. I would further suggest to Mr Marra that the “endless possibilities” that he refers to reflect the Scottish Government’s commitment to making higher education free for young people, supporting our colleges sector and delivering foundation and modern apprenticeships.

Michael Marra: Will the member give way?

Kaukab Stewart: I will.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Mr Marra.

Michael Marra: Does the member not recognise that the young people who are achieving those qualifications are doing so in the context of a decline in the number of teachers under this Government and a compression in the number of subjects that they can choose in their schools, as well as the huge impact of the pandemic? That is the context that I was talking

about and the challenge in Scottish education policy to which this Government refuses to rise.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was quite a long intervention.

Kaukab Stewart: The member knows fine well that we have the highest number of teachers that we have had for many years—since at least 2019, I believe.

Turning to our higher and further education sector—

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Kaukab Stewart: I am going to carry on. *[Interruption.]* Presiding Officer, I will continue in the face of—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Stewart, on the basis that the previous speaker went 45 seconds over their time, I will give you the same courtesy, so you have 45 extra seconds.

Kaukab Stewart: I am very grateful for that, Presiding Officer.

In 2020, the University of Glasgow was named *Times Higher Education* university of the year. It is currently in the top 100 in both *Times Higher Education* and Quacquarelli Symonds world rankings. This year, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, which is in my constituency, was also ranked as one of the world's top destinations to study the performing arts in the QS world rankings. It came 5th out of more than 15,000 university programmes at more than 1,500 universities.

The City of Glasgow College has retained its STEM-assured status for the next three years, having once again met and exceeded the UK STEM Foundation's rigorous accreditation criteria.

Having started at the chalk face myself—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Stewart, you need to bring your remarks to a close.

Kaukab Stewart: I do not want to finish without pointing out that I sympathise with teaching unions in their pursuit of a pay claim. I know that nobody wants to strike, and I urge all parties to work to find a compromise that is sustainable and fair.

I offer the Scottish Government—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Stewart, I have been very generous; you must conclude.

15:55

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, because I regularly raise issues about our current approach to education—not least with regard to education's recovery from the impact of

Covid, through my work on the Covid-19 Recovery Committee.

Scotland is governed by two Governments. The Scottish Government has direct responsibility for education—I will come on to talk about that—but we also have a Government in Westminster that has, in the main, direct responsibility for the economy. Therefore, having read the motion that was lodged by the Tories, I must say that I am surprised that they have done so without at least acknowledging the impact of failed Tory austerity on education, and of the current crisis in the economy that was made in Downing Street and is wreaking havoc on public services, including education.

Liz Smith said that it is not about the money. I respectfully disagree. The briefing that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities sent out today is very clear about what the detrimental impacts will be on education if the cuts that are currently proposed go ahead.

Liz Smith: If extra spending per pupil has always gone up, why is it that we are not improving the attainment level, if it is not all about the money?

Alex Rowley: I will come on to talk about that, but I have an example about class sizes. Last year, I put in a freedom of information request to Fife Council about the number of children in classes, which showed that some classes were way over the maximum. The data from Fife Council showed that local primary schools have 412 classes with more than 25 pupils in them and 136 classes with more than 30 children in them. When my granddaughter was at school and was struggling with maths, we spoke to her teacher about it and she said that the class had 32 children in it, so she just did not have time.

The Educational Institute of Scotland has been calling for class sizes to be cut for years and it is right to do so, but that would cost a fair bit of money at a time of further Tory austerity, which we face because the Tories tanked the economy. They have a bit of a nerve to come here and point the finger at one Government when, clearly, both Governments are responsible, and given the level of cuts that have been made.

It is a fact that, during the austerity years, the SNP disproportionately cut the amount of funding that went to local authorities. Given that about 50 per cent of local authority budgets go on education, it is hardly surprising that cuts have been made. When I was the leader of Fife Council, cut after cut was made as a direct result of the cuts that we faced from the Scottish Government, which had been passed on to it by the Tories.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am grateful for the opportunity to give some local government finance

statistics. They show that local authorities spent £6.4 billion on education in 2020-21, which was up from £6 billion in 2019-20. That was a 6.8 per cent increase in cash.

Alex Rowley: It is about having the ambition to improve education. I believe that education in Scotland has gone backwards, and I have heard that at first hand from the communities that I represent, but the cabinet secretary just shook her head and did not acknowledge that that is the case.

Children who go through the primary school system and then go to secondary school lacking basic skills in numeracy and literacy have been let down. They are deemed to have failed at every step of their way through the education system, and will come out the other side unprepared for the world of work. They then have to take low-paid, low-skilled jobs. I believe that the cabinet secretary's amendment does not acknowledge that.

The Government must address the teachers strike. A question was asked earlier about how that would be paid for. It is about priorities; the Government chose to prioritise other things over local government funding in the past. We cannot continue with the strikes that are damaging the education of children who have already been damaged by the effects of Covid. It is the cabinet secretary's responsibility to find a solution; she cannot run away from that. Our children need to be in schools, getting an education, and it is the cabinet secretary's role to address that.

I will make some points about STEM, which I have raised with the cabinet secretary on a number of occasions. In 2011-12, the percentage of pupils who were achieving a higher in mathematics was 24.1 per cent. That fell to 22.6 per cent in 2018-19. In biology the percentage fell from 12 per cent to 10 per cent, chemistry went down from 13 per cent to 12 per cent, and there were similar trends in geography and other subjects. We have to acknowledge that there has been a failure in STEM subjects.

I make that point not to criticise, but to say that, if there is a problem, we need to understand what it is in order to fix it. I say to the cabinet secretary that we have a problem in Scottish education. We need to address it; self-praise will not achieve that. She should acknowledge the difficulties, work with other parties and let us get the problems sorted.

16:02

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): In preparing my speech, I was slightly tempted to opt for a lazy cut-and-paste approach, because it is not so long ago—69 days, to be precise—that we

last debated education in the chamber. So much for education debates being a rarity.

When I read the Conservatives' motion, it genuinely felt like groundhog day, because it bears considerable similarity to Stephen Kerr's opening speech at the end of September. In contributing to that debate, I praised the approach that was being taken by the Education, Children and Young People Committee as a genuine cross-party endeavour to interrogate the condition of our education system in a balanced way, giving credit where it was due and criticism where and when it was merited. I bemoaned the lack of a similar approach being adopted in the chamber where, regrettably, oppositional politics overtakes an offering of measured and balanced analysis. I acknowledge that Alex Rowley's contribution stands in contrast to that.

As I said then and repeat now, on education as in other things, the Scottish Government is not perfect. Yes—sometimes SNP members need to acknowledge that: the cabinet secretary has acknowledged the need for improvement. However, nor is a motion such as we are debating warranted. By treating education as a political football, politicians let down those who are seeking the best from education—be they parents, pupils or professionals.

It is interesting that my contribution back in September secured a ringing endorsement from none other than my good friend Stephen Kerr. He said:

"I completely take on board the message that he"

—that is me—

"imparted in his speech."—[*Official Report*, 29 September 2022; c 99.]

Well, that Damascene conversion to adopting a considered and reasoned approach did not last long, did it? Here we are, less than 10 weeks on, and we are debating a motion that reads like a rant. That is in marked contrast to the positivity that I pick up on when I visit schools across my constituency. Of course, things are not perfect in education; there are challenges to be faced and changes that need to be made. However, there is much to celebrate in our education system.

Stephen Kerr: Graeme Dey makes a fair point, as usual. However, in my speech, I laid out what the problems are and asked what I think were reasonable and serious questions about serious issues, and I ended with a call for us to unite to work together. That depends on the Government's willingness to accept that there are challenges and problems that we should work on. We continually get nothing but self-congratulation, which does not create the right environment for a debate in the chamber.

Graeme Dey: If that is how Stephen Kerr interprets his earlier contribution, he is no loss to the diplomatic corps, that is for sure.

As I said, there is much to celebrate in our education system. Over the past few months I have visited a large number of schools in my constituency, and the ethos and spirit in those schools is in marked contrast to the depressingly negative Conservative motion.

We have heard a lot of negativity today, but let us look at something else. In 2007, when the SNP came to power, just 61.6 per cent of Scotland's schools were in good or satisfactory condition. The most recent available figures show that that number has risen to 91.7 per cent. That is a fact. In Angus, the amount is 94 per cent. We would all agree that good-quality teaching environments for our kids and our teachers are important. I have seen enormous progress being made in my constituency. In fact, Forfar academy—Stephen Kerr's old school, which serves some of my Sidlaw constituents—now has a brand new community campus and, at long last, we are in the planning process to give Monifieth the state-of-the-art secondary school that it deserves.

Let us be clear: the credit for those advances does not rest with the SNP Government alone. Those builds and others before them were delivered in partnership with local authority administrations of various political colours. However, I say to Opposition members that, if they are going to criticise the SNP Government's record on education, they should at least recognise at the same time the success stories, which include bringing in excess of 1,000 schools up to an acceptable standard.

We must also recognise that, just as credit for those advances is due jointly to the Government and councils, responsibility for delivery of school education—and, therefore, the accompanying credit or criticism—is also to be shared. The Government might set the strategic agenda, but local education departments and individual schools deliver it. If schools and councils are, rightly, praised for positive exam performance, it surely follows that, when things are not going well, responsibility for that also lies at their doors. I contend that that is specifically the case with regard to threats and violence that are directed at teachers and reporting of those events.

Although my speech has been largely focused on schools, I recognise that there is a bigger picture. I am pleased to serve on the Education, Children and Young People Committee, which has, in addition to the work that it has done over recent months on considering progress around the attainment challenge, been looking at challenges that face universities and colleges. I suspect that there will be future opportunities to explore those

topics in the chamber. I look forward to that and hope that we can do so in a measured and balanced way, setting aside the theatre that too often overshadows genuine interrogation of matters here.

In conclusion, I say to Opposition members that their criticisms of the performance of the Government on aspects of education would be more credible if they could occasionally bring themselves to acknowledge the many positive achievements. Their demands for money for education, in all its guises, at a time when the Scottish Government is under such pressure, would also carry some credibility if, once in a while, they would identify where the funding could be sourced from.

In the case of the Tories, a dose of self-awareness would not go amiss, either, given their woeful mismanagement of the economy and the impact that that has had on the financial position that the Scottish Government finds itself in, with all the implications that that has for education.

16:08

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): First, I declare that I have a daughter who is a secondary school teacher. If we are going to be thorough, I should also say that I have a daughter in third year at secondary school.

I am delighted to be back in the chamber debating education—a subject that, as many members know, I believe links directly into my previous portfolio: health. I have often said that I think that education is the solution to our health and welfare issues.

I have listened to the cabinet secretary and her colleagues, but I have to say that they are hiding from reality. Let us pause and reflect on what teachers tell us that they are having to deal with at the moment. They are way overworked, they are so bogged down with administrative duties that many have to work on into the night, they are short staffed and they are having to deal with a growing mental health crisis in the classrooms. Many teachers are going off with stress, heaping even more pressure on staff. It is a vicious circle that the Scottish Government does not want to acknowledge.

I spoke to a concerned teacher who said that the unprecedented numbers of pupils who are presenting with poor mental health is so high that they are worried that they will miss a sign, which will lead to a tragedy. That is a dreadful cloud for teachers to have to work under.

Education used to be the Scottish Government's number 1 priority. "Judge us on education," said Nicola Sturgeon. By any measurement, however,

this Government is failing our teachers and our pupils. We start from a position of having 815 fewer teachers than there were when the SNP came to power. Nineteen per cent of teachers are on a temporary contract, and that figure has risen steadily from 12 per cent in 2012.

I would like to discuss the opportunity to reset Scotland's education system so that we deliver skills and opportunities based on future needs. Given our 2045 net zero target, delivering on the economics of environment and climate change is important and it should be a priority. The green economy should be embedded in our education system but, on examination, we find that that is not the case. Scotland has some of the best wind resources in the world—there has been much discussion of that recently—but, in relation to the development of the technology, our wind turbines are imported and the servicing skills for those turbines are far too often imported, too.

Why are we not leading the world in the development of such technology? Given Scotland's long and celebrated engineering heritage, how can the Scottish Government justify importing so much of the green energy technology and skills that are needed for us to hit the 2045 net zero target? Why are our schools and colleges not properly resourced to deliver those skills?

The Scottish Council for Development and Industry report "Manifesto for Clean Growth", which was published in 2021, notes that shortages in green skills present the biggest challenge to clean growth, and given today's scathing Climate Change Committee report, which notes the lack of any progress by the Scottish Government on its climate change targets, perhaps it is about time that we started considering outcomes instead of creating soundbites.

In my region, engineering apprenticeships are readily available, but there is a lack of take-up, which means that companies are required to search overseas to fill apprentice places. Why do our pupils feel that they cannot fulfil those important roles?

It would not be right for me not to mention the importance of extracurricular activities. I often note that a big difference between private schools and state schools is that, if I walk past a private school, I notice that the pupils are tripping over cellos and hockey sticks. There is the same level of teaching and teachers, but those pupils have more opportunities. Scottish Conservatives would close the attainment gap by offering those opportunities for all. When will the Scottish Government work out that it is failing because of inequality of opportunity?

Alex Rowley: I say to the member that the statistics show that, in private schools, the teacher

to pupil ratios and, indeed, the support teacher to pupil ratios are far smaller than they are in our schools.

Brian Whittle: Alex Rowley is absolutely right, but private schools also provide an awful lot more opportunities outwith the standard curriculum, which broadens the education system.

In the previous parliamentary session, the SNP said that education would be its main priority but then promptly dropped its education bill from its programme. That bill would have provided an opportunity to reset our education system for the future and to develop the skills and resources that are needed to deliver on our children's ambitions. Instead, we have a teacher shortage, with teachers stretched to capacity; we have an underfunded further education sector; and we have a Scottish Government that is unable to join the dots and link future job demands to educational output.

If we want to tackle Scotland's poor health record, we should invest in education. If we want to grow our economy and deliver a more prosperous Scotland, we should invest in education. If we want to tackle welfare issues or criminality, we should invest in education. If we are to succeed, surely education must mirror the job requirements of the future, with resources to match.

Education is so much more than maths and English. It is about life skills, creating enthusiasm, showing our young people what is possible, pushing back boundaries and inspiring people. Our teachers could do all of that if the Scottish Government would let them. It should let teachers teach, give them the tools and support them, because they deserve to do what they are trained to do. Is it not about time that education was finally made the Scottish Government's priority?

16:14

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I will speak to the Scottish Government's amendment but, as a preamble, I advise members that, many moons ago, I was a secondary teacher of English. I am notorious for my pedantry. I correct those who say "less" instead of "fewer" or "disinterested" instead of "uninterested"—I will give lessons later.

Incidentally, I went on strike in the 1980s, when inflation was running at above 23 per cent. I was married to an assistant head, and I had two sisters who were primary teachers—one on Orkney and the other in Ayr. Our generations of teachers continue, as my niece is a deputy head of a primary school. I therefore have high regard for the profession, and not only as a parent and grandparent. I have become accustomed to

having my ear bent on all matters from those at the chalk face.

Although we obviously disagree on many aspects, as is evidenced by the motion and amendments, I think that we all agree that all children, young people and adult learners have the right to a first-class education, and we commend the hard work of staff and teaching professionals in Scotland's schools, colleges, universities and early learning and childcare centres. That hard work was particularly tested during Covid, which proved the dedication of the profession. Teaching was adapted and moved online, individual teachers went to households to provide lesson materials, and staff kept schools open, exposing themselves to Covid in doing so.

I will now speak about how important education is in helping children to make the most of their talents in a comfortable environment and, in particular, helping the least well off. The mantra is "closing the attainment gap", but in my book it is about closing the poverty gap. In 2022-23, Midlothian has received £174,000 or so in pupil equity funding and Scottish Borders has received £225,440, with more to come in successive years. That money supports qualifying children from primary 1 to secondary 3.

However, there is support even before that, starting with pre-school. The first intervention is the baby box, which is delivered to all who request it and is filled to the brim with high-quality items. Its percentage take-up is in the upper 90s, and it demonstrates the value of a child in tangible terms from the very start, because education starts at birth.

There is then the provision of 1,140 free hours of nursery, and we move on to free school meals for all P1 to P5 pupils and free bus travel for all under-22s. I say "free", but those are choices that the Scottish Government has made about expenditure in order to provide as level a playing field as possible for young people. A hungry child will have difficulty with learning. With free bus travel, children have chances to access out-of-school activities, which are all part of education in its wider sense. Tuition fees were abolished in Scotland, whereas in England a student, if they are not well-heeled, will leave with almost £30,000 in debt at the end of a three-year degree course.

Why should we focus on poverty in an education debate? It is because, although schools and teachers will do their utmost for every child, if a child is living under stress in their household because of poverty and shortages of food and warmth, it will be hard for them to learn. That is why the Scottish child payment, which is now £25 a week for every child under 16 in a qualifying family, is so significant, and it is even more so when it is combined with the other Scottish

benefits that I have listed. Some £84 million has been paid out since the payment was introduced.

If the Tory UK Government was to reinstate the £20 per week uplift to universal credit, that would give Scottish families a further £780 million, thereby lifting 30,000 children out of poverty. I ask members to think about the difference that that payment would make, bearing in mind that most people who claim universal credit are working, and the fact that it would ease the financial concerns of households and children.

We also need to have decent school buildings, which is not easy in a time of raging inflation that impacts on, for example, materials. In the Borders and Midlothian, three new secondary schools are on the cards at Galashiels academy, Peebles high school and Beeslack, just outside my patch. However, none of those schools will be built under the disgraceful public-private partnership or private finance initiative routes, which were introduced by the Tories and unhappily continued in Scotland under Labour and the Liberal Democrats. They have left councils carrying millions of pounds of debt, with the most costly borrowing possible.

In 2021 alone, the cost of those extravagant contracts to Midlothian Council was £11 million, or 12 per cent of its education budget. In Scottish Borders, the most recent figure is £9 million, which represents 8 per cent of the education budget. That is money wasted.

I will finish where I started, with teachers. In the current harsh economic climate, which has been exacerbated by Tory mismanagement, Boris, Truss and Brexit for starters, I understand the demands for pay rises. As members in the chamber are aware, teachers know that the Scottish Government has a fixed budget—it was fixed when inflation was around 3 per cent, not 11 per cent—and that increased salaries mean cuts elsewhere. I therefore hope that a middle ground will soon be found.

I note that Stephen Kerr would not answer the simple question of how much should go to the teachers and from which budget. His contribution—I think that it is appropriate to say this in a debate on education—was

"full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

That is a quote from "Macbeth", act 5, scene 5. I thank Ms McGuffie, circa 1960, who is still fondly remembered for compelling us to learn all of Shakespeare's soliloquies.

16:20

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The widespread disruption to education as a consequence of the pandemic cannot be underplayed, and the impact of that continues

today. Schools reopened, but challenges of attendance and engagement remain, with impacts often most keenly felt by the most disadvantaged groups. We have also seen falling teacher numbers, regular reports of challenging behaviour in classrooms and increasing demands being placed on teachers and school staff.

During the pandemic, I urged the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to commit to an equity audit when pupils returned to schools, to identify where most support was needed so that that could then be delivered. The audit highlighted particular negative impacts for early primary pupils and for those moving from primary to secondary—both key transition points in a child's education. It also revealed that higher numbers of pupils from less advantaged backgrounds were showing regression in literacy and numeracy.

The Scottish Government has a responsibility to ensure that the additional gaps in learning that stem from the pandemic do not result in further disadvantage or widening of the attainment gap, by providing immediate support measures and addressing the underlying causes of poverty.

Our amendment calls for a further assessment to be made

“of the impact of the pandemic so that pupils, parents and teachers can receive the support that they need.”

In some ways, the debate has moved on from the pandemic, but its impact on young people and children will last for a long time. We cannot underestimate that impact or forget about it. It is clear that, beyond the wider consequences of Covid, there are particular impacts on young people and children in schools, and we need targeted action to address those. Absence rates continue to be a challenge and we need a re-engagement plan to be put in place.

The equity audit also highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the mental and physical health and wellbeing of children. Although I note the inclusion in the national discussion on education of a question on support and care for young people, we need the provision of services that are related to mental health and to emotional and social wellbeing to be increased now.

I recently asked the Scottish Government about access to school counselling services. With around 12,000 children and young people accessing such services in the last six months of the past year, the demand for them is clear. Those valuable services are often delivered by counsellors on fixed-term contracts. We need certainty for them and for the pupils they are supporting that the funding will be continued. Such services are an example of why we cannot develop, support or look at education in isolation. Education must be connected to other policies and

budgets, and school counselling services are a good example of how that can be done. We need a guarantee that the funding support that is provided through the mental health strategy will continue next year.

Alongside the on-going impacts of Covid, the current cost of living crisis is also being felt keenly in our schools. NASUWT carried out a survey in autumn in which 65 per cent of respondents said that more pupils were coming to school hungry; 58 per cent said that more pupils did not have the equipment that they needed for lessons; and 55 per cent said that more pupils' families were unable to afford a school uniform.

Christine Grahame has spoken about the bigger picture and the economic levers that need to be used, and the cost of living crisis extends beyond schools and education. Specific action must be delivered through schools to address that so that the situation does not further deteriorate or have a negative impact on young people's education. We cannot have children going to school without the food, clothing and materials that they need.

I recently visited Fair Isle primary school in Kirkcaldy to see the community shop that it has set up in response to the increased cost of living that parents, carers and pupils face. The shop is run by staff and parents, with donations coming from local businesses in the community as well as from larger retailers, and it aims to provide clothing, cleaning products and food for free or for a small donation. It is a really good example of the community and the school coming together to provide support to families—support that people can access without judgment. It demonstrates the need for such support, as well as the valuable role of schools in providing for families beyond education.

The significant declines in literacy and numeracy that we have seen pre-dates the current crisis and the pandemic. Teacher numbers have fallen significantly since the SNP took office, and the impact in a number of key subject areas is clear. Teacher shortages put further pressure on existing staff as well as limiting subject choices for pupils, which can have a knock-on effect on options for future study or work. In STEM subjects, we have seen a drop in teacher numbers of more than 500 since 2008, with impacts on the number of pupils who take those subjects. Those subjects are critical for our major industries, which are already facing skills shortages. Brian Whittle raised those issues, and my committee—the Economy and Fair Work Committee—consistently hears that message about skills shortages.

We need to ensure that our schools offer the qualifications and skills that are needed to grow key sectors in our economy, but that cannot be done if teachers are not in place. We are also

seeing a fall in the provision of language courses, and there are questions about how we can deliver the future skills that are needed for a sustainable economy that is based on green jobs.

We need to put in place a coherent skills strategy that works with education pathways to deliver the skills that our economy requires, as well as providing the opportunities and capacity for people to reskill and upskill throughout their lives. Lifelong learning used to be a touchstone of this Parliament, but the contraction in the college sector has really brought an end to that ambition.

With further strike action tabled, the Scottish Government needs to act quickly to resolve the situation with teachers and provide them with a better pay deal so that further disruption to education can be avoided. If we truly value those workers, they deserve more than kind words; they deserve improved pay and conditions that recognise their vital role in society.

16:26

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): Teachers, lawyers, doctors, accountants, politicians, engineers, architects, journalists, civil servants, advisers, consultants, farmers, producers and people in just about every other occupation or job that exists in society today share one common need in these times, in this century, and that is the need to be able to communicate in writing, and to do so with reasonable speed and accuracy.

To reach our true potential, that ability can be developed only really by acquiring the skill of keyboard technique, or touch typing as it is known, and employing that marvellous invention from 1868, the QWERTY keyboard. It has been around for more than 150 years—I have mine here, Presiding Officer—and, as I am sure all the well-educated and intelligent members in this particular audience know, it is called that because the first six letters on the top of the three rows of letters are Q, W, E, R, T and Y.

Fifty years ago—I remember it well—very few people were required to touch type. In fact, it was really only shorthand typists, who would often type a letter that was dictated by their boss. Incidentally, the typist's skill was probably far superior to his. In those long-forgotten male chauvinist days when women were expected to do the menial work that was, in fact, highly skilled, typing was the exception and not the rule, and very few people had that skill. However, now, everybody is expected to be able to communicate in writing.

The cabinet secretary has probably heard my plea to her today several times, because I am like a cracked record. I must pay tribute to her, as we

had a very pleasant meeting in which she courteously listened to what I had to say. However, I have not quite got there yet. As we know from the story of Bruce and the spider, persistence often pays off. In fact, as the American President Calvin Coolidge once opined,

“Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence.”

I therefore make no apology for persevering with my attempts to persuade her.

My plea is that we introduce, perhaps as a pilot in one education authority—I know that the director of education in Highland is not unsympathetic to the idea—a properly supervised training programme to teach our young people how to acquire this skill. I submit that, perhaps more than any other skill that I can think of, the skill of touch typing would equip them for the rest of their working life—in my case, it has been more than 45 years—to perform to their absolute maximum potential and produce work at up to three times the speed of those who have to hunt and peck for the right keys.

The skill is called “cognitive automaticity”—I am not very keen on jargon, but I thought that I would try to impress members with my knowing such a phrase. Cognitive automaticity is the skill of doing something automatically, without thinking about it. I did not mention that phrase to show off that I knew it, but to make the point that when someone can touch type, they do not need to think about how to write—their whole mental focus is on what they want to say, which means that their mental attention is not diverted from the primary task of focusing on what they are trying to achieve.

As colleagues might recall, I raised that point when I was on the Education and Skills Committee, and the response of what I would call the education establishment was somewhat underwhelming—I do not want to be too negative, so I will just leave it at that. Its first argument against my point was, “Oh well, voice technology will replace that”. I say that it will not, because you need a written record of things. Voice technology does not work very well at the moment and, although it might work in the future, it will never replace having a written record. Its second argument was that kids could learn to touch type by themselves. I say that they cannot—they might think that they can, but they cannot and do not, and, if they do, they do not learn it properly. All that is required is 15 to 25 hours of supervised training—15 to 25 hours is an investment for the next 45 years.

There is evidence from Holland that kids who learn to touch type perform better—I will not read out the quote because I do not have time. The *British Journal of Educational Psychology*—not my usual reading, but nonetheless—states that kids

who do not learn how to type perform less well. The absence of that skill is damaging to children's education.

I thought that I would just change the mood of the debate today, and I hope that I have done so.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Fergus Ewing: I do not think that I have time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I am afraid that the member is just winding up.

Fergus Ewing: I am very sorry. I would have taken it, but—

Rachael Hamilton: I will talk to you later.

Fergus Ewing: That's a date, as they say.

I commend touch typing to the cabinet secretary, and I hope that she will seriously consider what I have had to say.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Ewing. I never thought that I would have to reprimand you for waving your keyboard around as a prop.

16:32

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I fear that my contribution might be a bit jarring after the last one.

I am somewhat grateful to the Conservatives for having given us the chance to debate education today, but I have to say that their motion is a complete waste of Parliament's time. This was an opportunity for Stephen Kerr to dazzle us all with his grand vision for Scotland's schools—either to put forward an alternative to the Government's reform agenda or to detail what specific shape he thinks those reforms should take.

Instead, we are debating a motion that is full of relentless negativity and not a single proposed solution. Bizarrely, the one demand in the motion is for the Scottish Government to bring forward an education plan. From Mr Kerr's opening speech, we get the impression that he has hardly noticed that the biggest set of reforms in at least fifteen years is under way: Education Scotland is being reformed; a new independent inspectorate is being established; the Scottish Qualifications Authority is being abolished completely and a body that is fit for purpose is being set up to take its place; an independent review of qualifications is taking place and is due to report this spring; and a national discussion covering the curriculum for excellence and everything that surrounds it is taking place. That is a major package of change—the most

significant one since the new curriculum was introduced.

Martin Whitfield: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Ross Greer: I will take an intervention in a moment, but I want to make a bit of progress.

The Tories agree with plenty of that, or at least they used to. By last summer, we had achieved a consensus among all parties on the need to replace the SQA and establish an independent inspectorate. I know from six years of sitting on Parliament's education committees that the underperformance of Education Scotland has long frustrated MSPs of all parties, who have agreed on the need for change there.

I recognise that we disagree significantly on the future of exams, but previous Conservative education spokespeople have certainly had thoughts about the changes to the curriculum that they would like to see—short of the frankly cynical calls to scrap curriculum for excellence entirely. Why, when there is so much opportunity for all parties to shape those reforms, are we debating a motion that makes no proposal, other than to demand that the Scottish Government do something?

Liz Smith: Will the member give way?

Ross Greer: I feel that I should take Mr Whitfield's intervention first, but I will then take an intervention from Ms Smith.

Martin Whitfield: I am grateful to Ross Greer for giving way. Does he not agree that the new SQA is going to mark its own homework? That was one of the great challenges that the existing SQA made with regard to the proposals that the Government announced last week.

Ross Greer: I am grateful for that intervention, because that was one of the recommendations in Ken Muir's report that I personally struggled with the most. I made my hesitation about endorsing that recommendation clear to the Government and to Mr Muir, and that was for the reasons that the cabinet secretary has set out. If we were to split the functions and have one function sit within the new Education Scotland, it would, in fact, sit closer to Government. It would not have the independence that we desire for it.

I have not seen any suggestions that that accreditation function should sit in an entirely independent body somewhere else. If both of those functions are going to be set within the same body—the qualifications agency that has greater independence from Government—we need to look at how we create silos or separation between those two functions so that they are both sufficiently separate from Government but also

from each other. We have that opportunity through the reform process.

Liz Smith: I am grateful to Mr Greer. I think that I remember—the member will correct me if I am wrong—that, on three occasions when the Conservatives lodged a motion on education, the Greens, Labour and Liberals voted with us, because they were concerned about SNP education policy. What has happened to that ability to persuade ministers now?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you some of that time back.

Ross Greer: I appreciate that, Presiding Officer. Ms Smith is quite right. In the previous parliamentary session, we were deeply concerned about SNP education policy. That is why, off the back of the SQA shambles in 2020 in particular but also since then, we—not just the Greens but others—have managed to persuade the Government to take a different path. Collectively, the Opposition parties in the previous session forced the SNP to withdraw an education reform bill that would not have addressed the challenges in education.

However, we are now seeing a series of reforms that Ms Smith will know that I have campaigned for for a long time, particularly around reform of exams and assessments and particularly around the replacement of the SQA. We are now seeing a reform package that is much closer to what the Greens have been proposing over many years than what we saw in the previous parliamentary session.

I will take exams as a specific example. The Greens are looking forward to the results of Professor Hayward's review early next year. That process is a direct result of our intervention in the 2020 SQA scandal. We did not think that it was good enough to simply restore the grades and move on, essential as it was to do that.

The 2020 incident and the comparative data sets that we have from pre-pandemic years versus those alternative models in each pandemic year made it clear that there is a deeper problem in our qualifications system—one that some of us had been pointing out for many years. Why does the traditional, high-stakes, end-of-term exam model—the one that we have used since the Victorian era—result in such a wide attainment gap between those from the most and least deprived backgrounds, whereas models that base grades on evidence that is generated through continuous assessment or teacher judgment result in a far narrower gap?

I have never believed that the high-stakes exam model was the most accurate or useful way of assessing a young person's knowledge and abilities. Those exams always felt more like tests

of how quickly someone could write things down or how much memorised content someone could recite on cue. Of course, they also leave young people vulnerable to having their course in life being thrown off by a single bad day, whether that is due to sickness, lack of sleep the night before or any other reason.

However, we now have a data set that strongly suggests that that model also contributes to a wider attainment gap than would otherwise be the case. That should not come as a huge surprise, because there is plenty of evidence to show that young people from the most deprived backgrounds are more likely to experience a chaotic household situation and thus be more at risk of the kind of disruption that would hamper their ability to achieve their best at the one opportunity that is provided by the high-stakes exam system.

Continuous assessment models, on the other hand, are better able to recognise a young person's true knowledge and abilities through the generation of evidence over time, so that no one incident can scupper their chances of getting the grade that they deserve.

Of course there are challenges in our education system, and the Government is trying to solve them. Take as an example the publication of the "Additional Support for Learning Action Plan", which includes commitments from the Greens' manifesto. The Opposition does not need to agree, and it absolutely should scrutinise these reform plans, but, when no alternative is provided, I cannot come to any conclusion other than the fact that the Opposition does not take itself particularly seriously.

I am greatly relieved that the Tories seem to have no plan to replace this SNP-Green Government. If they had a plan to replace us, I assume that they would have a plan to implement their own policy agenda, but they do not seem to have one. This Government, on the other hand, does have a plan. Reform is under way, despite the challenges, and I am looking forward to seeing the results of those reforms.

16:39

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): As Brian Whittle did so, I should perhaps likewise declare an interest, as I was a secondary school teacher for around 10 years before being elected to Parliament.

I will say a little bit about the poverty-related attainment gap, which has been spoken about. We should first of all remind ourselves exactly what we mean by that, as it has been lost a little bit. It is about children from lower-income households and families who are experiencing the day-to-day grind

of poverty not having their skills, abilities and talents fully recognised and accredited in Scotland's education system. Tackling that attainment gap is based both on what happens in education, which I will return to, and on how we support families living in our communities blighted by poverty more generally.

Although child poverty levels in Scotland remain far too high, it is reasonable to acknowledge that they remain clearly lower than those in Conservative-controlled England and Labour-controlled Wales. That is a fact. It is easy to see why, because there is a clear Scottish Government commitment to tackling child poverty.

Let me provide a few examples. There is, of course, the groundbreaking Scottish child payment, which is now £25 a week for children in households on qualifying benefits. To date, £84 million has been put into those households since it was established. There is no rape clause and no two-child limit—it is simply about getting them the money. We should also remind ourselves in Parliament that the call from campaigners was for £5 a week and not £25 a week—let us remember that. Mr Rowley made a point about how we direct resources. We could of course take that £84 million and give it to local government or the national health service, but it is a direct resource commitment to the poorest families in Scotland, which I support.

We could also mention the school clothing grant. National minimum standards of £120 for primary school children and £150 for secondary school children now apply. I could also go on and talk about free school meals, which I was proud that the Parliament acted on when I was elected in 2007, and which I was keen to see extended.

I will also look at what happens in schools. It is worth noting resources in schools, where we could of course look at teacher numbers, which have risen for six years in a row. They are up by 885 on the previous year and we are on track to deliver our commitment to recruit at least 3,500 teachers and 500 classroom assistants. That was backed by investment during Covid of £240 million, and then an additional, permanent, baked-in £145 million to make many posts permanent.

Michael Marra: Does Bob Doris recognise that those numbers are still below the level that they were at in 2007 when he was elected to this Parliament and when this Government took office?

Bob Doris: I am happy to reflect and look at the numbers. Mr Marra is right to try and make that point. However, I point out that the teacher pupil ratio is at almost record levels. That is also a key point, which I think Mr Marra fails to recognise.

I will comment a little bit on progress on attainment levels. The number of 18-year-olds

from the most deprived backgrounds being offered a place at university is at a record high; it is up 32 per cent since 2019—the last year that there were exams. We also know that 93.2 per cent of pupils who left school in the last year went on to positive destinations. The record high was 93.3 per cent. That is good going. At St Roch's secondary school, in my constituency, the figure was 100 per cent. I pay tribute to that school, which is in a particularly deprived area.

If we look at exam results for 2022, progress was made—albeit not enough, which I readily accept. At national 5 level, the gap between those at the highest and lowest income levels shrank from 17.1 per cent to 14.6 per cent. At higher level, it went from 16.9 to 15 per cent. I say again that that is not enough, but it is progress. In fact, given that we have faced a global pandemic for two years and disruption to education, we might have anticipated that the figures would have worsened, not improved. That is therefore a significant achievement, which Stephen Kerr and the Conservatives want to wish away in this debate.

The Education, Children and Young People Committee recently published a report on the Scottish attainment challenge, which was a constructive approach to addressing inequalities in schools. That constructive approach may have been due in part to the new convener of the committee, Sue Webber, who is here. It would, of course, be impolite to mention who the previous convener of the committee was, but I am sure that Mr Kerr could inform Parliament if anyone is interested.

The evidence that the committee heard during that inquiry was really interesting. At an event in St Roch's, we heard from representatives of schools in Glasgow and the west of Scotland about their concerns that a lot of the good work that had been done in addressing the poverty-related attainment gap might be ditched because of issues with securing those gains during the global pandemic and its impact on Scottish education. They told us not to ditch the reforms but to stick with them.

In the time that I have left, I want to say a bit about further and higher education. The commissioner for fair access said that our success in relation to access to further and higher education was unambiguous and that we had exceeded our target for 16 per cent of entrants to higher education to come from the most socially deprived backgrounds by 2021. I am rushing a little because I know that I am running out of time. We have a fantastic track record, but I have concerns, and I want to put those concerns on the record.

Sixty per cent of all young people from the Scottish index of multiple deprivation 20 group who have a

first-year place at university got there through a further education route, but further education—as every other sector does—faces a flat cash settlement.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Mr Doris.

Bob Doris: I am worried about the implications for the community work that colleges do, their courses and their staffing, and the onward consequences for making further progress in addressing the attainment gap and getting young people into higher education.

I do not have the answer to that, but I have—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Mr Doris. I must ask you to sit down.

I call Murdo Fraser, who joins us online.

16:46

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As others have done, I should declare an interest, because I am married to a primary school teacher.

The duty of educating our young people is one of the primary functions of government, and one of the ways in which we should measure the effectiveness and success of a Government is how it performs that function. As our motion makes clear, in too many respects, the SNP Scottish Government has been failing our young people. Scottish education was once regarded as being the envy of the world but, in recent years, we had been slipping down the international league tables, until the SNP Government decided to withdraw us from many of the international comparisons, which means that we can no longer track that.

As Willie Rennie reminded us, today and tomorrow, secondary schools across Scotland are closed as a result of strike action—the first such action in a generation. That means that young people in senior school, some of whom expect to sit their prelims for highers or nat 5s in just a few weeks' time, will experience further disruption to their education. We face the prospect of further strikes into January, when those prelims will be sat. We must remember that we are talking about young people who, because of Covid, have already suffered long interruptions to their education.

The strikes are ostensibly around the issue of pay, but there are many other issues that affect teachers, who feel undervalued as a profession. I am particularly concerned about the growth of violence in the classroom. There were nearly 20,000 recorded attacks on schoolteachers last year—that is a 10 per cent rise on the figure for 2018-19, which was the last full year before Covid.

In aggregate, since 2017-18, there have been almost 75,000 recorded physical or verbal attacks on teachers. That is an extraordinary statistic.

Earlier, Stephen Kerr said that there was an attack every three minutes. He was half right, because there will not be an attack every three minutes in schools today, because many schools are closed because of the strikes.

No one should have to go to their workplace at risk of physical or verbal attack, but that is the reality that faces too many teachers today. In the words of the former EIS president, Heather Hughes, as quoted in *The Herald* in June,

“violent incidents are happening more and more in our schools because young people and teachers are not getting the support they need to prevent them from happening”.

She went on to say:

“teachers often feel unsupported when reporting these issues. All too often they are made to feel that the blame lies with them and not with the lack of support for young people who are expressing their frustrations over the lack of appropriate help”.

In 2021-22, the number of attacks on schoolteachers rose despite a record number of pupils missing more than 50 per cent of the school year because of Covid. In addition to the bare statistics, which are bad enough, we hear anecdotally from teachers just how serious the problem has become, with a concern in some quarters that Covid-related interruptions to education have changed the culture in the classroom, making unacceptable behaviour more of a norm.

We see the outcome of that manifest in the fact that, just last month, teachers at Northfield academy in Aberdeen, feeling unsupported by the education authority, voted to strike over school violence, as Liam Kerr reminded us earlier. In Glasgow, teachers at Bannerman high school voted to hold 12 days of strikes in the run-up to the Christmas holidays over violent and abusive pupil behaviour. It is a problem that is only going to get worse.

It is clearly unacceptable that teachers are being put at risk in that way. It is no wonder that some are leaving the profession and some are taking early retirement. We see in the strikes that are taking place a manifestation of the unhappiness that teachers have with their lot.

The situation does not impact just on teachers. A teacher having to devote a large proportion of their time to trying to deal with a disruptive pupil means that the others in the class do not get the support and attention that they deserve.

The situation cannot be unrelated to the staggering decline in the number of school

exclusions since the SNP came to power. In 2007-08, there were 39,717 exclusions in Scottish schools. In 2018-19, the last year before Covid, that had fallen to just 14,990, which is a drop of 25,000—an incredible 62 per cent. I cannot believe that that reduction reflects improving behaviour in the classroom. Indeed, all the evidence suggests the opposite. Instead, what we are seeing is the consequence of a top-down policy to reduce the use of exclusion as a management tool. That drive to reduce the number of school exclusions simply means that there are more disruptive pupils being kept in a classroom environment when they should be put elsewhere. We need to consider whether an agenda of mainstreaming those who have serious behavioural issues is appropriate or whether some alternative provision should be made for them.

We cannot go on as we are. Attacks in schools are reaching a crisis point, and that is something that the Scottish Government has to address. Otherwise, we will see yet more industrial action from frustrated teachers, as is already happening.

There is a dismal air of complacency about the Government's approach to education. That needs to change, and, in the debate the Scottish Conservatives have set out the improvements that need to be made. The SNP, with the backing of the Greens, will win the vote this afternoon, but in so doing it will let down teachers and pupils across Scotland, who deserve so much better.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: John Mason will be the final speaker in the open debate.

16:53

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I believe that Scotland still has an excellent education system. Our universities have no tuition fees for students and we have a high percentage of young people going to university. There has been considerable progress, with more people from disadvantaged backgrounds going to university, and we certainly want that trend to continue.

We have some tremendous universities.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

John Mason: Let me get into this a little bit more.

In recent years *The Times* and *The Guardian* have ranked St Andrews as the top university in the UK, which is no mean achievement.

Stephen Kerr: Mr Mason has fallen into the trap of the idea that university is what education is all about. There is a huge disparity of esteem between all the various routes that a young person can take in life. Let us not put a premium on

universities; let us back our young people when they choose other options as well.

John Mason: I was about to go on to say that. The very next line in my speech is: having said that, apprenticeships are a great route, too, and are definitely a better option for some young people. Perhaps some schools have overemphasised going to university as the only measure of success, and we probably need to redress that imbalance.

There is also still an issue with relatively few women going into certain careers, such as engineering and other STEM areas. One figure that I saw recently said that only 25 per cent of students in such subjects are women. In addition, relatively few men are entering primary teaching, childcare, and the wider care sector.

Colleges, too, are a key part of our education system. I am pleased that we have three colleges in Glasgow: City of Glasgow College, Glasgow Kelvin College and Glasgow Clyde College. The Kelvin and Clyde colleges, in particular, have a strong reputation for drawing folk in who are further from the education system. I was at a Kelvin College graduation recently, and I was struck by the incredibly diverse range of students. There was a real mixture of ages, ethnic backgrounds and social backgrounds.

It seems to be much easier now to move on from college to university. That step was often fraught with difficulty in the past.

I accept that there are issues with funding for colleges, as Bob Doris hinted, and with whether we have struck the right balance when it comes to sharing resources between schools, colleges and universities. The colleges certainly feel that they are treated as the poor relations. The last time I looked at the University of Glasgow's accounts, the university had £1,000 million in its reserves. A university like that is incredibly rich—richer than the Scottish Government—compared with the colleges and newer universities.

I think that schools are turning out more rounded young people than was the case in days gone by. When I was at school—I am declaring an interest—the sole measure of success seemed to be academic, and many of us lived in fear of our teachers. When I visit a school nowadays, it seems to me that there is a much healthier relationship between teachers and pupils, on the whole, and more of a sense of working together to achieve the best outcomes.

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

John Mason: I am sorry; I have already taken one.

Denominational and Catholic schools also have a valuable place in our education system. Of course, there must be common standards across our schools, especially when it comes to examinations, but it is good that parents are involved and can choose, to some extent, the ethos of the school to which they want their children to go.

Bob Doris: Will the member give way?

John Mason: I am sorry; I must carry on.

We must not underestimate the importance of parents and parental involvement. I remember a headteacher telling me that the school that he led was almost like two schools. On one hand, there were children whose parents were enthusiastic about their education, and who engaged with the school and got involved in homework and so on. On the other hand were children whose parents were not really involved.

At least one school in my constituency has used PEF money to try to build up relationships with families. We need to do all that we can to help and encourage pupils who do not have parental support, but we have to accept that there is a limit to what a school can do if the parents are not engaged.

That is where families with an African or Asian background who come into an area can be a big boost to a school. Often in such cases, the whole family is highly committed to education, and highly motivated students can give a lift to the whole school, encouraging young people who are perhaps less self-motivated.

While I am talking about schools, I want to say how much I appreciated having Maureen McKenna as Glasgow's director of education. Her replacement, Douglas Hutchison, has a hard act to follow. Also, I very much welcome the development of a new Gaelic-medium primary school in Calton, in the east end of the city.

We cannot talk about schools without looking at teachers' pay. The Labour amendment calls for "a fair pay deal", and the Liberal Democrats also called for fair pay. What exactly do they mean by that? Scottish teachers are being offered £35,000 once they are qualified, which I understand is some £7,000 more than equivalent teachers would be offered in England and is the third highest in the G7 group of wealthy nations.

Martin Whitfield: Does the member recognise that, in Scotland, teaching is a graduate-only profession, unlike in England?

John Mason: Yes.

There is a question of fairness, too. Teachers are a hugely important part of our society, but so are other local council workers. How could it be

right to give teachers a substantially bigger rise than their colleagues in other parts of local government get? I have not even mentioned affordability. Higher pay deals to match inflation might well be deserved by many people, but, in effect, such deals mean cuts to services in local government, the national health service or elsewhere.

Let us not overstate the weaknesses and understate the achievements of our education system, as I fear that some of our Opposition parties are doing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches.

16:59

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): This has been a fascinating debate, in which members have been passionate about what is probably the most important thing in any person's life: their first few years in education. It is a time when people can hope and dream about becoming anything—an astronaut, a footballer, a nurse or a pilot.

Our education environment and the professionals who work in it—not only the teachers, but those who help out in the classroom and the dining hall and who pick pupils up when they tumble in the playground and get a bloody knee—keep young people's positivity and imagination going.

Brian Whittle: Does Martin Whitfield agree that, to be able to keep that passion going, we have to be able to see it, and does he agree that, when we reduce the teaching of sport, art, music and drama in schools, we take opportunities away from our children?

Martin Whitfield: The member has stolen my commendation of his contribution. Let me take a moment to say—with the greatest of respect to Liz Smith—that education is about more than being able to read, write and count, essential though those abilities are. It is also about the experience of drama, art, music, dance, physical education and sport, whether your team wins or does not win. It is about going from being the last person who is selected in the playground to being the first. It is about discovering that the soft skills that you practise with your friend groups can keep you out of fights and can offer better empathy. That is an essential element that I fear gets lost in much discussion about our young people's lives.

Young people have suffered major disruption to their learning because of the pandemic, and teachers are striking. They are fighting for a better pay deal, and it is the SNP Government's responsibility to be at the negotiating table. It is one of the very few negotiations at which the

Scottish Government has a seat; it should use it. The Government should take the lead on finding a way to reconciliation. That is what negotiation is about.

We have heard the claim that education is this Government's priority, but there are serious failings at every level. The attainment gap is stubbornly wide, whether you call it an attainment gap or a poverty-related attainment gap, and it is growing. Our colleges, as many members have said, feel neglected, and are facing the prospect of massive staff cuts.

Our students are having to drop out of university because they cannot find anywhere to live. That is what we are offering our young people, who are our hope for the future.

Listening to members' contributions has been interesting, and some have been very positive. As Alex Rowley rightly pointed out, there has to be recognition of where there has been failure and where more needs to be done. It does not matter whose fault it is; what the Scottish Government will do to make it better is what is important. It will find cross-party support for ideas that can be implemented to improve young people's experience of education.

I was grateful that my intervention on the Government's opening speech was taken, because there is concern that by not splitting the two roles that I mentioned, the SQA will be marking its own homework. I was interested to hear the idea of properly separating the two roles, so I would love to hear the cabinet secretary's view on how that will be achieved.

I will mention Brian Whittle's contribution, because it led to the discussion about the role of—I will say this very carefully—culture and sport in young people's lives, and because of his call to reset skills priorities in relation to what the country will need in the future for the green economy and achievement of net zero. We need to provide those skills, and we need to provide for our young people and older people being able to gain those skills, so that we can drive the economy forward.

I will mention Claire Baker's contribution in relation to the equality audit, because that was the first time that we saw the damage that Covid has done to our young people. She was right to say that although many adults have moved on from Covid, the reality for young people—those who were at the start of their primary school experience or earlier, who might not even have been able to name the challenge, through to those who had moved on to high school—is that Covid has caused massive challenges that are not being addressed.

I am aware of young people who have to travel by taxi between schools to get the range of

lessons that they need, particularly in modern languages. In 2022, it is a tragedy that young people who are passionate about foreign languages must find their own way to learn.

I want to pause in the short time that I have left to mention Fergus Ewing. I was severely disappointed that he was not able to take my intervention on touch typing, because it would have been lovely to hear at what age that skill should be acquired. He discussed the automaticity of touch typing, which is what exists in handwriting. When people learn to write, they just write. It does not hold back their ideas or their imaginations. That relates to the gap that exists and the challenges that some young people face in attaining skills.

We have large classes, and teachers are pressured in the classroom by individuals who take up a huge amount of time. That is a cry for help from those young people, so we need to facilitate support for that.

This has been a fascinating debate, but there is so much more to be done. I urge the Scottish Government not to fear the criticism that it has heard today but to accept it and to come forward with proposals that will find cross-party support—because “Education, education, education” is the single greatest gift that we can give the young people in our population.

17:05

Shirley-Anne Somerville: There has been, I suppose, a mixed range of speeches today. Unfortunately, the speeches from the Conservatives in particular—with perhaps the exception of Brian Whittle, to be fair to him—have had one thing in common: a lot of noise but no substantive policy proposals about how we might take things forward. There is a great deal in the Conservative motion but no genuine attempt to set out how we might move forward with policy on education.

Liam Kerr: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will make some progress then take some interventions in due course.

There has been a great deal of challenge to the Scottish Government to be open to new ideas and to be ready to listen to others. We have just had the national discussion: the biggest debate on Scottish education for 20 years has just closed. I am happy to stand corrected by any party in the room, but I do not think that they took part in it. The co-facilitators met Opposition members and we had an opportunity to build a consensual mission. Instead, what we have once again from

the Tories is a focus on “SNP bad” and very little else.

Liz Smith: I would be happy to send the cabinet secretary copies of the representations that I made in response to previous calls from the SNP for our views. I think that my colleague Jamie Greene did the same when he was education spokesperson and I know that Pam Gosal has, as well. Does the cabinet secretary accept that we have made representations?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I accept that Liz Smith played a constructive role when she was education spokesperson. I wonder whether Tory members support curriculum for excellence—as I think Liz Smith did in her time—or are still for scrapping it, which has been the more recent policy. I will look back on Tory policies of the past; it is a bit difficult to know what their position is, particularly on key aspects of curriculum for excellence that are viewed very positively by the OECD, for example.

A number of speakers, Kaukab Stewart being one of them, spoke about positive destinations for our young people. She was quite right to do that. She rightly pointed to the results and said that they are not only a credit to our young people but are a fundamental function of our education system—an education system that is doing its best to support our children and young people at a time of great difficulty.

Alex Rowley was right to point out—although the Tories did not like it—the impact of Tory austerity and the impact of the cost of living crisis right across Scotland. It is important that we recognise what schools can do, but the context in which they are working is made more difficult by levels of poverty, which is a point that I will come back to, if I have time.

It is also important that we celebrate what is right in Scottish education. There is higher spending per child in education in Scotland than there is elsewhere in the UK. Almost 130,000 leavers have received SQA results in the past year and we have the best-educated population in Europe, according to the most recent Eurostat data. Provision of 1,140 hours of ELC is being rolled out. I could go on, Presiding Officer, but I will attempt to take another intervention.

Liam Kerr: I find it staggering that the cabinet secretary has yet to deal with the points about violence that were brought up by Stephen Kerr, Murdo Fraser and me. What, precisely, has the cabinet secretary put in place since taking up her post that will reduce physical and verbal abuse, given that it is not a new problem?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I was going to talk about that later, but I am happy to talk about it now.

Everybody in the chamber who raised the matter was right to do so, because no teacher—no person, in fact—should go to any place of work and suffer physical or verbal abuse. It is for schools and councils to decide what action should be taken in each case, because councils are the employer. However, I met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities’ education spokesperson last week to discuss what more the Scottish Government can do to help. I would have been at another meeting about the matter with COSLA and other stakeholders this afternoon, had it not been for work on this debate. I hope that that demonstrates that I would have been spending time on the issue, but am delighted to be here discussing another Tory motion on education.

We have to look at another issue very carefully—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry, but, if Conservative Party members do not like what I am saying, they should feel free to intervene rather than chunter from a sedentary position.

A number of comments have been made about teachers’ workload. We have commitments to reduce class-contact time and to have more teachers—we have a commitment to have 3,500 more teachers by the end of this Parliamentary session. On mental health, we have committed to having counsellors in schools. There are 1,000 more teachers in our primary schools than there were before the pandemic.

Christine Grahame and Bob Doris rightly pointed to the aspects of and challenges related to poverty. Those are very important, and we need to look at them. The Scottish Government, in conjunction with local government, is determined to substantially eliminate the poverty-related attainment gap, but it is a real shame that the Tories seem to be doing their level best to undermine that mission and to make it more challenging, given the state of the economy and society at this time.

It would be remiss of me not to reference Fergus Ewing’s speech. Persistence pays off. I admire his tenacity and appreciate his on-going discussions with Highland Council. I look forward to seeing how those develop.

John Mason rightly pointed out many aspects of Scottish Education that we should be proud of, and mentioned the importance of all of them: universities, colleges and apprenticeships—

Pam Gosal: Will the member take an intervention?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I apologise. I need to move on.

I pay particular tribute to colleges such as Kelvin College for the fantastic work that it does, and I

acknowledge the important role that denominational schools have in our society.

There are a number of aspects of Scottish education that we should be proud of, and for which we are internationally commended. It is disappointing that, once again, we heard very little about that from the Tories. I recognise that we can improve, which is why we had the national discussion, but it is a shame that no one in the Tories seemed to notice or take part.

17:13

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):

Earlier this year, life as I knew it changed forever when I became a first-time mum. I will never forget the moment that I met my daughter or how she instantly became the most important person to me and my immediate family. It has to be said that being part of the parent club is genuinely one of the best feelings in the world.

I have been so fortunate to be able to spend the last few months learning how to become a mum. As we know, there is no step-by-step manual because every baby has a different personality and milestones, but I am looking to return fully to my MSP role in January 2023.

Before I get into the premise of today's debate, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their well wishes; my constituents, who have been understanding of my maternity leave; and, of course, my fantastic office team, who have gone above and beyond to keep my office running smoothly.

Every child in Scotland should have the same opportunities in life, regardless of their postcode or family dynamic. As we have heard this afternoon, every MSP in the chamber agrees with that, although there are stark differences in policies and in how we believe Scotland is performing compared with other countries.

My colleague Stephen Kerr correctly outlined the importance of giving every child a golden ticket to a first-class education. He also raised serious concerns about the violence and threats that our teachers face daily in their classrooms. Those concerns were echoed by Murdo Fraser but not by the cabinet secretary until other members prompted her.

When we discuss education issues, it does not help that we have a Scottish Government that refuses to listen to experts, academics, parents and Opposition politicians when they raise genuine concerns about the state of the education system. Therefore, it will come as no surprise that most of my contribution will focus on the Scottish Government's flagship policy of providing every child in Scotland with 1,140 hours of free

childcare. I feel like a broken record when it comes to that policy, but, if I did not have a vested interest in childcare before, I certainly do now.

When the Government introduced the expansion of the existing childcare policy, the SNP said that it would deliver three main benefits. First, children's development would improve and the poverty-related attainment gap would narrow. Secondly, more parents would have the opportunity to be in work, or to be training or studying. Thirdly, the policy would increase family resilience through the improved health and wellbeing of parents and children.

I will start on a positive note: in principle, 1,140 hours is a good policy. The First Minister hailed it as transformative, and it has the potential to give children the best possible start in life because it removes the financial burden on parents, who often struggle with the cost of childcare. That is especially true for working mums, as many choose to pause or stop their career progression to start a family. I do not believe that, in 2022, a woman should have to choose between her career or having children. The onus is on the Parliament to give them the tools so that they can do both successfully.

As it stands, the early learning and childcare policy is not working. It is my view and, indeed, the view of many in the early years industry that the policy's aims will never be achieved should the Government continue to ignore the crisis that has emerged in the early learning and childcare sector. It is not enough to simply have a good policy idea without having the willpower and determination to see it through.

As Brian Whittle said, we have an opportunity to reset Scotland's education system. Since my election to the Scottish Parliament and during my time as a councillor in North Lanarkshire, I have been in direct contact with nurseries in the private, voluntary and independent sector. They have told me on several occasions about the deep-rooted problems with the 1,140 hours policy. Those include the financial inequality that exists between PVI and local authority nurseries; a staffing crisis and the loss of childminders; parents not obtaining their first, second or third choice of nursery setting for their children; and PVI settings closing as people cannot afford to run their business—

Michael Marra: I appreciate the topic that the member is raising, given the problems in Huntly, in my region, where a notice from the Care Inspectorate has resulted in the closure of a nursery and where the council is not stepping up to take up the weight. Does she believe that the Care Inspectorate needs to do more with the Government to ensure that there is provision when it finds that a nursery has to close?

Meghan Gallacher: Absolutely. I will touch on that point later in my contribution. Levels of bureaucracy are created through the mountains of paperwork, and there are cross-boundary issues due to councils not working collegiately to deliver funded childcare.

The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey): Will the member take an intervention?

Meghan Gallacher: I would like to continue. I will take an intervention from the minister later, if that is okay.

What used to be a healthy, competitive market between PVI nurseries and local authorities has now resulted in councils being the kingmaker, leaving many PVI nurseries in a checkmate position. The PVI sector has fought tooth and nail to try to make the rate process fair, but when the funding structure that is set by the Scottish Government and COSLA allows local authorities to pay ELC staff 30 to 50 per cent more than staff in funded PVI settings receive, with 65 per cent of PVI nursery fees being controlled by the 1,140 hours policy, we can see exactly where the problem lies.

The National Day Nurseries Association has said that low or static rates principally mean a real-time cut in funding for settings and threaten the existence of some nurseries.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Ms Gallacher. I ask members who have just come into the chamber to desist from low-level muttering and to respect the fact that someone is contributing to the debate.

Meghan Gallacher: I am very grateful, Presiding Officer.

The NDNA has also said:

“the rates that are given are not sustainable since they are not keeping up with inflation, but also with rising economic and living costs. Nurseries are finding it more and more difficult to meet the cost of delivery, which could result in the potential loss of smaller settings.”

The issue with the 1,140 hours policy that really gets me angry is that, under it, a child in a private sector nursery appears to be worth less than a child in a local authority setting. No child should ever be worth less or more when it comes to getting the best possible start in life.

The SNP Government is fully aware of the problems, but there is yet to be any update provided to Parliament on how it intends to fix the policy or make it fair for all partners. While the SNP remains silent on the issue, nurseries will continue to close.

Clare Haughey: Will the member take an intervention?

Meghan Gallacher: I said that I would take the minister in a little while.

A business will not survive if it is not able to identify and correct issues relating to its model, and I do not see why the Scottish Government should be exempt from acknowledging the problems that the PVI sector experiences daily. It is not as if the issue is not reported time and again in the press. As recently as this week, *The Herald* reported a case study of a childminder losing their income because of the need to complete paperwork, as the sector is in crisis. She revealed that she is losing in excess of £600 a month as she has to commit a full day each week to complete paperwork—time that she is not paid for. The childminder blamed the excessive level of lost income on the bureaucracy that I mentioned earlier, and said that it is having a huge impact on her business. She said:

“We can’t do paperwork when we’ve got children in our care ... I absolutely love the job I do. I love watching the children develop and being a key part of that but what I am in effect doing is paperwork for a job I love, but I’m not being paid for it.”

That childminder is not alone.

What has become clear to me is that—as we heard from Liz Smith, who gave the timeline of failings—the Scottish Government has been in power for so long that it has lost the will and desire to fix its failing policies.

The SNP often tells Opposition politicians that we do not come to the table with any solutions. Therefore, for the benefit of the cabinet secretary and others, I will offer solutions that will make the 1,140 policy fair for local authorities and the PVI sector. I am happy to give way to the minister on this point, with regard to the fixing of the funding formula. Will she commit to a review of the funding formula to make it fair for the PVI sector and local authority nurseries?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that offering to take an intervention when you have 15 seconds to go is—

Meghan Gallacher: It is a yes/no answer, Presiding Officer.

Clare Haughey: The member will perhaps remember that I met her to talk about this issue prior to her going on maternity leave—and in that regard, I welcome her back to the chamber and offer my congratulations. It is very nice to see her.

We work closely with the representatives of the PVI sector, including the Scottish Childminding Association, and I am more than happy to meet the member again and update her on all the work that has been going on while she has been taking care of her little daughter.

Meghan Gallacher: I will take that as a no.

I understand that I must conclude my remarks, so I will just say that today we have heard damning reports from members across the chamber. It is about time that this SNP Government got a grip of our education system for the benefit of our children in Scotland.

Business Motions

17:23

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-07120, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 13 December 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Medication Assisted Treatment and Workforce Update

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Moveable Transactions (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Moveable Transactions (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 14 December 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Covid Recovery and Parliamentary Business; Finance and Economy

followed by Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Debate: Health Inequalities

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 15 December 2022

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

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Net Zero, Energy and Transport

followed by Ministerial Statement: Scottish Budget 2023-24

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Asset Transfers and Community Empowerment – Five Years On

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 20 December 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

8.00 pm Decision Time

Wednesday 21 December 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Rural Affairs and Islands;
Health and Social Care;
Social Justice, Housing and Local Government

followed by Stage 3 Debate: Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.15 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 22 December 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 12 December 2022, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alexander Burnett to speak to and move amendment S6M-07120.1.

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): I apologise for giving short notice of my intention to speak on the business motion and my amendment.

Throughout the journey of the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill through

Parliament, we have consistently asked for more time to be given to the legislation, against a background of tunnel vision from the Scottish National Party, which wanted to wrap everything up before Christmas.

The SNP has ignored our requests, with excuses that seem to change each time the matter is raised. The most recent excuse, from the First Minister—that, because the issue was loosely mentioned by the Government six years ago, that somehow counts as half a decade of scrutiny of the text of the bill—is utterly ridiculous. On another occasion, the Minister for Parliamentary Business told me that there is such a busy programme that we cannot possibly take our time over the bill, meanwhile granting an extension to the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill to allow the minister to fly to Egypt. Further, that busy programme did not stop business from other parts of the Parliament being completely sidelined by the drive to avoid a gender vote in 2023.

In the last week before Christmas, there could be a Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee debate, an update on the national planning framework or perhaps more scrutiny of the budget than the 40 minutes of questions to which we are currently limited. Even the Parliamentary Bureau's strategic planning meeting has been punted into the new year.

There is no good reason for the Government to be going to this length to push everything else out of the way. We are simply asking that adequate time be given for scrutinising the bill and that that does not come at the expense of other important parliamentary business.

What possible reason could the Scottish Government have for being so opposed to having stage 3 in the new year? Last time I raised the issue in the chamber, I alluded to a secret answer being the true factor behind the hurry. Whispers and rumblings from around the Parliament, including in some SNP corridors, conclude that it is to do with one thing: ensuring that the Scottish Government does not lose any more ministers. That is quite simply not an acceptable reason to rush legislation, and it should certainly not be the reason why we delay discussing the many other issues that the country faces.

Therefore, we are seeking to amend the business programme to take the bill off the agenda for the rest of this year. We should focus on the business that was sidelined and, at the same time, allow more time to take evidence on the bill from stakeholders who are being prevented from giving evidence.

We will, however, support next week's business—namely, the budget—taking place, so we will support the business motion. However, that

does not rule out our trying again next week to ensure that the Scottish Government sees reason. I urge members to support my amendment so that that does not have to happen.

I move amendment S6M-07120.1, to leave out from “Tuesday 20 December 2022” to “12.45 pm Decision Time”.

17:26

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): Here we go again—it is a wee bit like groundhog day in the chamber. The proposed business was discussed by the Parliamentary Bureau, as all the business managers know. The bureau, including the Conservative Party business manager, unanimously agreed the business programme.

Alexander Burnett: Will the minister take an intervention?

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Take the intervention.

George Adam: I know that the member is quite new to the bureau and that he is learning on the job, so to speak, but when I look at the fact—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, resume your seat for a second. Can we listen to the minister without the shouting, particularly from members on the front benches? It is up to the minister whether he takes an intervention.

George Adam: I am looking at the position that we are in. It appears that the Tories’ plan for the last week is to shut the Parliament a week early and create a Tory MSP Christmas holiday. They want to do that instead of dealing with the hard issues that the Parliament has to deal with. I do not think for one minute that the people of Scotland would appreciate this nonsense from the Conservative Party.

On the issue at hand, there is much talk from the Tories about the Government trying to railroad the bill through. The reality is that, as the Presiding Officer will be aware, an extra week was given between stages 2 and 3 after one of the business managers asked for that. I said that we would work to do that. Not only that, but, this week, there was a request from the Labour Party, because of the debate on the issue, to extend the time for an extra hour, and I quite happily agreed to that with members. Therefore, when members have made reasonable requests, I have been able to work with colleagues to make them happen.

The serious point here is the abuse by the Tory party in its attempts to close the Parliament a week early before Christmas.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-07120.1, in the name of

Alexander Burnett, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07120, in the name of George Adam, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:29

Meeting suspended.

17:33

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S6M-07120.1, in the name of Alexander Burnett, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07120, in the name of George Adam, setting out a business programme.

The vote is now closed.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My machine was unable to connect. I would have voted no in that division.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Swinney. I will make sure that that is recorded.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-07120.1, in the name of Alexander Burnett, is: For 30, Against 91, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-07120, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 13 December 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Medication Assisted Treatment and Workforce Update

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Moveable Transactions (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Moveable Transactions (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 14 December 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Covid Recovery and Parliamentary Business;

Finance and Economy
followed by Health, Social Care and Sport
 Committee Debate: Health Inequalities
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 15 December 2022

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
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Net Zero, Energy and Transport
followed by Ministerial Statement: Scottish Budget
 2023-24
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Asset
 Transfers and Community
 Empowerment – Five Years On
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 20 December 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Gender
 Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 8.00 pm Decision Time

Wednesday 21 December 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Rural Affairs and Islands;
 Health and Social Care;
 Social Justice, Housing and Local
 Government
followed by Stage 3 Debate: Gender Recognition
 Reform (Scotland) Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.15 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 22 December 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
 12.45 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 12 December 2022, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-07121, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 1 timetable.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 17 March 2023.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:36

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions. I call George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-07122 to S6M-07124, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and to move motion S6M-07155, on the suspension and variation of standing orders.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the International Organisations (Immunities and Privileges) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Police Act 1997 (Offences in Schedules 8A and 8B) Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Order 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of meetings of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee during December 2022, Rule 12.2ZA be suspended and replaced with—

1. Where a member who—

(a) has made a complaint about any of the matters set out in rule 6.4.1(b),

(b) is the subject of such a complaint, or

(c) has given evidence in the course of the Ethical Standards Commissioner's investigations into such a complaint,

is a member of (or a committee substitute for) the committee considering this complaint, or any related question of sanctions or withdrawal of a member's rights and privileges, that member shall not participate in that capacity in any such consideration by that committee.—
[George Adam]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question on the motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:37

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first is, that amendment S6M-07111.3, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07111, in the name of Stephen Kerr, on the state of the Scottish education system, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My phone would not connect. I would have voted no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Balfour. We will make sure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)

McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-07111.3, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, is: For 66, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-07111.1, in the name of Michael Marra, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07111, in the name of Stephen Kerr, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)

Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)

Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-07111.1, in the name of Michael Marra, is: For 54, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-07111, in the name of Stephen Kerr, on the state of the Scottish education system, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Unfortunately, I was unable to connect. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Macpherson. We will make sure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)

Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)

(Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-07111, in the name of Stephen Kerr, on the state of the Scottish education system, as amended, is: For 68, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that all children, young people and adult learners have the right to a first-class education; recognises that there is much to be proud of and to celebrate in Scottish education; commends the hard work of all staff and teaching professionals in Scotland's schools, colleges, universities and early learning and childcare centres, and welcomes the comprehensive programme of reform underway in Scottish education, which includes the National Discussion to shape the future vision for Scottish education, the independent review of qualifications and assessment, the establishment of a new independent inspectorate, a new national agency and a new qualifications body, plans to expand Scotland's early learning and childcare (ELC) offer, the introduction of a new shared inspection framework for early learning and childcare (ELC), the development of purpose and principles of post-school education, research and skills, and the independent review of the skills delivery landscape.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Unless any member objects, I propose to ask a single question on the four Parliamentary Bureau motions. The final question is, that motions S6M-07122 to S6M-07124, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and motion S6M-07155, on suspension and variation of standing orders, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the International Organisations (Immunities and Privileges) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Police Act 1997 (Offences in Schedules 8A and 8B) Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Order 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of meetings of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee during December 2022, Rule 12.2ZA be suspended and replaced with—

1. Where a member who—

(a) has made a complaint about any of the matters set out in rule 6.4.1(b),

(b) is the subject of such a complaint, or

(c) has given evidence in the course of the Ethical Standards Commissioner's investigations into such a complaint,

is a member of (or a committee substitute for) the committee considering this complaint, or any related question of sanctions or withdrawal of a member's rights and privileges, that member shall not participate in that capacity in any such consideration by that committee.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

#IWill Week 2022

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-06631, in the name of Jackie Dunbar, on #iwill week 2022. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises #IWill Week 2022, which takes place from 21 to 25 November; understands that the #IWill movement is part of a UK-wide initiative, which aims to bring together the wealth of youth volunteering, fundraising, campaigning and mentoring that young people are doing to benefit others, the environment and the causes that they believe in; further understands that Youthlink, the charity behind this movement, looks to put a spotlight on the issues that it believes are affecting young people, notably with its annual conference on 8 November 2022 being focused on youth work and poverty, and wishes #IWillScotland all the best for its upcoming week, bringing awareness to the young people actively making a change.

17:46

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I am pleased to be able to bring to the chamber this members' debate, which celebrates the hard work and commitment of the young folk across Scotland during #iwill week. I thank colleagues from all sides of the chamber who have supported my motion, thereby allowing us this evening to highlight the volunteers and young people across Scotland who are making a positive change in their communities.

The #iwill week was established in 2013 and brought together 50 young people who wanted to make a difference in their community with 50 organisations that could help them to achieve their goals. The #iwill week now reaches more than 700 young #iwill ambassadors and more than 1,000 organisations, and this year it took place from 21 to 25 November.

It has the aim of shedding light on the challenges that are faced by young activists and change makers, as well as helping to encourage meaningful conversations among all those who work in the youth work sector on how they can continue to support youth social action into 2023. From primary schools to a clinical commissioning group in Barrow-in-Furness, and from FTSE companies to Government departments, the #iwill movement has gone from strength to strength.

However, challenges lie ahead, including poverty, the climate emergency, worsening mental health and wellbeing, social and economic inequalities and racial injustice. Challenges that existed before the Covid-19 crisis have been exacerbated by the global pandemic, and the

future has never felt more uncertain. This is why #iwill week is so vital: it provides a platform through which young people can truly influence change.

Social action is about people coming together to improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities. It can include volunteering, donating money, taking community action or undertaking simple neighbourly acts. Through the commitment and skill of citizens, social action can empower communities and help people in need. Taking part in social action is associated with higher levels of wellbeing and can improve folks' confidence and skills. It is often reported to be the catalyst for people becoming involved in local democracy and national politics, which are areas where we need more diversity.

Our ambition as a country is to be a democratic and welcoming nation. To do that, we need to empower our communities to take more ownership of the decisions that are made and we need to empower folk to have influence over their lives and outcomes. Social action is important at a young age. Young folk should grow up influencing decisions and their communities in ways that will shape their futures and spaces to make a positive difference.

The #iwill week is one way of celebrating the young folk across the country who are involved in social action and are striving to make their communities better for all young people, as well as seeking to see and make changes to policies that might impact on young folk at local and national levels.

Research suggests that high-quality activities meet six principles. They will be youth-led, they will be challenging, they will have a social impact, they will allow for progression to other opportunities, they will be embedded in a young person's life and they will enable reflection on the value of the activity. The higher the quality of the social action, the more likely it is to benefit both the young folk involved and the communities or causes that they are trying to help.

I give a quick shout-out and my personal thanks to Cian Gullen for the help that she has provided for me with this topic. Cian recently marked her sixth year as an #iwill ambassador. In those years, she has worked with YouthLink as co-chair of the #iwill advisory group and has been involved in a lot of the planning of #iwill events in Scotland, as well as helping to ensure that the movement remains youth led. She has worked with other #iwill ambassadors and other young people to help to progress the #YouthVIP recommendations to make volunteering more accessible to young people across Scotland. She is a true advocate for social change and I know that others take inspiration from her work.

I end by strongly encouraging all members to promote the remarkable work of #iwill and the #iwill ambassadors in helping to make change not only for young people but for the wider communities that we represent. It is important that we recognise the incredible work of young people across our communities and regions and right across Scotland.

Without being clichéd, I can say that children and young people are our future. We must enable them to lead the way, listen to their views and support them to bring about meaningful social change. I ask the minister for a commitment that the Government will build on its record in that regard and will continue to support the advance of youth democracy and social change.

17:51

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I apologise for my late arrival in the chamber.

I thank Jackie Dunbar for lodging the motion recognising #iwill week 2022, which is an opportunity to recognise the important role of youth volunteering, campaigning and mentoring in communities, neighbourhoods, towns and families.

As she has outlined, #iwill has grown over the years and #iwill Scotland, supported by YouthLink Scotland, brings together more than 100 youth organisations from across the country and supports a wide range of work and initiatives that enable young people to drive social change. They include celebration of international volunteers day, the work of the Scottish Youth Parliament on a variety of issues to ensure that young people's rights are upheld, and work to support young carers and young adult carers by ensuring that they can participate in a survey to find out about the pressures that they face and the support that they need.

I am delighted to see that there is a focus on disability. I have been working closely with an inspiring young constituent who is passionate about driving forward disability rights through important issues such as relaxed theatre performances and quiet times in shopping centres for young people who are living with autism. I thank her very much for her commitment and drive on that issue.

I am old enough—sadly—to have had the privilege of doing my own bit with young people, and I spent many years as a volunteer with the Aberdeen open awards centre supporting the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and as a child protection officer for Aberdeen Grammar Rugby. Those were very different roles with one thing in common: they helped children and young people to reach their potential, to step out of their comfort

zones, to build confidence and resilience and just to have fun in a safe space.

My son was a scout for many years, and now, as an adult, he looks back on the experiences and opportunities that the scouts gave him in team building, problem solving, being pushed out of his comfort zone, cooking and even dealing with homesickness. I have absolutely no doubt that all that made him the person he is today.

Not all children and young people are given the opportunities that they deserve. Many find themselves facing circumstances, experiences or environments that are difficult and challenging to navigate. It is therefore imperative that barriers and obstacles be removed so that they can achieve their potential and have good and fulfilling lives.

The focus and support that #iwill provides in that effort is pivotal. I was pleased to note that the key themes that were explored in #iwill week 2022 included working together on what we need to learn about working across sectors, how young people can shape a place, how we can create genuinely enabling environments for young people, and the role of funders in all of that. Those are important themes and questions, and they are ones that all of us, collectively, must be invested in answering in our respective roles. I very much hope that the outcomes of that week of celebration of and focus on young people provide the #iwill movement with a platform to take forward its work right across Scotland.

I again thank Jackie Dunbar for bringing the debate to Parliament. I want to end with a few words that I often used to remind my family of how valued they were: "What you are looking for is already in you. You are already everything you need to be." Let us never forget that.

17:56

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland)
(Con): I thank Jackie Dunbar for bringing the debate to Parliament this evening. We were councillors together at Aberdeen City Council, and we are now MSPs together. We rarely agree in debates, but I am glad that we can today.

"Young people are part of society. They deserve to be heard because they are here, and they exist in the present. They are not just the future and the decisions made in Scotland and the UK affect young people today."

Those are not my words; they are the words of an #iwill ambassador from Aberdeen. We are fortunate to have so many young people who are willing to come forward and be heard. As a Parliament, we should be doing more to listen to their voices and to hear their views on topics that affect us all.

We are lucky to have a vibrant Youth Parliament, and perhaps we should be doing more to strengthen the links between the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Youth Parliament. As elected representatives, we have the privilege of welcoming school groups into our workplace. I know that, for many of us, it is the highlight of our week. Young people have important things to say about our democracy, our policies and the issues that we discuss, and they often ask the unexpected questions that others dare not ask.

#iwill week is all about a celebration of those young people who get involved. It celebrates the social action that our young people take part in, and it commends the huge amount of volunteering that young people do and the difference that they make throughout Scotland.

Figures from Volunteer Scotland show that, far from declining, volunteering among our young people is increasing. At 49 per cent, youth volunteer participation is double the rate of participation by adult volunteers, which sits at 26 per cent. Seventeen per cent of young people who do not volunteer say that they will in the future. In the past decade, formal volunteering has grown from 33 per cent to 49 per cent. Girls are more likely to volunteer than boys. Our young people are active and vital members of our volunteering communities in Scotland.

#iwill week also encourages organisations and governing bodies to commit to young people and their participation in social action and decision making. We want young people to be more engaged in how policy is made at all levels of our society. It gives me an enormous sense of pride to know that a policy convention that will take place tomorrow in Aberdeen, my home city, will be attended by more than 200 young people. They will discuss the role of youth work as a rights respecting and rights promoting practice. Young people are key to enabling social action that will be the catalyst for change that young people will ultimately drive. I think that, as parliamentarians, we should invite them to come here to present the outcomes of that conference to us.

I would like to add my thanks to the many youth organisations and youth workers throughout Scotland who are passionate about working with young people. YouthLink Scotland, which is leading the #iwill week in Scotland, does an incredible amount of work to build and strengthen our network of youth work. Youth work does, indeed, change lives. I know that colleagues will join me in congratulating Angela Leitch on her appointment as chair of that organisation just this week.

In closing, I once again pay tribute to our young people. We could all learn from, and emulate, their ambition, vibrancy, hopefulness and commitment

to helping others. They are, indeed, part of today's Scotland and we are a far richer country as a result.

18:00

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. I extend my thanks to Jackie Dunbar. It is fascinating that the debate follows on from our earlier debate, because this one allows us to highlight some of the real strengths that our young people can show us oldies. The desire through the #iwill movement for young people to fight for their cause is no stronger than in relation to climate change and democracy. The #iwill movement aims to lead us to listen to young people.

Douglas Lumsden categorised it brilliantly when he said that young people sometimes ask questions that throw even adults. I would go further and say that, actually, young people sometimes have the solutions that we are perhaps too narrow-minded to see. It is important that we open up the opportunity to listen properly to young people and that we do not hide behind tick-box exercises in which we just say, "Yes, we have spoken to them," and then move on. We should speak to and listen to them, and say that we want them to be part of the change that affects their lives.

The #iwill movement also asks organisations to pledge their support. That is an opportunity for organisations to walk the walk as well as talk the talk and pledge to support our young people, particularly at this challenging time as we move into a period of poverty the likes of which many living people in this country have never seen before and perhaps have only read about. We have a huge tsunami coming our way, and we need to involve young people in the solutions to that and in the discussions, because their ideas can sometimes help us oldies, as I said.

I also echo Douglas Lumsden's thanks to Angela Leitch, whom I know well from her East Lothian past. I know that she will be a passionate advocate for young people. She will ensure that young people have a say at the table or, indeed, perhaps just in a library or in a walk outside, so that they can express their ideas, opinions and views in a way that they feel comfortable with. It is a massive idea to invite those from Aberdeen to make their proposals here—perhaps in the chamber or wherever in the Parliament they feel most comfortable doing so—and to hold us politicians to account.

I know that time is short and that there was huge support for the motion, but I cannot end without extending my thanks to the young people themselves, and I would like to pick up on one

aspect of volunteering that is important for members to note. I also look to the minister for ideas on how we can improve the situation. With formal volunteering, the group of young people who come from the hardest-hit families in areas of the highest deprivation in the Scottish index of multiple deprivation are often the least likely to formally volunteer. I am thinking about the scout, cub and girl guide movements and other volunteering opportunities. Interestingly, statistics show that young people in that group are also most likely to just volunteer to help their friend, neighbour or community.

There is no requirement for everyone to formally volunteer, but productive work could be done to try to work out why the young people from those backgrounds are particularly challenged when it comes to formal volunteering, from which often flow great benefits and ideas. It is clear that the passion to volunteer and help and the passion for answers already exist. I would therefore be interested, at the end of this debate and after that, to hear what consideration has been given to bridging the gap between accidental volunteering and more formal volunteering, which is much easier to recognise in statistics and data.

I again thank Jackie Dunbar for bringing the debate to the chamber. We are talking about the most important people in our society. #iwill week has shown what they can really offer, and it is for us oldies to listen to them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the minister, Jamie Hepburn, to respond to the debate.

18:04

The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn): I begin by joining others to thank Jackie Dunbar for securing this debate and allowing us to collectively have this opportunity to recognise #iwill week 2022. I also thank colleagues for their contributions this evening, although I put it firmly on the record that I dissociate myself from Martin Whitfield's characterisation of us as "oldies".

This has been a very valuable, albeit short, debate. #iwill week is an important initiative for recognising the volunteering, fundraising, campaigning and mentoring work that young people are doing to benefit others. YouthLink Scotland, of course, deserves a mention for its activity in that regard. I have the highest respect for that organisation; I engage and work with it regularly; and I give my thanks to Tim Frew for his leadership as its chief executive. I welcome Angela Leitch to her role, too, and I think it important that we also place on record our thanks

to Lorna Hood, who has made a massive contribution to public life in Scotland in general, but not least in her role as chair of YouthLink Scotland over the past six years.

We must also thank the many thousands of people who volunteer or work in the youth work sector and who provide support and opportunities for young people to engage through the medium of youth work. We have heard many examples of that tonight, and they exist right across the country.

As a Government, we value the kindness and generosity of volunteers, who are continuing to make a difference in our communities across the country. We recognise through #iwill week that the massive contribution made by our young people who choose to volunteer and make a difference is having a positive impact, is improving the lives of individuals and communities and is making Scotland a better place.

Scotland's volunteering action plan, which was launched in June, aims to create a Scotland in which everyone can volunteer more often and throughout their lives. That includes supporting young people to volunteer, should they want to. In that respect, Martin Whitfield made a fair point about trying to extend the opportunities to ensure that the fullest and widest range of young people can take part in volunteering, no matter their background. As we take forward our youth work strategy, a focal point for us will be to consider how we better reach out and involve more young people.

Given the current situation, we should observe how volunteers have been at the front line of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and how they are now forming a critical part of the response to the cost of living crisis that we are facing. As we will all have seen in the communities that we represent, volunteers have provided a range of support, and young people have been a critical part of that activity.

The motion that Ms Dunbar has lodged and that we are debating this evening talks about the work to tackle the poverty that young people are experiencing. We know that the current situation is having a real impact on families living in poverty, and we know its implications for our young people. In March, we published our second tackling child poverty delivery plan, "Best Start, Bright Futures", which sets out the range of our ambitions and the set of actions that we will be taking over the next four years and beyond to tackle poverty.

It is all part of our ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world for a child to grow up in. After all, the national outcome for children and young people is that children

"grow up loved, safe and respected"

so that they reach

"their full potential."

In March 2021, we collectively took a step in that direction when we, as a Parliament, unanimously passed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill, which is, I think, an important part of the landscape of youth work, as it enables young people and children to express themselves and have their voices heard. That is, of course, a fundamentally important right that they have.

Martin Whitfield: I have no intention of sounding a note of discord, minister, but, on the issue of UNCRC incorporation, do we have a date for when the matter will return to the chamber for reconsideration?

Jamie Hepburn: The Deputy First Minister has set out to Parliament how we intend to take that forward. The matter will be brought back, but I am afraid that I cannot give specific information about that, because I am not leading on it. However, I will make sure that the member's question is picked up and, if there is information that I can convey to Mr Whitfield, I will be happy to do so.

The Scottish Youth Parliament was mentioned by Audrey Nicoll and Douglas Lumsden, and there is also the Children's Parliament. They are an important part of the landscape of youth but are also an important conduit for young people to come forward and set out their opinions and views about the world that we live in. Douglas Lumsden made that point effectively when he quoted the #iwill ambassador from Aberdeen. We have to think about young people in terms not just of the contribution that they can make in the future but the contribution that they can make here and now. Their voices should be heard, and I assure all members that those organisations are an effective mechanism for communicating the voices of young people to the Scottish Government.

I will return to the issue of the youth work strategy. We want to ensure that we continue to reap the benefits of the extraordinary activity of the youth work sector. Jackie Dunbar asked us to restate the importance of youth empowerment, and that is why I say that it is important that we take forward the development of a new youth work strategy. That is very much designed to improve outcomes for young people through a stronger and better-connected system that offers opportunities to promote equality and equity and is inclusive of the needs of all young people.

Our vision is for every young person to realise their full potential regardless of their background and circumstances. Youth work can play a critically important role in that regard, and my aim is that the youth work strategy will better enable that to happen.

We must actively give young people the confidence that their voices will be heard. Therefore, let us keep speaking to young people in partnership to ensure that we represent their views in Parliament on the issues that matter most to them.

Meeting closed at 18:12.

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