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DRAFT

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 28 February 2024

[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. As ever, members who wish to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant questions. There is quite a bit of interest in both sets of portfolios, and we have a busy programme over the course of the afternoon, so I make the usual appeal for brevity in questions and responses.

Robert the Bruce (750th Anniversary)

1. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting events to commemorate the 750th anniversary of the birth of Robert the Bruce, which takes place on 11 July this year. (S6O-03118)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I take the opportunity to welcome Kaukab Stewart to her ministerial position; I look forward to working with her to deliver the annual £100 million increase in the culture and arts budget to which the Government has committed.

Since we last held portfolio questions, we have had the very sad news of the death of Russia's leading opposition figure, Alexei Navalny. I am sure that members on all sides of the chamber will join me in condemning the Russian Government for its culpability. The whole democratic world, including Scotland, should mark his bravery and inspirational leadership, and remind President Putin and his henchmen that the memory of Alexei Navalny will not be erased and that there will be real consequences.

In answer to Claire Baker's question about the 750th anniversary of the birth of Robert the Bruce, the Scottish Government delivers support for the historic environment through our sponsorship of Historic Environment Scotland, our leading public body for heritage. Historic Environment Scotland is marking the 750th anniversary of the birth of Robert the Bruce, as one of the main sponsors of

a programme of community-led activities in Dumfries and Galloway by the Medieval Bruce Heritage Trust, which began on 10 February and will run until 14 July. There will also be Bruce-themed activities at the Caerlaverock castle jousting event on 27 and 28 July, and I commend visits to both Stirling castle and the Bannockburn visitor centre as well.

Claire Baker: There is no denying the notable part in Scotland's history that was played by Robert the Bruce. As the cabinet secretary will know, Robert the Bruce's final resting place is in Dunfermline abbey, in Scotland's ancient capital and its newest city. The 750th anniversary is an opportunity for Dunfermline to maximise those links and to encourage visitors and engagement in cultural activities. How is the Scottish Government working with Fife Council, VisitScotland and others to ensure that the city of Dunfermline is best placed to capitalise on events such as that historic anniversary? How is the Government supporting Dunfermline in maximising its cultural appeal to visitors, given its new city status?

Angus Robertson: I commend Claire Baker for doing just that: she has used the opportunity of portfolio questions to highlight the importance of Dunfermline to Robert the Bruce. It adds to the list of the variety of places and events that will mark the life of Robert the Bruce in this important anniversary year.

I would very much like to come to Dunfermline and visit the abbey, and I commend everybody who is watching these questions to do likewise. The Scottish Government meets regularly with our agencies, whether that is Historic Environment Scotland or VisitScotland, and we have an ongoing dialogue with local authorities. If there is anything of which Claire Baker would wish me and my colleagues to be aware, I look forward to hearing about that, and to underlining the importance of Dunfermline to the memory of the life of Robert the Bruce.

Culture (Promotion)

2. Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it is promoting culture outside of the central belt. (S6O-03119)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government works closely with partners to promote culture across the whole of Scotland. For example, the youth music initiative offers young people across the country access to music making. Creative Scotland's funding reaches all 32 local authority areas. The regularly funded network includes organisations from the Scottish Borders to the Shetland Islands, while the Culture Collective includes the creative islands network and the Ayr Gaiety partnership's

Culture Collective programme. South of Scotland Enterprise recently published the “South of Scotland Creative Economy guide” to promote that region’s vibrant creative economy. Highlands and Islands Enterprise and its XpoNorth Digital programme provide innovative support, including their recent Highland heritage and film sector mixer event.

Sharon Dowey: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer and I, too, welcome the Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development to her new post.

College students around Ayrshire are frustrated about the lack of local jobs in the culture sector. A lack of opportunities forces people to either leave where they live, commute huge distances or accept that their careers may be held back. Between 2014 and 2023, however, Creative Scotland did not hire anyone beyond Edinburgh or Glasgow; the overwhelming majority of roles went to people in the capital city. Does the cabinet secretary agree that job opportunities across the public sector, including in culture, could be spread more fairly across Scotland?

Angus Robertson: I am very seized of, first, taking the opportunity to commend cultural venues and organisations across the country—including some in the area that Sharon Dowey highlighted. Those matters are being considered by Creative Scotland, which is an arm’s-length organisation, for reasons that I think all members agree with. It is currently going through a programme of regularly funded organisations, and there are most certainly organisations from the region that Sharon Dowey highlighted. Is there more that can be done to highlight the vibrant culture and arts scene throughout Scotland? No doubt. However—as I already said in a detailed answer to the member—there are projects and organisations, which are well funded, throughout the country, including in rural Scotland and the south-west of Scotland, and I look forward to that continuing.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): At a meeting that took place earlier this month, Aberdeen City Council considered a report entitled “Culture Delivery and Funding Review”, which included analysis of Creative Scotland’s grant awards to Aberdeen in comparison to other Scottish cities. What is the cabinet secretary’s response to that report?

Angus Robertson: As the member is well aware, under the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, the Scottish Government is unable to intervene in the artistic judgment of Creative Scotland, including in relation to the multiyear funding decisions that are under way.

The Scottish Government provides funding to Creative Scotland to distribute funds across the

whole of Scotland. There are three organisations based in Aberdeen that are regularly funded by Creative Scotland and receive a total of £0.69 million per year. There are also other organisations that serve Aberdeen but have headquarters outside the city. If there is anything that Jackie Dunbar wishes to bring to the attention of me or Creative Scotland, I would be grateful if she could do that in the normal way.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to increase culture funding by £100 million per annum during the next five years. That additional investment represents a considerable vote of confidence in the culture sector and its role in creating a wellbeing economy. Can the cabinet secretary give further information about how that increased funding will reach rural communities across Scotland?

Angus Robertson: That commitment to additional funding despite the challenging budget situation signals our confidence in the Scottish culture sector. It is the starting point of a journey of three phases: the first phase is to sustain, the second is to develop and the third is to innovate. All of that is under discussion with our culture and arts sector colleagues to ensure that funding reaches all parts of the country and all parts of the Scottish culture and arts ecosystem.

If members from across the chamber have particular views about where that additional resource should bring additionality to the culture and arts sector, I am extremely keen to hear from them. We want to ensure that our organisations, venues and performers are properly funded, and we look forward to delivering the additional funding. We have already started the rise to an additional £100 million of annual funding for culture and the arts, which I hope is welcomed across the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Cultural Organisations in Stirling (Funding)

4. **Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it can offer to cultural organisations in Stirling that are facing funding challenges. (S6O-03121)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government, through Creative Scotland, provides support to a number of cultural organisations and individuals in Stirling. In 2022-23 alone, Creative Scotland awarded £1.76 million through funds—including its regular, open and targeted funding—to 46 successful applications from individuals and organisations that are based in the Stirling area.

Evelyn Tweed: I know that the Scottish Government understands the huge cultural significance of organisations such as the Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum and Creative Stirling, which are in my constituency. Given the forward focus on funding, are there avenues for any crisis funding to help in the meantime?

Angus Robertson: As I am sure the member will appreciate, ministers have no role in the decision making of Creative Scotland in its allocation of individual grants and support. However, the Scottish Government is engaging closely with Creative Scotland to provide support where possible for organisations such as Creative Stirling, which faces immediate challenges. The former minister for culture, Christina McKelvie, has already written to Creative Stirling with information on alternative routes of funding that it may wish to investigate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a number of supplementary questions, which I hope will be brief.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): Creative Scotland's regular funding network consists of 121 organisations, but only 12 organisations located in the north-east received funding, compared with 81 in the central belt. Can the cabinet secretary highlight what measures are being considered—such as capacity building—to begin to rectify that disparity?

Angus Robertson: I reiterate this point, and I think that there is cross-party consensus about it: Creative Scotland operates as an arm's-length organisation, so it is not for me, as culture secretary, to tell it which organisations, in which parts of the country, should be funded. The member will be aware that Creative Scotland is going through a new process to deliver multi-annual funding to regularly funded organisations. Creative Scotland has gone through stage 1 of that process but has not yet reached stage 2, so I cannot comment on the conclusions of that. Creative Scotland will no doubt have heard the point that the member has raised about ensuring impact and support right across Scotland. I support that. No doubt, the decisions that are made will be examined closely by the subject committee, and I know that the point that the member has raised will have been heard by Creative Scotland.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I associate myself and my party with the cabinet secretary's remarks about the death of Alexei Navalny. All our thoughts are with his friends and his family and with those fighting against oppression in Russia. There is compelling evidence of Putin's involvement in deaths on foreign soil, and he must be brought before the International Criminal Court for his war crimes.

I recently visited Stirling castle and the Old Town Jail with my family, and I commend the excellent cultural and heritage organisations in Stirling. The cabinet secretary has recently given clarity on funding for the culture budget in 2024-25. Further clarity is being sought on the Government's five-year spending announcement, which is welcome. When can culture organisations in Stirling and elsewhere expect further clarity on the Government's spending announcements for future years?

Angus Robertson: First, I commend Neil Bibby for his comments regarding Alexei Navalny.

Neil Bibby asks a very reasonable question about funding. He appreciates that there is an ongoing standard budget process in the Scottish Government. We have already committed to the initial uplift in this financial year regarding this year's financial commitments. Next year, an additional £25 million will take us to a net gain of £40 million. We then need to get into year 3 and year 4 to get towards the £100 million of additional support for culture and the arts. I appreciate that people want to know how quickly that money will be available, and I want to ensure that it is available as quickly as possible. As soon as I am able to give further clarity on that, Neil Bibby and colleagues will be the first to hear it. Everybody understands that we require the additional resources for the culture sector, and the Government is committed to that.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Creative Stirling has shown itself to be a highly innovative organisation. It has met the needs of communities, but it does not benefit from siloed funding. I wish to ask the cabinet secretary about the conversation with Creative Scotland, which I know he has engaged with, in particular about opportunities for multiyear funding and about innovation. Organisations such as Creative Stirling will go to the wall unless they get support, survive this period of vulnerability and continue to do what they do best as they seek long-term funding.

Angus Robertson: Mark Ruskell's question is very timely. I know that Creative Scotland is very much seized of the need to introduce multi-annual funding, which I think everybody agrees will be hugely beneficial to the cultural sector. There is also an understanding about the issues of innovation, resilience and looking forward to the next year, given the significant change in public behaviour and so on, and that will be key for many cultural organisations. I have had those conversations with Creative Scotland, and I know that it is giving strong consideration to how it proceeds as we move from the current funding situation into the new multi-annual funding approach. No doubt it will be interested to hear

Mark Ruskell's views on ensuring that that can deliver for cultural and arts organisations, in Stirling and throughout the rest of Scotland, too.

Screen Machine

5. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what action it is taking to protect the future of the Screen Machine mobile cinema. (S6O-03122)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Kaukab Stewart): I thank members for their warm words in welcoming me to my portfolio.

The Scottish Government will work closely with Screen Scotland, which has been exploring a number of options with Regional Screen Scotland in order to secure a sustainable future for the service both immediately and in the longer term.

The work is on-going and, as I am sure Rhoda Grant will appreciate, much of the detail is commercially sensitive. However, I welcome the funding that Screen Scotland previously provided to ensure that the service will remain active until April this year, and I expect to hear a further update from it on that work at our next regular meeting.

Rhoda Grant: I thank the minister for that response, and I welcome her to her post.

The minister knows that the Screen Machine gives rural and island communities access to cinema that they would not otherwise have because there is no alternative. If funding is not found to replace the Screen Machine and to pay for its running costs, this much-loved facility will disappear. Such is the concern that young people in Barra enlisted the support of Dame Judi Dench to highlight the issue and its importance to them. Will the Scottish Government therefore undertake to investigate every possible avenue to ensure that funding is found to save this very valuable institution?

Kaukab Stewart: I understand the strength of feeling around the issue, and a number of MSPs have made representations about it. In 2023, Screen Scotland provided more than £176,000 for the specific purpose of leasing the cinemobile and securing the mobile cinema service until April 2024.

Following the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture's meeting with Regional Screen Scotland, which operates the service, Scottish Government officials in Screen Scotland have been leading work to explore all options for the immediate and long-term future of the service. I met officials just this morning, and I

would be happy to write to the member with an update as soon as I have it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will have a couple of brief supplementary questions.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I, too, welcome the minister to her place.

The Screen Machine is very much loved in my island communities—Brodick is the busiest venue anywhere, averaging 63 seats out of a capacity of 78 per screening. It is also much missed in Cumbrae, which is one of seven islands that the currently on-loan French cinemobile is too large to visit.

The funding landscape has changed, and we have heard the cabinet secretary talk about the additional funding that is going into the culture sector. Given the immense cultural benefits that the Screen Machine brings and the expected working life of the new vehicle, is its cost not more than worth it?

Kaukab Stewart: I understand the costs as well as the value, which the member highlighted, and the significance of Screen Machine's unique cultural, educational and wellbeing benefits for communities such as those in Kenneth Gibson's constituency. I understand the point about people's access to cinema being restricted, and I understand how important it is for communities to be able to come together to access a wide range of cultural resources, which are invaluable sources of expression and foster a sense of belonging. I agree with Kenneth Gibson that the Screen Machine has a positive environmental and cultural impact on all communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alexander Stewart. More briefly, Mr Stewart.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I, too, welcome Kaukab Stewart to her post. On behalf of my party, I also echo the comments that have been made with reference to Alexei Navalny.

Since 1998, the Screen Machine has brought the newest films to more than 40 remote locations. However, in April, that service will expire. With the cost of a replacement vehicle being £1.4 million, Regional Screen Scotland is pleading with the Scottish Government to provide half of that amount. Will the minister pledge today to stop funding the Scottish Government's obsession with independence and instead direct funds to replace a vehicle that is the cornerstone of communities across Scotland?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Again, that was not brief.

Kaukab Stewart: I refer the member to my earlier answers, and I assure him that the Scottish

Government is doing everything that it can to support this very valuable service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 6 was not lodged.

Aberdeen Festivals (Support)

7. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to Aberdeen's festivals. (S6O-03124)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Since 2011, Creative Scotland has assisted 41 festivals and other cultural events in the Aberdeen City Council area, with total funding of £1,443,654. In the same period, EventScotland has supported 79 events, excluding business events, with a total funding of £2,107,607.

In addition, since 2018-19, Creative Scotland has funded Aberdeen Performing Arts with £333,333 every year, as a regular funded organisation, supporting its work in mounting the "Granite Noir" crime fiction festival, the "Delve" music festival, the Climate Week North East festival, the "Rise Up!" festival, and "Light the Blue", which is a children's festival. The Scottish Government also continues to fund Techfest, which is Aberdeen's science festival, as part of our wider programme of support for science festivals, in line with our science, technology, engineering and mathematics education and training strategy. Techfest received a grant of £25,000 during 2023-24.

Kevin Stewart: I thank the cabinet secretary for that comprehensive answer and welcome the support for festivals such as Techfest, but what more can the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland do to support Aberdeen's other festivals, such as the Spectra light festival and Nuart Aberdeen, to help them to grow even more? Can we ensure that there is collaboration between Creative Scotland and VisitScotland, so that we get more visitors from abroad to come to those amazing festivals?

Angus Robertson: I thank Kevin Stewart for his welcome for the broad range of festivals that have been supported in Aberdeen already. The fact that additional events have not been supported is a matter best raised directly with Creative Scotland, although I would welcome being copied in to such interventions.

The encouragement for Creative Scotland and VisitScotland to work together is helpful—no doubt, they do that already. It is certainly something that I will raise at my next meetings with them, to ensure that important cultural centres such as Aberdeen have the greatest amount of exposure in order to maximise the number of visitors to the granite city.

Culture and Arts (Equality, Opportunity and Community)

8. Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what role culture and the arts play in delivering its missions of equality, opportunity and community. (S6O-03125)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Kaukab Stewart): The Scottish Government's missions align closely with the ambitions of the culture strategy of empowering through culture, strengthening culture and transforming through culture.

In our recently published refreshed cultural strategy action plan, we have committed to launching a creative and culture sector fair work task force to support implementation across the culture sector, supporting our opportunity ambition. Our culture collective programme also supports delivery around equality and community, developing initiatives in partnership with our communities across Scotland.

Collette Stevenson: I congratulate the minister on her new role.

The Scottish Government recently announced £1.5 million of funding through the youth music initiative. Beneficiaries include the "Mobilize" music project at the Key youth centre in East Kilbride, which runs guitar, drum and vocal lessons for young people. I invite the minister to visit the centre to see the benefits of the funding at first hand.

Will the minister outline what other support the Scottish Government is providing to cultural initiatives such as that to benefit people in East Kilbride?

Kaukab Stewart: I thank Collette Stevenson for highlighting the youth music initiative. We are proud to support that programme, and the impact that it has on communities across Scotland cannot be overstated. I look forward to seeing the programme at first hand in due course.

On cultural initiatives, the Scottish Government provides support for An Comunn Gàidhealach, the body that organises both the Royal National Mòd and local mòds, including the East Kilbride local mòd, which takes place on 8 June.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I am sure that the minister will be aware that the Edinburgh Deaf Festival provides an accessible celebration of deaf culture, language and heritage alongside the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Unfortunately, the organisation has lost its funding from Creative Scotland, which is putting the whole festival at risk. Will the minister intervene to save a festival that works so hard towards the goals of equality, opportunity and community?

Kaukab Stewart: I absolutely agree with equality, inclusion and community. The member will appreciate that I have taken up my post only recently and that I need to take some time to familiarise myself with everything that is going on around that. I will be happy to engage with him in the very near future.

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I, too, welcome Kaukab Stewart to her new post. Congratulations.

The Scottish Government's programme for government in September 2023 made commitments to renew culture by focusing on empowering communities. What update can the minister give on actions that the Scottish Government has taken since the publication of the programme for government to improve opportunities for community asset transfers for arts and culture organisations in Scotland's most deprived areas?

Kaukab Stewart: I have previously stated that I am a great advocate of community asset transfers. Once again, I ask respectfully for patience while I get to grips with my portfolio, so I can come back with a more detailed answer that is specific to his question.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on the constitution, external affairs and culture. There will be a brief pause to allow the front-bench teams to change positions before we move on to the next portfolio questions.

Justice and Home Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is justice and home affairs. Members who wish to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant questions. There is, again, a lot of interest in asking supplementaries in this portfolio, so brevity in questions and responses would be appreciated.

Proportionate Response to Crime

1. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when the results from Police Scotland's proportionate response to crime pilot in the north-east will be published. (S6O-03126)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): As I stated in the chamber yesterday, Police Scotland's north-east pilot is about ensuring a proportionate approach to policing. At a meeting of the Scottish Police Authority last week, Deputy Chief Constable Malcolm Graham outlined some preliminary findings and stated that a full evaluation would be presented to the SPA in the near future.

Any decision on publication—or, indeed, to extend the pilot more widely—is for Police Scotland to make, with oversight and scrutiny provided by the SPA. Public confidence will, of course, be key to that process. Officers in the north-east will continue to investigate all crimes that are reported. That means that all reports are recorded using the THRIVE model, with an assessment of threat, harm, risk, investigative opportunities, vulnerability and engagement.

Douglas Lumsden: Following a freedom of information request to Police Scotland, I have learned that Police Scotland is refusing to let the public know how many times a crime reference number was given but no further action was taken during the north-east pilot. Does the cabinet secretary think that it is right that the police withhold that information? Has she seen that data? If so, can she share it with us today, so that the people of the north-east can have trust in the process?

Angela Constance: The information that I am aware of is further to my meeting with the chief constable last week, on 8 February. I have had some oversight of the preliminary findings that the deputy chief constable, Malcolm Graham, outlined at the SPA meeting. The member will be aware that the chief constable emphasised to board members and board observers that the police in the north-east continue to assess every case and investigate all crimes.

According to the preliminary information that is available, where there are no proportionate lines of inquiry because there is no risk of threat or harm, cases are reported, filed and given crime reference numbers, and no further action is taken unless other evidence becomes apparent. Those are likely to be a very small proportion of cases; the preliminary summary says that they make up less than 5 per cent of calls. I hope that that response is helpful to the member.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Does the north-east pilot reflect the way that policing has always been carried out in England?

Angela Constance: The pilot conducted by Police Scotland in the north-east operates broadly in the same way as forces operate elsewhere in the United Kingdom. On its website, the Gloucestershire Constabulary states that it will

“look at the information we've got and decide if we can investigate your report further. If we decide we can't investigate your report, we'll contact you to explain why”.

It goes on to say that its decisions are based on “vulnerability”, “seriousness”, the “likelihood of solving” the crime and the “best use of our resources”, which is broadly similar to Police Scotland's THRIVE model. That approach is replicated across other English forces. Like the

north-east pilot, it is about proportionate response and ensuring that individuals get a faster resolution from officers.

Pathology Services (Accuracy and Reliability)

2. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service takes to ensure that any information that it receives from pathology service providers is accurate and reliable. (S6O-03127)

The Solicitor General for Scotland (Ruth Charteris KC): The Lord Advocate has sole responsibility for deaths investigation in Scotland. During investigations, information is gathered from external agencies, including pathology services. The Crown requires to rely on information provided to it by professionals who are bound by their own standards of professionalism, codes of practice and governing bodies. Such information forms only a part of an investigation; it is considered in the context of other evidence, providing a cross-check for reliability, accuracy or the need for further interrogation.

Monica Lennon: I thank the Solicitor General for that response and for clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the Lord Advocate. Her office will be aware that my constituents Ann and Gerry Stark were told repeatedly by the Crown Office and health authorities that all tissue samples of their deceased son, Richard, had been returned to the family, but that was not true. Does the Crown Office accept that the failings in that case should never have happened? Will the law officers take the opportunity to apologise to the family? Can we have more information about the urgent action that was taken since the scandal came to light last year, so that all families, including the Stark family, can have full confidence in the Crown Office when it investigates the sudden and unexplained death of our loved ones?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: I acknowledge that the issues surrounding retention of samples are of exquisite sensitivity. The importance of the accuracy of the information that is provided to relatives about that cannot be overstated. COPFS must necessarily rely on the information that is provided and has no role in policing pathology services. Nevertheless, important work is being carried out. There are data retention agreements in place with pathology and toxicology providers in relation to reports, instrument data and samples that are obtained for the purposes of the procurator fiscal's investigation.

I understand the distress and anguish of families who suffer the loss of a loved one, and I extend my condolences to Ms Lennon's constituents, Mr and Mrs Stark. There is a standing offer to the

Starks, and to Ms Lennon, to come to the Crown Office and meet us. I am happy to reiterate that offer and, of course, it would be appropriate to go into the detail of that case at that meeting.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I recognise the sensitivity of these issues, but I require more brevity, particularly in the responses. I have a brief supplementary question from Russell Findlay.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Three months ago, I was grateful to meet the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General, who told me about serious and worrying concerns about pathology services, specifically regarding a lack of paediatric pathologists. What work has since been done to improve that vital service and ensure that every death in Scotland is subject to proper full investigation?

The Solicitor General for Scotland: COPFS has a series of contracts and service level agreements with universities, local authorities and the NHS for pathology, mortuary and toxicology services across Scotland. The current pathology contract extensions are, in the main, in place until March 2024, and work is on-going with all pathology providers on a service redesign to streamline the nature and number of the contracts, in order to ensure resilience and efficiency through negotiations and service co-design.

We also regularly meet pathology providers, and as Mr Findlay has indicated, those concerns were shared with them. I am mindful of my injunction to watch my time, so perhaps we could take up the issue further elsewhere.

Mental Health-related Incidents

3. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Presiding Officer, I draw your attention to the fact that we are having some technical issues with the consoles at the rear of the chamber.

To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reported comments by Police Scotland's chief constable that the force deals with over 100,000 mental health-related incidents each year. (S6O-03128)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I am grateful to police officers for all that they do to support people who are in distress or are experiencing mental ill health. The Scottish Government and the Scottish Police Authority have established a multi-agency group to implement a comprehensive programme of work to improve pathways in order to support those in need to access the right service at the right time and to reduce demand on officers. We are ensuring that resources are targeted at specific programmes, such as the enhanced mental health pathway for people in distress or in

need of mental health support who come into contact with Police Scotland.

Jamie Greene: The chief constable made it clear that that volume of incidents equates to about 600 full-time officers' worth of work. An immense amount of resource is involved in dealing with such incidents, and we would be better served if that resource was used to deal with or prevent crime. The reality is that the police pick up the pieces when other public services are not available out of hours—for example, general practices, accident and emergency services, mental health services and social care services simply shut down at 5 pm on a Friday and are not available until Monday morning.

Everybody knows that the status quo cannot continue. What is the cabinet secretary doing right now to alleviate the pressure on police so that they do not become the first port of call for all health emergencies?

Angela Constance: I agree that the status quo cannot continue. That is why, in my original answer, I was at pains to stress that we are implementing, in partnership with others, a comprehensive programme of work. I am happy to write to Mr Greene with the full details of that work.

All interested stakeholders and partners are facing in the same direction. We have a clear programme for government commitment, following the thematic review of policing mental health by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland. I am sure that the inspectorate and the Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee and Public Audit Committee will hold the Government's feet to the fire on the issue. There is immense will to resolve it, and a lot of energy is going into that. Police officers have a role in emergency situations in which further assessment is required, but we must be better at following best practice in facilitating a safe and appropriate handover to professionals who are better placed to support people in need.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A couple of members would like to ask supplementary questions. If the questions and responses are not brief, I will intervene.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Not only has research attributed declining trends in mental health to a decade of Tory austerity, but the United Kingdom Government continues to slash Scotland's funding for public services, which massively undermines our ability to respond to people in crisis. In that deeply challenging context, what work is the Scottish Government undertaking with Police Scotland and other partners on the response to mental health incidents?

Angela Constance: The Scottish Government's significant investment in justice and mental health services is now all the more significant, given the UK Government's new age of austerity. Yesterday, we passed a budget that includes £19.5 billion for the health and social care portfolio, and I am very pleased that the Scottish Police Authority's resource budget has increased by nearly 6 per cent, which will protect front-line policing, and that we are increasing the available capital budget, too.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): It is helpful that the Scottish Government has recognised the need for change in relation to police officers dealing with cases of people experiencing a mental health crisis. The Scottish Police Federation has said that we need a triage system that links up services to ensure that people get the help that they need quickly. Will the cabinet secretary consider, as part of the work that she mentioned, a collaboration between health and justice services to create a triage service so that people get the help that they need and we free up police time?

Angela Constance: In short, that is exactly what we are doing as part of the comprehensive programme of work. We are considering the interface between justice and health services.

Safe Consumption Room Pilot

4. **Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has had with Police Scotland regarding the policing strategy for the safe consumption room pilot in Glasgow. (S6O-03129)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government has had extensive engagement with Police Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and the Glasgow city health and social care partnership on the proposal for a safer drug consumption facility and its delivery. The success of the pilot will depend on further extensive partnership working and the building of trust between the facility, the people who use it, local residents and the police.

The discussions have included broader aspects of how the facility will operate, including its policing. However, Police Scotland has complete operational independence in how it polices the facility, and its approach will no doubt be informed by the Lord Advocate and what she chooses to say in her statement of prosecution policy.

Paul Sweeney: I recently visited the H17 overdose prevention facility in Copenhagen. A discrete co-operative policing model in the Vesterbro district is key to the successful operation of the centre, even though a major police station is situated directly opposite.

What assessment has the cabinet secretary made of international examples of policing safe consumption rooms? How will the Government ensure that potential users of the Glasgow pilot facility are not deterred from engaging out of fear of contact with the police or the criminal justice system?

Angela Constance: Our policy on the matter has been informed every step of the way by best practice and international practice. I again put on record my thanks to Police Scotland, which has been a partner in pursuing a public health approach to supporting people into treatment and recovery. It continues to have an independent role in policing, and it has signed off its own policy work in that regard. I am happy to speak to Paul Sweeney further about that. It is a balance between Police Scotland reassuring a community that it is not withdrawing from that community—it will continue to patrol the area in the same way as it does now—and not seeking to put up barriers to treatment for vulnerable people.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): It is welcome that the Scottish Government and Police Scotland continue to engage while fully responding to drug-related deaths. However, limitations will remain due to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on the latest discussions with the United Kingdom Government to ensure that it does not block this life-saving proposal?

Angela Constance: We continue to update UK Government colleagues on progress. In November, at the most recent UK drugs ministerial meeting, the UK Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire received a presentation on the work from the associate medical director of Glasgow alcohol and drug recovery services. Although the UK Government has previously made it clear that it does not intend to block the plans, any U-turn on that from the current Government or an incoming Government would do a great disservice to this life-saving proposal.

Leith Police Station

5. Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it is giving, in collaboration with Police Scotland, to the possibility of establishing a new Leith police station within the Scottish Government's Victoria Quay building. (S6O-03130)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Police Scotland's 2019 estate strategy outlined plans to dispose of outdated and underused properties and to develop a modern, fit-for-purpose estate through options including co-location with partner organisations.

In its current consultation, Police Scotland has proposed a number of changes to the estate and is in discussion with a range of potential partners and organisations to explore alternative and better-suited sites across Edinburgh that will be fit for the modern-day needs of staff and the public.

Management of the police estate is the responsibility of the Scottish Police Authority and the chief constable. Police Scotland will undertake a specific consultation on its plans for Leith police station in due course, which anyone with an interest will be able to respond to.

Ben Macpherson: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for that answer and for her letter of 20 February. I appreciate that the individual consultation on Leith police station has not yet gone live. The current Leith police station is effective with regard to police duties, but the building is not optimal for the 21st century and net zero considerations.

Whatever happens, Leith will need a police station, given its high population and population growth. Victoria Quay is currently underused by the Scottish Government and could be better utilised for a range of possibilities, as well as the civil service. I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary, along with Scottish Government colleagues and Police Scotland, keeps under consideration the potential for a new Leith police station at Victoria Quay.

Angela Constance: As I said in my letter to Mr Macpherson, Police Scotland's commitment to co-locating with other public bodies very much supports the single Scottish estate programme, which supports publicly funded bodies to co-locate.

Police Scotland is, of course, sensitive to community concerns about changes involving police buildings. I recognise the point that Mr Macpherson makes about the growing population. I am also aware that Leith police station dates from 1827.

The review of the police estate is driven by a desire to meet the needs of local communities, such as Mr Macpherson's, and to ensure that officers and staff are located in areas where they are most needed and in an estate that is fit for 21st century policing.

HMP Stirling (Noise Disturbance)

6. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the Scottish Prison Service's work to address reported noise disturbance at HMP Stirling. (S6O-03131)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): As Mark Ruskell will

understand, that remains an operational issue for the Scottish Prison Service. However, I assure him that any noise reporting continues to be taken very seriously by both me and the SPS. I will continue to seek updates from the chief executive, Teresa Medhurst.

SPS senior leaders met local representatives on 6 February, when they discussed the welcome reduction in noise in the establishment over the festive period. The SPS has reaffirmed its commitment to identifying and implementing solutions, but substantial measures will require time and significant investment on its part.

Mark Ruskell: I thank the cabinet secretary for that update. As I am sure that she is aware, the local community neighbouring HMP Stirling has been deeply affected by the disturbances over the past eight months. It has been a nightmare, particularly for families with children, with reported impacts on their mental health.

Will the cabinet secretary report on the progress that has been made towards implementing the SPS action plan to deal with the problems? Will she agree to meet the SPS, MSPs, councillors and local residents to assure them that the detail of the action plan is being implemented, so that people can see an end point to the misery that they have been facing over the past eight months?

Angela Constance: Let me assure Mr Ruskell that the SPS remains committed to delivering meaningful improvements both for the women in its care and for the surrounding neighbours and neighbourhood.

I also reassure Mr Ruskell that the SPS remains in regular contact with residents and local elected representatives. I have met Mark Ruskell and others, along with the SPS. Members are more than welcome to keep in touch with me. In addition, I remind MSP colleagues and local residents that they are very welcome to visit HMP Stirling; that can be facilitated.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Firefighting (Exposure to Carcinogens)

8. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its discussions with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service regarding the plans required to address the carcinogenic nature of firefighting. (S6O-03133)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The safety and wellbeing of firefighters remains a priority for the Scottish Government and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. The fire service continues to make progress on important issues through a

specific contaminants implementation plan, which has been developed and delivered in partnership with the Fire Brigades Union. The plan includes the development of a recording system for staff to record exposure to contaminants, station zoning arrangements, progression of trials of health screening and changes to operating procedures.

We have provided the SFRS with an additional £10.3 million of capital funding in the draft budget for 2024-25. Although decisions on how the money is spent is a matter for the SFRS board, the extra funding will allow the SFRS to invest in better facilities for our firefighters.

Maggie Chapman: The minister will be aware that, earlier this month, the European directive on exposure to carcinogens, mutagens or reprotoxic substances at work was updated to acknowledge the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer's reports, which recognise the firefighter occupation as carcinogenic. The European Commission is also developing guidelines and mandatory decontamination procedures for firefighters.

What assurances can the minister provide Scottish firefighters that they, too, will have their health protected in law? Will she consider establishing a joint collaboration—including the Scottish Government, the national health service and SFRS's leadership team, occupational health unit and statistics unit—to progress that and much-needed routine health monitoring for firefighters?

Siobhian Brown: I commend Maggie Chapman for championing this important issue. The Scottish Fire Rescue Service has embraced the need for action. Although the health and safety of firefighters is primarily a matter for the SFRS as the employer, the Scottish Government is willing to listen and consider any proposals to help with the safety and wellbeing of firefighters in Scotland.

Legislating on the area is complex—as there is a mixture of reserved and devolved responsibilities—and cannot be taken lightly. However, I assure the chamber that I will continue to work with the service to investigate the suggested collaboration on the best course of action.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): The Scottish Government's commitment to the safety and wellbeing of all fire and rescue officers is welcome. More broadly, will the minister outline the steps that are being taken to ensure that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service will take action across all areas of operation and working practices to reduce exposure to contaminants?

Siobhian Brown: I regularly meet the fire service board chair and the chief officer. The

safety and wellbeing of our firefighters is central to those meetings.

I have received assurances from the SFRS that it prioritises the issue of contaminants and is working in partnership with the FBU so that the appropriate actions can be taken across all SFRS operations, which I will set out. The SFRS is currently running a pilot in East, North and South Ayrshire to test the content of the contaminant standard operating procedure. The trial will run until 31 March and will help to finalise the standard operating procedure prior to its full roll-out across the service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: With apologies to the members whom I was not able to call, that concludes portfolio question time on justice and home affairs. There will be a brief pause to allow a change of front-bench members before we move to the next item of business.

Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2024 [Draft]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-12130, in the name of Tom Arthur, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2024. Members who wish to participate should press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

14:52

The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur): The motion on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2024 seeks Parliament's approval for the guaranteed allocations of revenue funding to individual local authorities for 2024-25. It also seeks agreement on the allocation of additional funding for 2023-24, which has been identified since the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2023 was approved on 1 March last year.

We cannot ignore the hugely challenging circumstances in which we have had to agree the Scottish budget this year. Our block grant funding for the budget is derived from the United Kingdom Government's spending decisions and has fallen by 1.2 per cent in real terms since 2022-23. That is a real-terms drop of £500 million. Our capital spending power is due to contract by almost 10 per cent in real terms over the next five years.

The reality is that the amount that Scotland has available to spend is still largely driven by the block grant that has been set by successive UK Governments, whose constraint of public expenditure has prolonged the austerity that public services feel. Scotland and the rest of the UK require more money for infrastructure, public services and fair pay deals.

The UK Government did not deliver for Scotland in the autumn statement, and we have no advance information on what lies ahead with the spring statement on 6 March. However, we will always do our best with the powers that we have, and the 2024-25 Scottish budget is built on our values. In tough times, it sets out to protect people, sustain services and take pragmatic steps to address the climate emergency.

The Scottish Government is providing more than £14 billion in the 2024-25 local government finance settlement. The revenue funding of almost £13.4 billion includes £147 million of funding for councils that have chosen to freeze council tax in 2024-25. We are also providing almost £700 million of support for capital expenditure. Including the funding to freeze council tax, we are increasing the resources available next year by

more than £574.6 million. The 2024-25 local government finance settlement provides an additional 4.3 per cent in funding, or a real-terms increase of 2.5 per cent, compared with 2023-24.

In addition, as outlined yesterday, the Deputy First Minister has confirmed her intention to pass on up to £62.7 million of Barnett consequentials following the UK Government's spring budget, as a result of the recent announcement on ring-fenced adult social care funding in England. That funding will be available to councils to protect their households by freezing council tax, and local authorities will have full autonomy to allocate the additional funding based on local needs and priorities, without the need to produce productivity plans, as is required in England.

The Deputy First Minister confirmed her intention to pass on any consequentials that are associated with increased teacher pension employer contributions and to prioritise the £4 million increase in the islands cost of living fund in direct response to concerns that some island authorities have raised about the cost of living and delivering services in island communities.

The budget invests in the Verity house agreement by baselining almost £1 billion of funding across health, education, justice, net zero and social justice, prior to agreement on an assurance and accountability framework.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The minister mentioned the Verity house agreement. Has he checked with the First Minister whether it is still a thing? Does it still exist?

Tom Arthur: In his eagerness to make an intervention, the member might not have heard me. We have baselined almost £1 billion into the local government funding settlement as part of the Verity house agreement, and we are committed to taking that forward across a range of areas, some of which the Deputy First Minister set out yesterday.

As we do every year, to reach the number that we have presented today, we have compared budget with budget, because that provides the best like-for-like comparison of available funding. Adopting any other approach would be to mislead Parliament.

It is important to note that the total funding package has already been finalised following the passing of the Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill. Today's debate is about seeking Parliament's approval for the distribution of the approved total funding to individual local authorities. The motion seeks approval for the distribution and payment of almost £12.8 billion of the revenue total of almost £13.3 billion, with the balance being made up mainly of specific grant funding, which is administered separately.

The £12.8 billion is a combination of the general revenue grant of more than £9.7 billion and the distributable amount of non-domestic rates income, which has been set at almost £3.1 billion. There remains a further £201 million of revenue funding, plus the funding of the council tax freeze, which will be notified to local authorities once the distribution has been discussed and agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. That will be included for approval in the 2025 order. There is also specific revenue funding amounting to more than £263 million, which is paid directly by the relevant policy areas under separate legislation.

The 2024 order also seeks approval for more than £403 million of changes to funding allocations for 2023-24. The full list of changes can be found in the report on the 2024 order.

The Government recognises the financial challenges that local authorities across Scotland and the whole public sector are facing. The fiscal constraints that we share emphasise the need for us to focus urgently on improving the delivery of public services and on designing them around the needs and interests of the people and communities of Scotland. We must also continue to press the UK Government for additional funding for our shared priorities and pressures, and I would welcome support from across the Parliament for that.

The Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill, which Parliament passed yesterday, ensured that total funding from the Scottish Government to local government next year increased in cash terms and in real terms. The order confirms the distribution to individual councils, and the proposals reflect the crucial role that local authorities and their employees continue to play in our communities.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2024 [draft] be approved.

14:58

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives on the order. From the outset, it is right that we acknowledge that the 2024-25 local government settlement has been decided in the context of a number of challenging fiscal circumstances. Inflation might have fallen significantly since the heights that were seen in 2023, but we are still dealing with its global effects. The illegal war in Ukraine continues to affect energy prices, and disruption to trade in the Red Sea risks further disruption to European economies.

Despite that, analysis by the Scottish Parliament information centre makes it clear that the Scottish

Government's overall budget has increased this year in real terms. However, any hopes that that would mean councils receiving relief from years of underfunding did not last long. COSLA described this year's financial settlement as

"leaving councils at real and significant financial risk for the coming year".

In practical terms, the budget means that councils are planning yet more cuts to local services. To take just one example, West Dunbartonshire Council, in my region, is having to close an £8.3 million budget gap. Potential cost-saving measures include increasing fees for school breakfast clubs and reducing financial assistance for school uniform costs. Such decisions are not easy for councils to take, but they have become too common in recent years.

The Scottish National Party often complains about how the UK Government treats the devolved Scottish Government, but if members want to see an example of a disrespectful relationship between two tiers of government, they need look no further than the Scottish Government's approach to local councils. Let us take, for example, the continued controversy around the SNP's council tax freeze, which was announced without councils even being consulted. The SNP repeatedly promised that the policy would be fully funded, but we now know that that is not the case. Despite COSLA having asked for £310 million to fund the freeze, the 2024-25 budget offers just £147 million. The irony is that that botched policy announcement came just a few short months after the SNP Scottish Government announced the Verity house agreement, which promised a renewed relationship with local government—one that would involve "improved engagement" on budget issues.

Councils have said that a change in the relationship is desperately needed. They want to have a more long-term relationship that is focused on outcomes. The Verity house agreement gave them hope that such a relationship was coming. However, from having spoken to nearly every local authority in Scotland, it is clear to me that the Verity house agreement is falling short.

Here are some of the things that councils have said directly to me in meetings about the SNP's relationship with local government on the Verity house agreement:

"The agreement is not worth the paper it is written on". *[Interruption.]*

"We have a degree of optimism but a huge amount of scepticism".

"Like a zombie still has life but bleeding to death by Scottish Government requirements, including teachers numbers and the National Care Service". *[Interruption.]*

"The role of local government is not valued".

"Talk is cheap, but actions are now required".

"The Scottish Government is not delivering their side of the agreement".

"The relationship is broken ... there is a lack of trust, a lack of transparency from the Scottish Government". *[Interruption.]*

"We are not buttoned up the back". *[Interruption.]*

"This is the worst settlement we have seen".

Given those damning verdicts, it is perhaps not surprising that, two weeks ago, council leaders wrote to the Scottish Government to declare a "fundamental position of dispute".

Before I conclude, I would like to make it clear that we will not—

Tom Arthur: Will the member give way?

Pam Gosal: I think that the minister should listen to me say how we are going to vote.

Tom Arthur: Will the member give way?

Pam Gosal: Do we have enough time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is up to the member whether she gives way. We are tight for time, but she will get a little bit of time back.

Tom Arthur: I am grateful to Pam Gosal for giving way. She said that she has spoken to councils. Were the responses that she has received from councils sent in their corporate capacity as local authorities, or were they from individual councillors to whom she spoke? Will Ms Gosal clarify that for the record, please?

Pam Gosal: That is a good question, and it is great that I can clarify that. I have spoken to 31 council chief executive officers. I have gone right to the top of the chain to speak about the cuts that the SNP Scottish Government is making, which will be devastating for local services. I hope that that satisfies the minister.

Before I conclude, I make it clear that we will not vote against the order at decision time, as the order is required so that councils can receive the revenue funding that they have been allocated, but nor can we support the order, which will only continue the trend of ever-worsening council budgets. We will therefore abstain in today's vote.

With this year's budget, councils have yet again been left with a financial settlement that leaves them unable to deliver the services that their communities expect. Instead of deciding how to improve local services, councils are currently signing off budgets that will deliver more cuts to services. We badly need to see a new approach to how councils are funded—an approach that empowers councils to deliver for their communities in the way that they know best.

The Scottish Government says that it wants to build a relationship with local government that has “mutual trust and respect” at its core. The onus is now on the SNP to deliver that.

15:04

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): We will not oppose the order today, because we know that it is necessary to get the funding allocated to councils. However, although we will not attempt to block it, we cannot support it.

As we indicated during various stages of the budget process, we do not support the 2024-25 budget because people are paying more and getting less. Councils—and the democratic mandate that they receive from communities—have been treated with complete contempt, and decisions seem to have been made in a haphazard and chaotic way. The chaotic and disrespectful way in which councils have been treated also seems to have put the final nail in the coffin of the Verity house agreement.

From the very outset, the decision to impose a freeze on council tax has had a whiff of “The Thick of It” about it. The First Minister, panicked by a by-election drubbing, announced a freeze at the party conference, in front of astounded SNP councillors, without letting his Cabinet, civil servants or even his coalition partners know about it, never mind have any input—in direct conflict with the Verity house agreement that had just been signed with local authorities. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance was then sent out to assure councils and Parliament that the freeze would be fully funded.

Tom Arthur: On that point about consultation, can the member confirm that Councillor Stephen McCabe consulted Mr Griffin, as the party’s local government finance spokesperson, before he wrote to Michael Gove, asking Michael Gove to bypass this Parliament? Can Mr Griffin confirm whether that is something that he approves of?

Mark Griffin: Mr McCabe is a democratically elected leader of his own council and acts in that capacity without any instruction from me or anyone else. He has his own democratic mandate, and it is about time that the Scottish Government started recognising and respecting the democratic mandate of councils, because not doing so is how we got this problem in the first place.

As I said, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance was sent out to assure councils and Parliament that the freeze would be fully funded, but she completely failed to give any details, repeating over and over that it would be down to negotiations with the valued partners in local government who were snubbed by that very announcement.

The minister appeared at committee and could not give any explanation of what a fully funded council tax freeze meant. We then got the details of the result of those in-depth negotiations with councils, which seemed to be a case of the Government just plucking a figure of its own out of the air because COSLA rejected it completely. Then, after weeks of the Government insisting that the council tax freeze was fully funded, all of a sudden it was not fully funded, because another £63 million was found. However, the kick in the teeth to local councils was that that funding came mostly from UK Barnett consequentials, which should have been going to councils anyway. It would be funny if it were not absolutely tragic.

It is the councillors from every political party, including the SNP, in all 32 local authorities who are having to make the heartbreaking decisions—decisions that are of this Government’s making. It is this Government that has cut billions of pounds cumulatively from council budgets and from council services—services that the most vulnerable rely on—since 2013. Roads are crumbling, teacher numbers are being cut, libraries are closing and bins are overflowing. Now, it is being left to those councillors to make those tough decisions to balance the books. They are taking the tough decisions on whether to accept the freeze to protect households or whether to try to protect services.

We should all be concerned about the context of the discussions that councillors are having on whether to accept it. I have been told that, as a result of the damage to the relationship between national and local government and the lack of any trust whatsoever between those two spheres of government, those who are making decisions in councils, at political and officer level, are making recommendations on budgets and on freezing council tax on the basis that they cannot trust the Government to baseline the freeze funding. There are councils that are, right now, working on the basis that the Government will give with one hand and take away with the other and that, next year, they will have to impose huge increases in council tax just to stay afloat.

The fact that hard-working, non-political council officers in council chambers of all political make-ups have that level of distrust in the Government should shock and appal everyone in this chamber, and it shows just how damaged and toxic the relationship between local and national Government has become.

I hope that the minister will reflect on that, and I hope that we are not in the same position as we are now when we consider the equivalent order next year.

15:10

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Let us remember that the Verity house agreement, the existence of which the minister could not confirm when I intervened earlier, talked about a “positive working relationship”, “mutual trust”, “respect”, “joint leadership” and “shared priorities”. It said:

“Where we disagree, we will seek to deal with these matters constructively in the spirit of cooperation, through the engagement mechanisms described in Section D of this agreement”.

That was before the conference decision that the First Minister made—overnight, in a matter of minutes—to freeze the council tax without consulting any local authorities, his advisers or any officials in the Government, and probably without consulting any of the SNP back benchers who are here today. That process would probably make Liz Truss blush, because it was reckless and cavalier, and it drove a coach and horses right through the Verity house agreement.

The Verity house agreement is as good as dead, and the minister should acknowledge that. The trust between local and central Government has completely disappeared and there is no chance of its recovering under the current Government. It is not just in the mechanisms where it is clear that the agreement has broken down. I listen to ministers in private and I hear what they say about councillors. Members of this Parliament complain about the disdain and distrust at Westminster, but that is exactly how ministers treat local councillors—I have heard it.

For example, the language about local authorities on teacher numbers is appalling. The implication is that councillors do not care one jot about schools and that their only intention is to cut teacher numbers. However, that argument has had a hole blown in it, because Glasgow City Council, which is led by the SNP, proposes to cut 450 teachers over the next three years—

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: Not just now—I am sorry.

Do councillors in Glasgow City Council not care about education? Of course they care. It is because they have no money and are right up against it that they have had to make that decision. The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance and all other ministers carry on as if councillors are either stupid or do not care. Ministers need to change that attitude, because it is not the way for Government and local government to work together.

To repeat, the agreement talks about a “positive working relationship”, “mutual trust”, “respect”, “joint leadership” and “shared priorities”. That is all

bunkum—it does not mean anything. The councils were duped from the very beginning, because the Government had no intention of working in that way. Any time that any pressure was put on, the Government was going to do the dirty on local government, and that is exactly what has happened.

I have never seen public services in local councils in such a bad state. I have been in politics for 18 years in various Parliaments and I have never seen things as bad as this. Housing, the roads and social work are all crumbling because the Government does not respect local authorities. The Government is making cuts to local government that are way more than it needs to do, and it has done so for years. We are now paying the price for that. The pressure-cooker atmosphere in schools is astonishing. I have never seen staff so depressed, and that is because of the way in which the Government ignores their fears about what is happening in classrooms. That is what the Government is reaping, because it sowed the seeds of this situation a long time ago.

As for any suggestion that we will reform the council tax, I do not know how many working groups I have been on, but the Greens, who are not here today—well, the Green back-bench members are not here; I presume that the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity has been compelled to turn up—seem to believe that they have a new dawn and that somehow we are going to reform the council tax. Apparently, the citizens assembly will come up with an answer, and there is a new working group on top of all the other working groups that exist. Ministers are laughing at all of that. The reality is that they have no intention of doing anything on council tax reform; they are just stringing local government along and are doing exactly what they have done for years in treating it with contempt.

15:14

Tom Arthur: The Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2024, which is before Parliament today, seeks approval for the guaranteed payment of almost £12.8 billion in revenue support to Scotland’s 32 local authorities. Next year, the Scottish Government will provide local authorities with a total funding package that is worth more than £14 billion, delivering an increase of more than £574.6 million, or 4 per cent. That is a real-terms increase of 2.5 per cent despite the challenging circumstances that I outlined in my opening speech.

There is also further Scottish Government support of almost £629 million to be paid outwith the local government finance settlement. That includes the attainment Scotland fund, the schools for the future programme, the home energy

efficiency programmes and the city deals funding that is paid to local authorities. That brings the Scottish Government's total investment to almost £14.7 billion.

The settlement also provides continued fiscal certainty through our policy of guaranteeing the combined general revenue grant plus non-domestic rates funding, as is set out in the order. That means that any lost non-domestic rates income will be compensated for by an increased general revenue grant, thereby effectively underwriting that critically important revenue stream.

The Scottish Government will continue to work in partnership with COSLA to empower councils through a new fiscal framework and by increasing discretion to determine and set fees and charges locally in the coming year. We are also committed to finalising, in the coming months, an accountabilities and monitoring framework to underpin the Verity house agreement.

The Scottish Government is committed to a fairer, more inclusive and fiscally sustainable form of local taxation. We have convened a joint working group on council tax reform, which is co-chaired by Scottish ministers and COSLA. Together, we are exploring proposals for meaningful changes to council tax to be introduced. The joint working group is considering exploring a broad range of potential measures, including citizens' engagement on long-term reforms to the system. Those reforms will have a core aim of providing fairness in the system and support to those who need it the most.

Bearing in mind that the overall quantum was confirmed when the Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill was agreed to, Opposition members should note that a failure to approve the order would result in Scotland's local authorities and, as a consequence, all our communities being deprived of more than £403 million of additional funding in the current financial year and almost £575 million of additional Scottish Government investment next year.

I say to any member in the chamber who does not vote for the order that that means local authorities and local communities being deprived of more than £403 million of additional funding in this financial year and £575 million of additional Scottish Government investment next year.

I listened closely to Pam Gosal's remarks earlier, and I will be checking the *Official Report* to see exactly what she said and what remarks and statements she is attributing to chief executives of local authorities. I think that that will make for very interesting reading in the *Official Report*.

As for Mr Griffin, I find it remarkable that, as his party's local government spokesperson, he has no

opinion whatsoever on whether the UK Government should be directly funding local authorities and on whether this Parliament's role should simply be cut out—[*Interruption.*]

I am sorry, but it is a bit much for Mr Rennie to come to the chamber and start criticising austerity when his party was the midwife of austerity and given the cuts that it has inflicted on communities across these islands and the butchery of public services. I wonder whether he now thinks that the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 and the alternative vote referendum made it all worthwhile. What a shameful contribution from Mr Rennie.

The order provides additional funding for local government this year and next year, and I urge members to back it at decision time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the draft Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2024.

National Care Service (Scotland) Bill: Referral Back to Lead Committee at Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-12317, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill: referral back to the lead committee at stage 1.

15:20

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I come to the chamber more in sorrow than in anger to move a motion to ask the Parliament to send the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill back to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for further evidence taking and consideration before stage 1. This is only the second time that such a motion has been brought before the chamber—such is the seriousness with which this action is taken.

Members will know that I first proposed a national care service over a decade ago. That was in response to *Clostridioides difficile*, which ripped through our hospitals and care homes and caused deaths as a result. People were transferred from hospitals to care homes without testing, care staff were without adequate personal protective equipment, standards were variable, and there was little oversight at the time. That sounds all too familiar.

Although Nicola Sturgeon said no to a national care service 10 years ago, the Scottish National Party has changed its mind. I welcome all converts, no matter how late in the day.

I have long believed in a national care service, so I do not take this step lightly. Let me set out why I think that the Parliament needs to send the bill back to the committee. At this point, I record my thanks to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, the Finance and Public Administration Committee, the Education, Children and Young People Committee and many other committees besides, and all the clerks for their diligent work on this piece of legislation. That work has not been easy. However, my beef is not with them; it is with the Scottish Government.

Members should read the report from the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. It contains page after page of criticism, requests for clarity, and areas that are identified as requiring substantial improvement. The Finance and Public Administration Committee looked at the bill twice, and it was still highly dubious about the budget.

However, the real problem arises with a backroom deal that was done with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. That deal changes

the fundamental governance structures of the national care service. Some might agree that the deal is a welcome change, but there are many in the independent sector and the voluntary sector and many people with lived experience of care who do not think that it is right. However, whether people agree or disagree is not the point; the point is that the committee has been unable to scrutinise the bill, as the Scottish Government has been unwilling to share its amendments before stage 2. Despite polite requests from the committee, the minister kept saying no. Despite an SNP member of the committee asking to see the target operating model, which would have given us a clue about the direction of travel, the minister still said no.

The Parliament's history has too many examples of pieces of legislation that lie on the statute books and are simply incapable of being enacted because they are such a mess. The Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 has not yet been enacted. Legislation has, sadly, been challenged in the courts because there was insufficient scrutiny of evidence.

Frankly, the national care service is too important to get wrong. The Government has already indicated that it will not be up and running until 2028-29, so there is time to take an extra few weeks to scrutinise the Government's amendments, which will fundamentally change the governance arrangements. That should be properly considered at stage 1.

There is precedent. I will cite a recent example. The Rural Affairs and Islands Committee successfully argued that it should see amendments during stage 1 of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill. It got sight of amendments before stage 1 was completed.

Many members have noted in the past that stage 2 is, in any event, too short a process. Amendments are dealt with and dispatched at pace. If the changes have not been considered by the committee at stage 1, that makes for poor scrutiny and, ultimately, bad legislation.

The second issue is the lack of an expert bill advisory group. Every bill that I have ever worked on in the past has had an expert advisory group, because such groups help the Government to shape bills and ensure that they are capable of implementation.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am entirely in agreement with what Jackie Baillie is saying.

The Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning (Joe FitzPatrick): That is a surprise.

Liz Smith: Actually, it is not a surprise, because I think that we both have exactly the same views about the importance of scrutiny in the Parliament.

Does Jackie Baillie agree that we seem to have a tradition in the Parliament of having too many framework bills, which means that we do not have enough time to scrutinise, because we do not have the necessary detail?

Jackie Baillie: I absolutely do. The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee made the point that it is not good legislative practice to stick substantive decisions on spending into secondary legislation.

An expert bill advisory group simply does not exist for the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, so there is a genuine lack of confidence that the proposed changes will work, and promises of co-production after the bill is passed are not enough. Witness after witness described the bill as “vague”, as lacking in vision and as failing to articulate a set of general principles.

Rachel Cackett, of the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland, encapsulated the problem. She said:

“I do not know what the bill will look like ... For me, there is a question about what principles are being agreed at stage 1 and also what exactly those amendments will look like.”

Dr Jim Elder-Woodward, from Inclusion Scotland, rightly complained that the Scottish Government’s deal with COSLA

“did not take any cognisance of the co-design process and ... was made without reference to any stakeholder”.—*[Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, 31 October 2023; c 28, 23.]*

This Parliament is a relatively young institution, and we do not have a second revising chamber. It is therefore important that we take the time to get things right.

I want to support the bill, but it is currently a mess. We are in danger of making bad legislation because the Government has not allowed appropriate scrutiny. This is about the integrity of the Parliament and the integrity of us as members. Every party that is represented in the chamber, aside from the SNP and the Greens, has expressed disquiet. Parliament matters, and I ask back-bench members of the Government parties not to railroad the bill through.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill be referred back to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for a further report on the general principles of the Bill.

15:26

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members’ interests. I am a practising general practitioner in the national health service. I am also a member of the Parliament’s Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.

The lead committee charged with scrutinising the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill had four evidence sessions with COSLA, and we now know that every single one was a waste of time. That is not COSLA’s fault, and it is not MSPs’ fault; it is because the Scottish Government eventually came to the conclusion that Humza Yousaf’s original version of the bill simply would not work. It therefore pulled the bill, and it changed much of what had been focused upon and scrutinised for the past 18 months. We were unable—and we are still unable—to ask appropriate questions, due to unseen changes that the Government is making. Why not just let us see the bill in its full detail? Is it not ready? Does the Government even know what it wants? There is a secret group creating secret changes, with a secretive SNP Government at the helm.

When it comes to the latest SNP rebrand of its NCS bill, members of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee are well aware that there is a dearth of detail, and there are so many unanswered questions, including about money. It is not just Opposition members who are shaking their heads. The Parliament’s Finance and Public Administration Committee has repeatedly raised concerns about how the proposals would be funded and has pointed out that costings did not and could not reflect the actual costs of the provisions of the bill. The SNP-Green Government is already spending over £800,000 every month on civil servants to get the NCS up and running. We are told by the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport, Maree Todd, to expect a total spend of £2.2 billion. However, it is all very unclear, given the many iterations of the financial memorandum.

The bill is far from ready for a stage 1 debate and vote, and the lead committee has simply not been able to properly examine what is now on the table, because we do not know what is on the table. Despite the warnings, the SNP-Green Government says that it is unable to articulate and communicate how its national care service would actually work in practice. The Parliament is being asked to support a bill on the basis that, come stage 2, all will be revealed. Really? That is not how scrutiny of legislation is supposed to work. We are not here just to give the Government the benefit of the doubt. All of us are here to scrutinise the Government’s plans and the decisions that are

made to ensure that the people of Scotland get a good deal, not the best guess.

The only reason why the bill is going on the agenda tomorrow is that the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee voted along party lines. To be clear, MSPs on the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee who are not in government are united in our thinking that the bill must be sent back for proper scrutiny. The four committee members who are not SNP or Green members dissented on up to 46 of the report's 110 recommendations, including support for the bill's general principles. SNP-Green ministers might well respond by saying, "Well, this is a framework bill. At this stage, we only need to agree the principles." That is not good enough. It is not right to push through a bill that the Government itself cannot even articulate.

If the current bill were a car, we would not know what make, what model or even what colour it is, but the Government is suggesting that we put down hundreds of millions of pounds in a deposit anyway.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): There has been much talk from the Opposition about a framework bill. I remind members that the national health service was established in the United Kingdom using a framework bill. Thank goodness that those folk back in the day had the radical view of doing it that way—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart—

Kevin Stewart: —to create an institution that works for all—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart, do you have some kind of question for the member?

Kevin Stewart: It is a pity that Dr Gulhane and others do not have the radical edge that Nye Bevan and others did—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart!

Dr Gulhane, please continue.

Sandesh Gulhane: Well, there was no question. If Mr Stewart wanted to speak, he should have put his name forward to do a speech.

I ask members across the chamber to vote not along party lines but on the principle that committees and scrutiny of legislation are important.

I move amendment S6M-12317.1, to insert at end:

“, and, in so doing, expresses severe concern about the viability of the Bill, its related costings and its handling by the Scottish Government.”

15:31

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): The National Care Service (Scotland) Bill is our opportunity to reform the social care system in Scotland. I welcome the Parliament's consideration of such an important issue, but the fact that I am here to prevent what is essentially a delay in delivering that much-needed change is disappointing.

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister take an intervention?

Maree Todd: I have five minutes. I will not be taking interventions.

People across the country deserve better, and that is what the bill will bring. Most important, it will put the people who access social care services right at the heart of our system. We are already working hard to make the changes that are needed in the social care system in Scotland, but the reality is that we need longer-term, widespread reform to fix some of the issues that are ingrained in the system.

I do not intend today to set out fully the Government's approach to the national care service and the bill. The stage 1 debate, which is already scheduled for tomorrow, will provide the right opportunity for that. That debate has been a long time coming.

I have welcomed the scrutiny that the Scottish Parliament has given to the bill. Seven committees have reviewed the bill in the 20 months since it was introduced, and my officials and I have met thousands of people to discuss the national care service. It is surely one of the most extensively scrutinised bills ever to go through the Scottish Parliament.

We have worked hard to ensure that all the committees have been provided with everything that they have asked for to help their considerations, often at short notice. I will continue to do everything that I can to ensure that the important business of parliamentary scrutiny continues to be respected.

I am grateful to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for the substantial stage 1 report that it published last week. That report makes more than 100 recommendations, and my officials and I are currently considering them. Although it is important to take due time to consider all those recommendations fully, I have already written to the convener of the committee to welcome the report and signal my agreement to provide further information to the committee.

I previously committed to providing to the committee a summary target operating model for the national care service, and I have shared that

today. This week, I have also shared with all members a fact sheet that provides an overview of our plans for the national care service. That summarises the material that was previously provided to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and the Finance and Public Administration Committee. In brief, it describes our intention to create a national care service board to oversee social work, social care support and community health services, to drive transparency and consistency, and to reform local integration joint boards. Officials have already arranged to discuss stage 2 arrangements with the committee clerks to ensure that sufficient time is built into the timetable to allow for thorough scrutiny and, if necessary, for more evidence to be taken. That is a key priority, should the general principles of the bill be agreed to after the stage 1 debate tomorrow.

We need to listen to the different views that I have heard from so many stakeholders, to the perspectives that seven committees of the Parliament have already heard in evidence, to the voices of thousands of people who rely on social care provision and who have taken part in our co-design work, and to carers, who provide essential support.

People need change, and they are telling us that they need it now. Of the many thousands of people to whom we have spoken who are trying to access social care in Scotland now, none of them are telling me to slow down—everyone is telling me to speed up.

We will ensure that the parliamentary process is robust, but we will let people down if we spend our time in Parliament getting tangled up in procedural delay instead of talking about the substantive issues that impact on people's lives. Focusing on the parliamentary process is not helping those people who really need it. Delaying this vital work means that hugely significant policies, such as our rights to breaks for carers and Anne's law, will be delayed in their introduction.

There is an important debate to be had about how we demonstrate the value of social care in Scotland, how we ensure that people who require social care get access to the help that they need wherever they live, and how we embed human rights in social care provision. I look forward to that debate tomorrow.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Clare Haughey to speak on behalf of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.

15:37

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee has undertaken extensive scrutiny of the National Care

Service (Scotland) Bill since its introduction in June 2022. That has included two calls for written evidence, 18 panels of witnesses, three oral evidence sessions and multiple exchanges of correspondence with the responsible minister. The committee held a number of informal engagement sessions with a range of people with lived experience and different experiences. To inform its scrutiny further, the committee commissioned a literature review of international models of social care, including a combination of different models in UK countries, European Union countries, Nordic countries, Switzerland, Alaska, the USA, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

The committee also went to Aberdeen, where members met representatives of the Granite Care Consortium and visited the Camphill community to engage with staff and service users. We visited Dumfries, where members had informal discussions with Stewartry Care and other organisations that represent registered care homes and that provide registered care-at-home services, as well as with wider community and third sector organisations. On a visit to Glasgow, committee members met representatives from the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland and service users and front-line staff from the organisation Key, before holding a formal meeting at the William Quarrier conference centre.

Meanwhile, six other committees have undertaken their own scrutiny of aspects of the bill that are relevant to their remit.

On 12 July last year, the Scottish Government wrote to inform the committee that it had reached an initial consensus agreement with COSLA on a partnership approach that will provide for shared legal accountability with respect to the proposed national care service. On 20 September, the Government confirmed its intention to lodge amendments to the bill to reflect the changes that were required as a result of the consensus agreement with COSLA. My committee subsequently wrote to the Government on 7 November requesting additional information regarding the precise implications of the consensus agreement for the bill, and we received a detailed response from the minister on 6 December.

The committee's stage 1 report, which was published last week, sets out in detail the conclusions and recommendations that we have reached as a consequence of our exhaustive scrutiny. The consensus agreement with COSLA on the shared legal accountability means that a number of key aspects of the bill will need to change. Accountability for social care will no longer be transferred from local authorities to Scottish ministers. Integration joint boards will no longer be replaced by local care boards. Instead, a

national care service board is proposed, and local government will now retain social care functions, staff and assets.

The Scottish Government has made clear its intention to bring about those changes to the bill through amendments at stage 2. On that basis, a majority of the committee has recommended that the general principles of the bill be agreed to. However, we have done so on the understanding that further scrutiny of the changes that the Scottish Government now proposes to make to the bill should take place as part of an elongated stage 2 process. That would include a further written call for evidence and the gathering of additional oral evidence before we progress to the formal part of stage 2, which is the consideration and disposal of amendments to the bill.

I regret that it was not possible for the committee to reach a consensus position on the general principles of the bill at stage 1. However, I underline my commitment to ensuring that substantial further scrutiny takes place at stage 2, as I have outlined.

15:40

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I rise to support the motion in the name of Jackie Baillie.

Presiding Officer, there is an element of ministerial cosplay at work here. If you listen to the minister and her predecessor, Kevin Bevan—that is, Kevin Stewart, who evoked the name of Nye Bevan—you would be forgiven for thinking that they imagine themselves in the rubble and poverty of 1940s Britain, in which the NHS, our much loved national institution, was first forged.

However, we are not in 1946. Apart from the nomenclature, that is where the similarities end with the reality of the national care service. The bill will not give care free at the point of delivery. It is, in fact, a ministerial power grab. What lies before the Parliament to debate on Thursday, if the motion to defer it is not successful, is merely a framework, but it is one that will cost in the order of £2 billion. For what? It will be for a vast and unnecessary ministerial bureaucracy that strips power from our communities and gives it to the centre.

Let me be clear from the outset that my preference would be not just to defer the bill but to scrap it entirely. The Liberal Democrats are clear that it represents little more than a mammoth bureaucratic exercise that would waste time and money that would be far better spent elsewhere.

However, I support the bill being referred back to the committee today, because the call for stakeholder evidence went out and responses

came back more than a year ago. That evidence was geared towards the first iteration of the proposed legislation, but what is being put before the Parliament this week is a different version of the bill altogether. Indeed, there was a lot of instances of “This is no longer happening” in the convener’s remarks. That should surely give us cause to think and say that the parliamentary process has been derailed and must be started again, if it must continue at all.

The landscape around the legislation has fundamentally changed, and so, too, have the proposals in the bill. During its consideration of the bill, the committee did not have the full detail of what has been proposed—we just heard in the convener’s remarks what the so-called national care service would look like, and stakeholders have not seen that detail, either. The committee’s report says:

“One of the challenges the Committee has faced with this Bill has been the lack of available detail at the start of our scrutiny.”

That is a fundamental problem with any piece of legislation going through a democratically elected Parliament. Members of the Finance and Public Administration Committee, who said publicly last year that the numbers did not stack up, still say today that they harbour grave concerns. That is just not the way that we should be doing business in the Scottish Parliament. It is absurd that we should begin the legislative process in this context.

The minister was clear that people are telling her that we need change. They are right—we need change in our social care system, but not the kind of change that she has in mind. When people talk about reform and change of the care sector, they want to be sure that, when their gran needs help, she will get it, it will be cheaper than it has been and it will be given by reliable staff and that we can all access it in every part of the country. People are not imagining a ministerial power grab that will asset-strip our communities and put power in the hands of ministers—rather than social care partnerships—to direct their care entirely. That is a bureaucracy, and it will cost a lot of money.

The reason why Liberals oppose the plan in its entirety is that we fundamentally believe that power always works best when it is closest to the people that it serves. Nothing about the bill will deliver that, and nothing about it resembles in any way the national health service, of which we should all be rightly proud.

15:44

Sandesh Gulhane: The minister said that focus on the parliamentary process was not needed, but this is not obtuse process—this is scrutiny. It is clear that this secretive Scottish National Party

Government does not want scrutiny. The convener of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee was right to say that extensive scrutiny was performed, but, when secret fundamental changes happened, we were unable to perform proper scrutiny—for example, we took no evidence from COSLA regarding the consensus agreement. Does the minister not think that that might be important?

What are the facts? The National Care Service (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 20 June 2022, and the health committee started taking public evidence in October that year. Humza Yousaf realised that the bill was not going to work and pulled it. We had four delays that were instigated by the Government. With all that dither and delay, why are we rushing through stage 1, when we have no idea what the Government is doing?

Simply put, are the amendments ready, and, if they are, why the secrecy? If they are not, the Government simply needs to stop making it up as it goes along. The lead committee could not take appropriate evidence or ask appropriate questions, because we had not seen the bill due to massive and fundamental changes being made.

Our job is to scrutinise bills, and we cannot allow this precedent to be set or the role of committees will be undermined.

15:46

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): The establishment of a national care service gives the Parliament the chance to be bold, ambitious and innovative. I am clear that it is not Scottish Labour that is delaying it; I fear that it is the Government. The bill could have been introduced 10 years ago. The Scottish Government has chosen to force a bill through to stage 2 despite it falling seriously short of the mark. The convener is correct to say that we took hours of evidence. The report includes page after page of criticism and a major change in the deal with COSLA.

At the last minute, the minister has chosen to send a letter to the Parliament rather than to engage with the committee. I have only three minutes to respond to that, but, if the minister would come to the committee, the committee would be able to undertake proper scrutiny.

Time and again, trade unions, the third sector, carers and people who receive care came to the committee, or spoke to members individually, to express serious concerns about the way that the bill was progressing, but the Government's conclusion has been to ignore that and push on anyway. The minister might have spoken to hundreds and hundreds of people, but she has not listened to them, and, as we have heard through

their stakeholders, hundreds and hundreds of people are still very confused.

Labour has called for a national care service for years, because, if delivered properly, it would deliver much-needed parity between health and social care. It is challenging to fully understand the SNP's motives when it comes to its stubborn position on the national care service. It is widely acknowledged that the bill as introduced has changed direction significantly, is unclear and needs further scrutiny at stage 1, and the Government agrees. Members of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee agree, and other committees have expressed extensive concern about the bill. Stakeholders continue to express extensive concerns.

I want to address the minister's notion that we are delaying things. Extensive evidence was given to the committee about the things that we can already take forward at this point. Fair work principles, the work with the trade unions and the work on Anne's law do not require the bill, so will not be delayed, but that is not what the Government chooses to tell people about the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill.

As members have heard from my colleague Jackie Baillie, Labour wants a national care service. My colleague and I tried hard on the committee to fight for an expert advisory group, but that was rejected. We asked for amendments at stage 1, but that was rejected. Eventually, we had to ask for the general principles of the bill, which are completely unclear, to be rejected. The committee chose not to reject the general principles, although there was a significant division.

I must close now, but I hope that members—particularly back benchers—choose to send the bill back to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for proper scrutiny.

Qualifications and Assessment

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-12304, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, on the recommendations of the independent review of qualifications and assessment.

15:51

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): I am pleased to open this important debate on the recommendations of the independent review of qualifications and assessment. On Monday, I met teaching professional associations to discuss qualifications reform. I am grateful for their input thus far, and I look forward to continuing to learn from their members' expertise. Last week, I met Opposition spokespeople, and I very much hope that, today, we will be able to identify some areas of consensus on school reform.

The Government will submit a formal response to the independent review in the coming weeks, and it is important that today's debate informs that process. In some areas covered by the independent review's report, things are moving at pace, but we need to be mindful of the current context that our teachers and young people face, as Pam Duncan-Glancy's amendment makes clear. She also rightly points out the importance of engaging with parents and young people. To that end, I was grateful for the opportunity to engage on the matter with the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland yesterday.

The context has changed since the pandemic started. Fully engaging with the teaching profession on what comes next will be a guiding principle for me, as cabinet secretary. That is why I took the decision last year to pause legislative changes to the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Education Scotland. I did so because of my direct engagement with the profession—in particular, I reflected on what I heard from Scotland's secondary school teachers.

I commissioned further survey evidence to strengthen teacher voice in the reform process, and I thank the thousands of teachers who contributed. The results of the survey were published yesterday. The online survey response represents the views of more than 9,000 educational professionals, the majority of whom are teachers. Overall, the survey demonstrates that there is no clear and settled view among Scotland's teachers. Almost all respondents wish to see some change to qualifications and assessment but, although some people are very supportive of the proposals, others favour a more incremental approach.

My view is that the survey succinctly captures the changing context in our classrooms following Covid. Indeed, a number of factors—including additional support needs, attendance, behaviour and relationships, and teacher workload, as highlighted in Labour's amendment—are compounding the challenge in our classrooms every day. As cabinet secretary, I need to put in place a realistic programme of reform that takes into account the capacity of the system and the budget within which we must operate.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary recognise that all the factors that she has set out are reasons for introducing reform rather than delaying it?

Jenny Gilruth: The context that the member has addressed is important. However, as she knows, I built in an additional year, which has been important in allowing us to better capture teacher voice in the reform process. The current system is dealing with a number of different pressures. Yes, reform offers us opportunities, but we need to be mindful of the practicalities and how things will play out. I will talk about that later, particularly in relation to continuous assessment. How reform to the curriculum, qualifications and assessment is advanced in that context requires to be understood, although I think that there is consensus in the Parliament that change must come.

Crucially, reform must be interwoven with the driving of educational improvements. In its most recent report, the International Council of Education Advisers reminded us of that, stating that

"Clear beneficial impact on the learning and experience of the young people and their teachers should be the acid test of any proposals."

I firmly agree.

I thank Professor Louise Hayward and her review group for the substantial report and the recommendations on senior phase qualifications. Some, although not all, are asking for significant change. The independent review made 26 wide-ranging recommendations and challenges us to look at our senior phase qualifications differently.

Central to the proposed new approach could be the creation of a Scottish diploma of achievement, comprising three elements. The first is programmes of learning—subjects in today's parlance. The review recommends that we change the balance of assessment, moving away from overreliance on high-stakes exams; increase the use of digital assessment; and remove completely national 5 exams, which are usually taken in S4.

The second element is project-based learning, which would be a formal opportunity to build skills and put knowledge into practice through a project

that is based on interdisciplinary learning. The third element is a personal pathway, which would be an opportunity for young people to personalise their diploma by including a range of achievements that reflect their interests.

Taking those elements in their totality, the move to a Scottish diploma would represent a radical departure from our current qualifications offering. Any change to our qualifications system requires to be managed carefully. Indeed, having been a teacher when the curriculum for excellence was introduced, I know that there are lessons for the Government to learn on how we can work better to support the profession on qualifications reform.

As I announced to Parliament in December, a curriculum improvement cycle has already begun, with maths being the first area to be updated. Curriculum improvement in maths will involve working with the profession to better align the broad general education and senior phases to ensure smoother progression. I am pleased that we will shortly appoint a maths specialist to lead on that work nationally. Progression between the BGE and senior phases should be seamless, but we know that that is not always the case.

The new qualifications body will consider the content of qualifications to ensure progression as part of the curriculum improvement cycle, but the other change that is needed relates to rebalancing the assessment methods, as recommended by Professor Hayward. Ideally, we would do both at the same time, but that will not always be possible if we are going to make progress at pace.

Not every qualification has to look the same in the future. Coursework requirements were reintroduced this academic year, following the removal of modifications that were put in place during the pandemic. Although that was welcomed by some young people and teachers for some subjects, it has not been welcomed by all. Therefore, I asked the SQA to work with the teaching profession as part of its evaluation of 2024 to consider the experience of a return to full course assessment. That might inform future potential changes that do not have to wait for substantive qualifications reform.

I have also had an assurance from the SQA chief examiner that it will consider the impact of the reintroduction of coursework in its approach to grading this year, which is right and proper. That nuance is required with regard to external assessment weighting. I am firmly of the view that some subject areas would be better served by practical assessment. How that might be administered in every subject area will involve engagement with subject specialists in our schools but, in the future, there should not necessarily be a requirement for a final exam for every single course.

There are potential quick wins, on which I am keen to see the new qualifications agency move at pace, working with the teaching profession. That partnership between our national bodies, local government, teachers and professional associations will be critical to implementing reform. As Mr Kerr's amendment notes, this cannot just be about our schools.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary postulates a fascinating idea. With regard to the maths specialist, we are looking at implementation not in this academic year and, possibly, not even in the next academic year. Does she have a timetable in mind for the amendments to the different assessment approaches?

Jenny Gilruth: There are two elements to that, the first of which is curriculum improvement. The curriculum improvement that I announced in December will have a maths specialist lead. That process will involve working with the teaching profession and it will report later this year. We will update the curriculum in maths this year, followed by the English curriculum. We also need to engage with the new qualifications agency, which I hope to legislate for in the coming months. Finally, the Government will submit its formal response to Professor Hayward's recommendations, setting out the timelines that the member refers to. That is hugely important.

However, the point that I was making is that there are a number of actions that we can take in the here and now to update the content of our courses. It is important that teachers and our young people see progress to that end.

We like tests in Scotland. As Professor Gordon Stobart observed,

"In comparative terms, Scottish upper-secondary school students are more frequently examined than those in other jurisdictions".

We should contrast the school exams approach with that adopted by our universities, for example, many of which have moved to a much more flexible approach to continuous assessment post-pandemic. Why not our schools? Our teachers would say—rightly so—that it is because of the requirements that are stipulated by the SQA at the current time. The role of the new qualifications body will therefore have to be central to a move away from a focus on examinations-heavy qualifications towards more continuous assessment. How that requirement is implemented needs the Government to learn lessons from the introduction of the national qualifications.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: When will the new qualifications body be up and running? Which cohort of pupils will take the exams that it will set?

Jenny Gilruth: I gave some of that information when I responded to the previous intervention from Pam Duncan-Glancy's colleague. I will legislate for the creation of the new qualifications body in the coming weeks, and we expect it to be operational from 2025.

There were previously requirements associated with the original approach to unit assessment, which accompanied the introduction of the current national qualifications. That is really important—it is the bread and butter of what teachers do every day. However, in my opinion, those standards were accompanied by overly bureaucratic standards that required to be overcome by every pupil for every unit, and were for every teacher to input to the SQA.

How we administer continuous assessment matters. We do not want a rerun of those box-ticking or overly administrative approaches, which add to teacher workload and do nothing to improve outcomes for children and young people. Continuous assessment can support good progression. We know that there are challenges between nat 4 and nat 5, and particularly in relation to the jump on to higher in certain subjects. Getting that right through curriculum improvement will support Scotland's teachers and improve outcomes for Scotland's young people.

The best part of being education secretary is undoubtedly having the opportunity to visit Scotland's schools. In my engagement with our secondaries, I am always struck by the extensive range of qualifications that are now on offer. For many, that has been a welcome move that has opened up non-traditional pathways. Professor Hayward's second substantive recommendation in relation to the number of qualifications that we have in our schools is about a rationalisation of that offer. My view is that a degree of rationalisation is needed to support clearer pathways for our young people and for the teachers who are working hard to support them. In that respect, I am supportive of the review's proposal to rationalise the existing range of courses.

I am conscious of the time. I have not yet had an opportunity to talk about the opportunities that are presented by project-based learning or, more broadly, about how we can accredit the personal pathway element. I look forward to hearing views from members on those other two elements that would accompany any move to a Scottish diploma.

Undoubtedly, change must be carefully planned. Many teachers are now asking questions about the practicalities of how that might work in our classrooms. It was right and proper that we paused legislative reform last year to build in the opportunity for our teachers to fully engage with

the report's proposals—because, without them, reform cannot work.

I fully agree with Liam Kerr, who said earlier this month:

“it is the responsibility of the Parliament to address those challenges by setting them out clearly and trying to work in a cross-party way to find the solutions”—[*Official Report*, 6 February 2024; c 74.]

That is what I am trying to do in respect of the recommendations on the independent review of qualifications and assessment. I look forward to hearing the views of colleagues across the chamber in advance of the formal Scottish Government response.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes *It's Our Future*, the final report of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment; notes the report's recommendations, including proposals to change the balance in assessment methods in the Senior Phase; acknowledges the substantial engagement from teachers on the Review's recommendations since publication; agrees that it is crucial that the Scottish Government ensures a fair and credible qualifications and assessment system that enhances learning and teaching and creates improved outcomes for young people; reaffirms the need to make significant progress in the reform of the qualifications and assessment landscape in this parliamentary session, with initial changes starting in 2024; agrees that these reforms must be taken forward with young people and teachers, with changes clearly understood by parents, carers, employers and further and higher education institutions; recognises that the process of education reform must not solely be about qualifications and structures, but also about continuously improving Scotland's 3-18 curriculum framework to ensure seamless progression and to support pupils and teachers in classrooms, and agrees that trusted professionals working in Scotland's schools must be provided with the necessary support to enable the adoption of any proposed new approaches to assessment.

16:03

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I welcome this debate on what has become known colloquially as the Hayward review.

Arguably—I think that Ross Greer will pick up on this point later—we should have more time on this, so that the overview that the cabinet secretary has given, and the one that I will give, could be picked up on in more depth as we go through the afternoon.

To quote the commission on school reform:

“Since the pandemic a veritable plethora of reports on education have been published”.

There has been a lot of reviewing and report writing but very little actual reforming. I looked into that and discovered that, since the last election, there have been about seven reviews or reports in this space, five of which alone contain more than 130 recommendations. There have been 15

ministerial statements and 38 Scottish Government groups, which have met more than 300 times, and more than 300,000 words have been written.

It is now eight months since the publication of the Hayward report, nine months since the publication of “All Learners in Scotland Matter: The National Discussion on Education” and Withers’s “Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation” and nearly two years since the Muir report. That matters because, just last Monday, we read of warnings that the prolonged instability that is being caused by the stalled reform programme was damaging staff morale and the delivery of services for teachers and pupils.

The danger that I worry about is that, the further we move from the 2021 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development review of curriculum for excellence and the pandemic, the greater the likelihood of reform stalling. Despite the barrage of reports and recommendations and the proposals that the cabinet secretary outlined in her speech and, for example, the Minister for Higher and Further Education outlined in a useful letter on Withers yesterday, I do not see any overarching consideration that ensures that duplications—or, perhaps, the contradictions—in the reports are addressed. Neither do I see that an overall strategy is in place to ask what resources might be needed, particularly given the cabinet secretary’s comments on the various pressures that need to be addressed and will require resources.

I agree with the cabinet secretary that quick wins are good, but what is in place to ensure that such quick wins do not inadvertently prejudice other areas? As Dr Brown of the Royal Society of Edinburgh warns, we need to ensure that we learn from any mistakes that have been made in the past. My overall concern is that, absent all that I have mentioned, any reforms might not take teachers, staff and professionals along with them.

Although the Hayward recommendations have received strong backing, some of the results of the consultation that were published yesterday are sobering. As Andrea Bradley of the Educational Institute of Scotland demanded, it is imperative that the people who implement any reforms are listened to very carefully. Those results, which come from around 9,300 people, tell us that there is far from universal agreement with the Hayward recommendations. In particular, more than half of respondents disagreed with the recommendation to do away with external exams below higher level, such that assessment would be internal only.

Those respondents and a significant number of commentators raised concerns about the proposal

and suggested that removal could lead to pupils struggling with the transition to highers and beyond. I recall Mike Corbett of the NASUWT last summer warning that it risks making exams in secondary 6 incredibly high stakes in a context where there has been no meaningful practice. Questions have also been raised about standardisation and consistency of assessment, quality assurance, verification of what assessments count and how they might be cross-marked, and, of course, the perception, understanding and tolerance of employers.

The point about practice was made by Professor Lindsay Paterson last year, when he suggested that exams help to prepare pupils for progressing to further or higher education. That point was made to me by several providers. It is not only about the ability to set up new admissions procedures and the cost and time for them to implement them but about the ability of certain institutions to move away from traditional methods of consideration. I also worry about the workload implications for teachers, particularly in the context of class sizes remaining greater than is desirable, if they will have to take on an even greater burden of internal assessment.

That approach is part of the proposed Scottish diploma of achievement, which is intended to transform the senior phase. It consists of the three elements that the cabinet secretary set out in detail—the programmes of learning, the personal pathway and project learning.

A lot in the proposal is interesting, as the cabinet secretary set out, and we will no doubt hear more as the afternoon progresses. However, I have real concerns about the inadvertent but definite possibility that bringing in a Scottish diploma, with its inherent project learning and personal pathways that would be based on assessed coursework, could disadvantage pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, given the fact that, for example, pupils from wealthier backgrounds will have greater access to extracurricular activities. Young people in rural settings, looked-after children, young carers and disabled pupils might be similarly disadvantaged. In a context in which there has been little meaningful progress in closing the attainment gap—which we all know remains stubbornly high—and in which the gaps in primary school writing and numeracy are higher than pre-pandemic levels, the last thing that we can do is risk exacerbating that problem.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I agree that simply putting the project learning on to an already unequal system will increase that inequality. I am interested in Mr Kerr’s perspective on the system that we have at the moment. The comparative data set that we have from 2020 and

2021, in which we did not have high-stakes end-of-term exams, showed a narrower attainment gap than the traditional exam model. There is clearly a level of inequality in the system as it stands, and I am interested in how he thinks we could reconcile that with a move towards more continuous assessment.

Liam Kerr: That is an interesting point. The key to that goes back to what I was talking about earlier: we really need to interrogate what is going on here. We need to interrogate the data, what happened several years ago and why we got the results that we did, and then interrogate the myriad reports on that to ensure that we are getting the real, in-depth and nuanced learnings from all of those so that we come up with the right conclusion. That is a valid point that is well made.

I regret that I do not have time to go off at a slight tangent and talk about the outstanding foundation apprenticeship model that is being delivered by Aberdeenshire Council. I wanted to do that because it demonstrates an awful lot of the things that are desired by the review, such as raising attainment and closing the attainment gap, developing the meta skills that we all want to see, employer engagement and rounded assessment and qualifications. I hope to take up the cabinet secretary's offer, which I know she is sincere about, to work collaboratively on that and bring what Aberdeenshire Council is doing to the chamber.

In conclusion, the Hayward report is important and stimulating, but there are challenges to it. What we must see coming from the report, from today's debate and from the sector's responses in yesterday's consultation report is real, meaningful action.

I move amendment S6M-12304.2, to insert at end:

“; believes that, given the concerns highlighted by teachers surrounding some aspects of the review, the implementation of any of its recommendations must be done in conjunction with teachers, parents, pupils and staff, with their voices leading change, and acknowledges that, despite considerable review of the education system, the Scottish Government is not progressing with the radical change that many suggest is needed to Scotland's education system, which has suffered over the last 17 years.”

16:11

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I start by thanking Professor Louise Hayward and her team, and all the teachers, pupils, support staff and parents, for the work that they did on the report. They and we have eagerly awaited next steps, so I am pleased that the cabinet secretary has brought this debate.

However, in discussing qualifications and assessments, it is important that we view them as one piece of the jigsaw and recognise how they fit with the many reviews, consultations and surveys that have been carried out. Therefore, although they are missing from the Government motion, I welcome that the cabinet secretary mentioned them in her opening remarks.

The case for change is compelling. Right now, things are not working as they should for pupils, particularly for those who have additional support needs, for teachers and support staff burdened by heavy workloads, and for society, which is relying on today's education system getting it right for the generation of children who will deliver the skills that we need to grow the economy of tomorrow.

A failure to implement commitments that could address some of the issues that we see today—increased non-contact time, reduced class sizes and support for children who have additional needs—has held back potential, caused a decline in pupil and parental engagement and driven people away from the teaching profession. The cabinet secretary is therefore right to recognise that things are difficult and that we need to take people with us and time to do that, but those are reasons to reform, not reasons to delay.

One of the most pressing examples of why reform is crucial can be seen and heard in the experience of children who have additional support needs. The scale of how badly they are being let down has been coming over starkly in our committee inquiry. It is not just about a lack of support; they are being done a disservice in the way that we attempt to measure their success, so we must change that. If we can get it right for them, we will and can get it right for every child.

For too long, we have fostered a narrative that the only way to be successful in education is to get high grades in academic assessment through performance in high-stakes exams. We need to change that, which is why the debate is important and reform is pressing. The course programme element, and then assessment, are perhaps the most recognisable as similar to what we have now, but they will need to come with significant reform.

We need a broadened curriculum with a focus on knowledge and skills to grow the economy for the future. We also need to pay significant attention to the recruitment and retention of school staff and give education institutions the ability to innovate and deliver parity of esteem. Partnerships between schools and colleges that allow pupils to take college-level courses in place of highers and national 5s in subjects that are not otherwise included in the school curriculum—for example, in engineering, catering or social care—should be supported and encouraged. By making

those broader skills and courses available and, crucially, by valuing those course and colleges, we can enable more young people to broaden their opportunities.

Jenny Gilruth: Earlier, I made the point that we currently have quite a cluttered approach to qualifications in the school sector. Should some of the subjects to which the member refers always be delivered in school, or are there other places—such as colleges—where they might be better supported?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Those opportunities need to be available to children and young people, wherever they are. Some children and young people will flourish in those subjects in schools and some will require a different environment, including, for example, college. Provision needs to be tailored to the specific needs of the children and young people who are in our schools and our education system today.

The look that is being taken at the curriculum is important. Since its introduction, there has been a narrowing of the curriculum for excellence. The two-plus-two-plus-two structure, which is still prevalent, means that children are rushed to pick subjects in which they want to take a qualification as early as secondary 3, so that there is more time to teach them the relevant content, so that they can pass the high-stakes exam. That culture of teaching to the test stifles the ability to develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of the areas in which a child might excel or have an interest. It disengages pupils, it can limit their future choices and it should be reformed.

It is crucial that we allow pupils the room to study more subjects, but it is also crucial that we make the content fit for purpose and applicable in the modern world—for example, by clearly linking learning to future careers. An example of that is showing how maths can lead to a career in technology or gaming.

Reform needs to include a stronger focus on developing skills in problem solving, oracy and cross-subject work, so that young people head out to the world of work or further and higher education with the rounded skills that they will need. However, if we are to facilitate that broader learning, we will need to tackle staff workload, deliver increased non-contact time and address teacher shortages, including in computing, in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and in rural areas.

The way that we assess all that should be reformed, too. We must recognise the potential in all our young people to deliver what employers, colleges and unis need. Assessment must benchmark talent. There is value in exams, as they can act as comparators within our system

and with other places, but we should acknowledge that the uniform show of knowledge that they demand does not work for everyone. Some children's talent will be demonstrated in other ways. Some will struggle to produce an answer on paper, but that does not mean that they have not taken in what they have learned. Reducing the weight and changing the format of exams could help with that.

So, too, could a changed approach to the way in which we talk about qualifications and the way in which we develop them, award them and accredit them. That will help us to re-engage pupils through the delivery of parity of esteem and will improve outcomes for all pupils, including pupils with additional support needs. Therefore, I believe that the Government should accept Professor Ken Muir's recommendation to split the functions in the new bodies that replace the SQA and Education Scotland. I believe that doing that will be fundamental to meaningful reform.

Recognising and valuing a young person's journey and unique talents is crucial in spreading and fostering opportunity, and the personal pathway in the diploma has the potential to do that and to value talent for all. However, as others have said, it must be recognised that that approach is about valuing potential, removing barriers and guarding against inequality. Well-off children should not have an unfair advantage, and pupils with ASN should have access to the same extracurricular activities as other children.

I believe that we can achieve that if we measure success in schools differently, implement the Morgan review and support youth work. It is clear that, for so many reasons, reform is needed urgently. We should never pit one path against another. We should broaden opportunity and empower young people to take the path by which they will excel, and then empower schools and education authorities to set them on that path. Every child should face the world with no glass or class or stepped ceiling in their way, knowing that they are valued and equipped with the knowledge and skills that can transcend barriers.

In order to do that and to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow, we will need to introduce reform. Colleagues, we must do that quickly. Now that we know what is needed, it is time to leave behind an era of review, usher in an era of implementation and deliver the education system that our young people need, so that they can enjoy and create the opportunities of tomorrow.

16:19

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I welcome the constructive and open discussion that we had last week with the cabinet secretary. I

thought that that was quite a helpful session; she was much more open than I was expecting her to be, which was a good thing.

I have to say that it is ridiculous to have only four minutes to sum up my thoughts on the issue before us. We need much longer to discuss such matters, so I hope that we get more time at a future opportunity.

This is not year zero; 2016 was not even year zero. It was year zero way before then.

I think that the education community has been expecting significant reform after the reviews that Liam Kerr very meticulously set out. I pity the researcher who was tasked with working all that out. There have been a number of committees—lots and lots of them—and there have been various reviews that have built up an expectation in the education community that change is going to come. Therefore, this sudden change of direction—it is quite a sudden change of direction, and I will come on to explain what my views about it are—has discombobulated the education sector. Those in the sector are a bit confused as to exactly what is going to happen, and that is why this debate needs to give them clarity.

I have sympathy with the argument that there is enough going on. I accept that, with issues in relation to behaviour, additional support needs and high absence rates, together with various other things, the sector is under a lot of pressure and we need to be really careful about how we proceed. The problem with that is that there is an expectation—our previous First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, set it out—that, by 2026, we will have educational improvement in international terms and we will be closing the poverty-related attainment gap, whether substantially or completely. There is an expectation among the electorate that that is going to be done. The problem with the argument that there is enough going on already is that it implies that we are just going to stick with the status quo until we have things under control. We cannot just accept the status quo—we need to make improvements.

The problem that I have in relation to the behavioural issue and the absence policy that the minister set out is that I do not think that enough is being done. We need to have leadership from the top explaining why we think that the assessment on behaviour needs to change. The education secretary knows that I am in favour of setting clear boundaries and having consequences—or microconsequences, as some people call them—so that pupils know where they stand. I think that that is required in our schools, and teachers need to know that the education secretary has their back when they take those steps.

We need change. Before Christmas, I set out a number of changes that I thought should be included. On knowledge, I think that the education secretary has moved on. It is a welcome step to increase the knowledge content in maths. On resources, Pam Duncan-Glancy set out the contact time—we need progress on that. I am not particularly confident that the cabinet secretary will be able to deliver it, but we need it. I have talked about behaviour already. We need to change the Scottish national standardised assessments. The standardised assessments for P1s are ridiculous and they should go. They undermine the curriculum for excellence approach that we have adopted—that broader approach to education.

On accountability, the problem with delaying the reform to the national bodies is that we are leaving a vacuum. We need national bodies that have heft and are able to challenge the educational establishment.

I have not even got on to Hayward. I will quickly rattle through the Hayward review. On exams, I broadly accept the position of Carole Ford and the Commission for School Reform on nat 5s. I disagree with Pam Duncan-Glancy—I think that we should move back to the two-plus-two-plus-two model, as it avoids the two-term dash. I have sympathy with changing the continuous assessments. Looking at reform of the number of qualifications that we have is sensible.

I have concerns about introducing a personal pathway. The personal pathway is a big step, particularly in relation to how we are going to validate it. We could do more project work, not just the tokenistic stuff that some are implementing.

On parity of esteem, we should be using the Scottish credit and qualifications framework much more explicitly and we should be looking at the insight programme, which drives much of the behaviour in schools in terms of what headteachers try to encourage pupils to participate in. I have not really dug into that. We need so much more time for this debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As we move to the open debate, I remind all members who wish to speak to check that they have pressed their request-to-speak button. I advise members that back-bench speeches can be up to four minutes.

16:24

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): The SNP Government has an excellent track record of investing in Scottish education. We have significantly more teachers per pupil than Tory-led England or Labour-run Wales. Likewise, Scotland has more schools per pupil than Wales or England. Scotland has the highest level of school spend per pupil anywhere

in the UK—it is £1,300 higher per pupil—and it has shielded students from extortionate financial burdens by abolishing tuition fees in 2007 and graduate endowment fees a year later.

Willie Rennie: Will the member take an intervention?

Fulton MacGregor: No—I do not have enough time. Sorry.

That has gone some way to reducing the poverty-related attainment gap, which is a massive issue in my constituency. At the start of my speech, I put on record my thanks to all staff and pupils in schools across Coatbridge and Chryston for their on-going hard work and commitment.

Turning to the substance of the motion, I welcome the final report of the independent review of qualifications and assessment, which was published last June, and the survey on the recommendations. The time for change is now. The question of reform has been around for some time, but the pandemic has certainly exacerbated the need for change.

I will take a couple of minutes to pay tribute to the young people whose education was severely disrupted during the pandemic in an unprecedented way. As that period gets further and further in the past, it can be easy to forget the situation that unfolded for our young people. Children were off school for months in separate periods. They learned online and were separated from friends. Although we all agree that that was necessary to stop the spread of the virus, the known and as yet unknown consequences for our children's learning and overall wellbeing could be extremely significant and should never be underestimated.

I believe that the Scottish Government recognises that, which is why I welcome, for example, the work that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills has been undertaking on behaviour in schools. I have no doubt—and I am sure that others across the chamber agree—that, in my case load, there has been an increase in reported difficult behaviours in schools, much of which can be attributed to the pandemic period.

I welcome the measures that the cabinet secretary set out today, including the adoption of the Scottish diploma of achievement as a graduation certificate for all senior phase educational settings; the end of exams in secondary 4 and the use of a wider range of assessment methods in highers and advanced highers; and a digital profile for all learners, which will allow students to record personal achievements and identify and plan future learning.

I am pleased about the decisions on in-person exams and the direction in which we seem to be heading, which I believe that young people across the country will welcome. During a recent visit to St Andrew's high school in Coatbridge, when speaking to modern studies classes, I asked the pupils outright whether they were for in-person exams or a continuous learning model, and an overwhelming majority were in favour of the latter. It is good that, at last, we are appreciating the stress that the exam process can place on our young people.

We all know that education is very much an interconnected tapestry, and we must strive to deliver real change in the round. One area where I think that we can achieve better outcomes in the longer term is by raising the school starting age and implementing a kindergarten phase for our young people. That is, of course, Scottish National Party policy, and it is no secret that having a school starting age of five makes Scotland and the UK an outlier in an international sense. We need to be radical to do that and willing to invest in a future dividend, and the time to do it is now.

The benefits could be substantial and could help to tackle the growing issues of child and adolescent emotional and mental health, the increasing diagnoses of learning and behavioural difficulties and the poverty-related attainment gap. As I led on the Give Them Time campaign—at least from a Parliament angle—and following my colleague Kaukab Stewart's promotion to ministerial office, I am pleased to say that I will be progressing the issue in the Parliament. In the coming weeks, I will meet the lead organisation, Upstart Scotland, and lodge a motion for a members' business debate, for which I hope to have support from members from across the chamber.

I welcome the report and the motion. I believe that we have strong foundations to build on as we move forward.

16:28

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): We cannot afford to think that curriculum for excellence, which was introduced in 2010-11, will still be fit for purpose by the end of this century. Indeed, it is terrifying to think that those who are entering our early years provision now will still be working at the end of this century. Societal changes are happening at breakneck speeds, and digital evolution is at the very front of those changes.

In thinking about the speed of technological evolution, I googled "breakthroughs in 2010", and up came an article from *Business Insider* from December 2010 on the most groundbreaking

inventions of that year. Number 1 was the iPad. Why was it groundbreaking? The article said:

“The iPad is the first widely used touch-screen tablet and, according to one analyst, it is ‘the fastest-selling nonphone gizmo in consumer-electronics history.’

The iPad is so influential, clothes and bags are being customized to carry it easily. Larger than a cellphone and lighter than a laptop, the iPad is transforming the way people work on the go.”

We all know what happened to the iPad.

In technology and society, things must move on and rapidly evolve and adapt, which is why Scottish Conservative members understand and accept the need for education reform, which should be taking place at pace. What that reform might look like is very much up for discussion, which is why having cross-party support for the premise of accepting change is essential and a critical first step in the process.

Let us not forget that, under the Scottish National Party Government, education has gone backwards in international rankings; scores in maths, science and reading are at an all-time low; almost half of Scottish schools have not been inspected in 10 years; and there has been a failure to make significant progress in closing the elusive attainment gap. Previous attempts by the SNP to lodge an education bill were abandoned, despite education being called a flagship policy. Teacher numbers are down by more than a thousand since the SNP came to power—in 2007, there were 55,100 teachers; in 2023, there were 54,033, with the threat of more losses in Glasgow, where teacher numbers are likely to reduce by more than 400 in the next three years. The SNP has failed to deliver free school meals for all primary school children, despite promising to do so by August 2022. Entries in science subjects at higher level are at their lowest of the past five years.

As I have stated previously, it is now a question of what reform might look like and the pace at which change is implemented. We heard that, in the period just after the pandemic—if such a period can be defined, to be frank—there was a significant appetite for change from those who work in the profession. Now, we are aware of widespread concerns that teachers have highlighted about aspects of the review. For example, 57 per cent of teachers disagree with scrapping exams for S4 pupils, so we have to be careful. It is imperative that the implementation of any of the review’s recommendations is done in conjunction with teachers. Let us not forget the critical role of parents, pupils and other staff, whose voices are equally important when changes are considered. That collaborative approach will ensure that the reforms are not only well informed but reflective of the practical realities in classrooms across Scotland.

We want to see urgent action to reverse the decline of Scottish education, instead of more dithering and delay. It is essential to prioritise pupils’ needs throughout the process. We cannot follow a reform agenda that results in the status quo; our young people and schools have been let down far too often before.

I call for no more extensive and costly reviews, which lead to frustrating delays. Other countries are striving ahead with their education reform agenda and it is time that the SNP Government got in the race. We cannot afford to let our children down; after all, they are the future. We have to equip them with the skills to face the rapidly evolving future that is ahead of us.

16:32

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): The debate is hugely important and it is critical to get it right, not just for our young people and learners more widely but for the wider economy and society. The Hayward report mentions the World Economic Forum, which identified that education systems globally are lagging behind disruption in the economy and society, which is being driven by technology and other factors.

We live in an increasingly competitive international economy. Countries around the globe are developing their education systems at depth and scale. That is great for economic development, but it makes the situation even more competitive—I think that India has about 2.5 million STEM graduates annually, which is what we are competing against. Scotland’s competitive advantage will involve building on our strong educational legacy to stay ahead of those trends and our competitors.

The availability of skills is a key issue for inward investment and business growth, and it is the factor that inward investors identify most when they come to Scotland. The issue is not how much money Scottish Enterprise gives them or anything else that is going on, but the great skills pipeline that we have coming through our higher and further education system. It is hugely important that that continues to keep us in pole position.

Employers and businesses need meta skills—critical thinking, innovation, interpersonal skills, teamwork and much more—as well as students and young people who are coming through the system with knowledge. The combination of both is critically important. Technology does not solve all problems. We cannot google everything; it is absolutely essential that we understand the answers that come up and how to apply them. It is important that that builds on and supports the curriculum for excellence agenda.

The review identified the importance of project learning, which is a key part of the proposed Scottish diploma of achievement. It was welcome to hear the cabinet secretary mention that in her opening remarks. Project work allows learners to develop meta skills through work in areas that they have an interest in. It is also important that project work that involves business start-up ideas brings out entrepreneurial skills, as was cited in many cases that were mentioned in the review.

The work of the review needs to be closely aligned with the work of the national strategy for economic transformation in two ways. First, it must align with the skills actions, which are one of the five pillars of the national strategy for economic transformation. There should be close alignment on how the work will be taken into the economic space. Secondly, it needs to align with our drive to create more entrepreneurial start-ups, and it needs to enthuse young people by giving them the understanding that that is a legitimate, worthwhile and encouraged career path for them. The encouragement of meta skills and project-based learning helps to draw that out among young people and to highlight the link between curriculum work and what they may choose to do in their future career.

As all members do, I spend time visiting schools in my constituency and engaging with young people, and because of the work that I did when I was a minister and work that I continue to do to engage with the business community, I go from the school environment to talk to businesses that are in Scotland's tremendous, world-leading growth sectors, such as space, life science, financial technology, financial services, advanced manufacturing and many others besides.

Creating that link strikes me as being somewhat challenging. There could be understanding in the school environment of the opportunities in the work environment and of the well-paid jobs and fulfilling careers that exist in the sectors of the future. We need to do anything that we can to ensure that young people, their teachers and others in the school environment understand how changes to the curriculum can lead to worthwhile and profitable career opportunities. Businesses are keen to be part of that work.

I am glad that the Government is doing this work. It is hugely important that it continues to engage with businesses and other employers, which happened as part of the Hayward review. It also needs to continue to engage with others in the education system, including teachers, parents, pupils and staff.

16:37

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

First, I welcome the fact that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills has consulted those in the school and college teaching professions. That was the right thing to do, and it was good. The proof of the pudding will be what views are then taken on board, but that was the right approach.

The cabinet secretary also said that reform must come alongside driving educational improvement. I agree with that. That must be done to address some of the issues that we currently have in our education system, which are widely publicised in the media and elsewhere.

The review considered short-term, medium-term and long-term priorities, but, on reading the review, they are all quite similar. The review says that reform needs to be underpinned by adequate and sustained funding to increase the number of teaching and support staff. That is a major issue that has come up during the past few months.

Issues in education have been raised, by teaching staff in particular, during the many meetings that I have had with the sector. I know that the cabinet secretary has had such meetings, too. Teacher workload is an important issue, and it is continually raised when we speak to teachers or when we meet with trade unions.

Another issue is support for pupils with additional support needs. As I have said to the cabinet secretary before, I have met parents with children who have additional support needs who have said that they feel that getting it right for every child has not necessarily worked through the mainstream in schools. However, they made the point that, if we want to get it right for every child by mainstreaming, we have to ensure that there is support for kids with additional support needs.

There are big issues that need to be addressed. There are also issues related to curricular and technological resources. Sometimes, schools in more prosperous areas are able to raise lots of funds and they have the very best equipment, while schools in the less prosperous areas do not have that resource. It is important to consider that.

Willie Rennie raised a point about behaviour. We have to set out what is acceptable, what is not acceptable and what the consequences are. Teachers are crying out for that. Teachers tell me that it is not always clear that there will be consequences for poor behaviour. The cabinet secretary will quite rightly point out that the majority of pupils in schools are generally well behaved and are getting on with things, but it just takes one child in a classroom to completely disrupt that class. We need to be much firmer and much clearer.

I remember speaking to a teacher some months ago and mentioning the word “discipline”, referring to being disciplined when I was at school. The teacher made the point to me that teachers are not encouraged to use the word “discipline” in schools. They have to talk about “positive outcomes” and “positive behaviours”. Let us be absolutely clear with kids: they are expected to be disciplined when they are in the school, and they cannot disrupt the education of everyone else. Clear guidance has to be given around that.

I really believe in one of the points that was made in response to the consultation. It was

“said that this was one of the most important recommendations. Respondents emphasised the need for equal recognition of academic and vocational qualifications.”

That is absolutely correct. A lot of pupils may go on to do academic work later in life, but we have to ensure that the route for vocational education is improved and enhanced compared to where it is now.

That is me out of time. Thank you, Presiding Officer.

16:41

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I welcome the publication of “It’s Our Future”, the final report of the independent review of qualifications and assessment. I agree

“that it is crucial that the Scottish Government ensures a fair and credible qualifications and assessment system that enhances learning and teaching and creates improved outcomes for young people”.

I also agree with the main thrust of the two amendments to the motion—that teachers, parents and pupils need to be at the heart of any reform. I sincerely believe that the Scottish Government has been, and continues to be, committed to ensuring that that is the case.

In September 2022, the Scottish Government launched a national discussion headed “Let’s talk education”. It invited all young people in Scotland aged from three to 18 to share their ideas, views and experiences around education. As part of the “Let’s talk education” strategy, resources were developed to promote discussion, and events took place all over Scotland, led by schools, community groups and third sector organisations. Those discussions, along with feedback from parents, carers and teachers, were vital in shaping the recommendations contained in “It’s Our Future”. Those recommendations will lead to the adoption of a Scottish diploma of achievement as a graduation certificate for all senior-phase educational settings, an end of exams in S4, a wider range of assessment methods using highers and advanced highers, and a digital profile for all

learners to allow them to record personal achievements and to identify and plan future learning. Those changes start in 2024, and I agree that the reforms must be taken forward with the voices of young people and teachers at their heart.

I agree with Professor Hayward that another voice that plays a key role in education—one that is perhaps often overlooked but needs to be front and centre—is the voice of those involved in youth work. The professor said:

“Reform means bringing together all of our resources in education, and in youth work, and in other areas ... to focus these and to make best use of each individual components to give every learner the best possible life chance - and youth work has got to be a central part of that process.”

Mollie McGoran, chair of the Scottish Youth Parliament, said:

“Generally, for young people we’re seeing that youth work has so much value in the education space, in poverty prevention, in crime reduction, it’s really central to everything young people can get out of, what they should be able to get out of, their community.”

A national discussion carried out by YouthLink Scotland showed that 88 per cent of respondents wanted the skills that they had learned through youth work to be acknowledged alongside formal qualifications, and 87 per cent felt that young people should have access to youth work in school.

I believe that the value of youth work is clear, and I also believe that it needs to be further recognised and incorporated into any future reforms. In that respect, I am keen to hear from the cabinet secretary how we can include those voices on the journey. I am equally keen to explore the issue further with colleagues on the Education, Children and Young People Committee as we help to shape the exciting further reforms in the future.

16:45

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I have a lot to cram into four minutes, but the cabinet secretary need not worry—I can write to her at length about this if required. I agree with Liam Kerr and Willie Rennie that we also need at least one full afternoon’s debate.

The Greens have long argued against high-stakes, end-of-term exams and in favour of continuous assessment. We want to see a rounded measurement of a student’s knowledge and ability, not a snapshot of how they respond to specific circumstances, which can be significantly affected by variables such as illness.

The pandemic gave us comparative data sets, which prove that there is a problem here somewhere. In 2020, there were no exams and grades were eventually issued on the basis of

teachers' professional judgment. Attainment went up across the board, but the attainment of working-class kids went up far more—the attainment gap narrowed. In 2021, there were no exams again. There were quasi, internal exams in schools, with the same effect but to a lesser extent.

Either normal exams are devaluing working-class students or teacher judgment is overestimating them. I trust teacher judgment to a significant extent, but, whatever side we come down on, the question needs to be answered as we go on with the process: why do traditional high-stakes, end-of-term exam models result in such a wide attainment gap between those from the most and the 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?

The reality is that our exam and assessment system has not changed since the Victorian era, but we know so much more about young people, learning and how to measure attainment and achievement than we did back then. In Scotland, we overassess, and we often assess the wrong things. We are valuing what we measure, not measuring what we value. Young people, colleges, universities and employers want more than that. Professor Hayward's recommendations are the opportunity to move from the 19th to the 21st century.

I recognise the tension between the appetite for reform and the clear message from teachers that the current system is not achieving what we want, and the sense—primarily also from teachers—that they are already overwhelmed and would struggle with more change. We certainly cannot increase teacher workload by adding more internal assessment responsibilities on top of existing ones, but we need to break that impasse. I am glad that the motion makes clear that the intention is to achieve significant reform in this parliamentary session.

Young people have repeatedly made it clear through consultation that they overwhelmingly want those reforms, particularly the move to continuous assessment. We saw that in the review of the 2021 alternative certification model. A move away from external exams requires trust in teachers—the kind of trust that exists in other systems, such as in Finland. However, Scottish teachers do not feel trusted by the SQA. Many feel that the standardised assessments indicate a lack of trust by the Scottish Government.

There are a couple of specific issues, which I will run through, that I think we need to address. Professor Stobart highlighted that in having external exams in all three years of the senior phase we are an outlier. That is a key reason why

we are not really delivering CFE in the senior phase—we are teaching to the exam. The Greens would rather end external examination in S4, but we recognise the need to mitigate against qualifications without an external examination being seen as lesser. We want to see a reduced role for exams across the senior phase.

We also need to resolve the contradiction between the ability to choose up to nine national 5s and each course requiring at least 140 hours. We cannot timetable nine times 140 hours in a school year. That speaks to a wider misalignment between the curriculum and the qualifications systems, as identified by the OECD. That, in turn, is the result of a lack of cohesion between the SQA and Education Scotland. The governance reforms need to address that, potentially by putting more strategic direction within the Government's learning directorate.

The Greens are very enthusiastic about Professor Hayward's recommendations, and I urge the cabinet secretary to implement them pretty much in full. I have one caveat about the diploma—we need to make sure that those who do not get a diploma do not end up with the stigma that exists in systems such as that in the US around not graduating from high school.

There is a really important opportunity for employers, in particular, with the personal pathway and project learning, which will recognise a potential candidate's teamworking skills, leadership abilities and communication skills— aspects that traditional subject qualifications do not give an indication of to an employer.

I have barely scratched the surface, but I recognise the need to wind up. There are many more issues to touch on, but there is a high expectation that we achieve a lot with the reform process. There is a relatively high level of consensus, so we cannot afford half measures.

One clear lesson from the most recent reform to curriculum for excellence was that it was a mistake to do only half of it and not to reform qualifications at the same time.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Please conclude, Mr Greer.

Ross Greer: We cannot do that again. We need to be brave and seize the opportunity to create a system that will serve young people in our society for decades.

16:49

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I will use my time today to emphasise some of what Professor Hayward has said. First, I draw Parliament's attention to the evidence that we received from her at the

Education, Children and Young People Committee last year.

At the beginning of her evidence to the committee, Professor Hayward made five key points that are worth repeating. First, she said that the report

“offers a longer-term direction of travel for qualifications and assessment in Scotland.”

She emphasised that

“This is not a quick fix; it is about thinking about the future and making sure that we have a future that serves every learner, and Scotland as a nation, well”—[*Official Report, Education, Young People and Children Committee*, 20 September 2023; c 30.]

That really important point feeds into what the cabinet secretary has said about taking the necessary time. Yes, we need to move at pace where it is possible and practicable to do so, but we need to take the necessary time to ensure that we get reform right.

Secondly, Professor Hayward emphasised that, although the review is called the “Hayward review” colloquially, that name could not, in her view, be further from the truth, because she engaged across the country with a range of stakeholders, and the thinking and agreed positions in the report are from across all those communities. That attaches to the emphasis that the Government is placing on engaging with the profession and all other stakeholders. It is great to see the party-political consensus that is indicated by the amendments to the motion. That wide engagement will be so important going forward.

Thirdly, Professor Hayward emphasised that “vision is absolutely crucial.” She was keen to impress on the committee that, if no vision is set, there will be a real danger that, through the years of implementation, we will collectively lose sight of where we are trying to get to and, at that point, the process of review will begin again. Within the profession and among stakeholders who are relevant to reform, we must get a collectively agreed vision that is as solidified as possible. That also applies to the political sphere. We will be able to serve our constituents better in the reform if we agree on a position as much as possible and if we avoid party-political attacks on the issue and focus on the national interest of getting reform right.

Fourthly, Professor Hayward emphasised that

“The pace of putting ideas into practice should depend on the level of resourcing that is available. It is about working through the ideas and being realistic about the investment that can be made as they develop.”—[*Official Report, Education, Young People and Children Committee*, 20 September 2023; c 31.]

That is a really important point—we must keep in mind the financial challenge that we face nationally.

Fifthly, Professor Hayward said that no idea is contained in her report that is not already being implemented in at least one other country. That is a significant point. We must keep in mind that we can learn from other countries around the world, as we engage in reform.

In the time that I have remaining, I will refer to two recommendations in the report that could be quick wins. Recommendation 12, which is about artificial intelligence, emphasises that

“As a matter of urgency, Scottish Government should convene and lead a cross-sector commission to develop a shared value position on the future of AI”.

If we do not get ahead of the AI revolution, we will fall behind economically. That applies in the education context, too. Learning to use AI should be in our curriculum across the board as soon as possible.

Also, recommendation 16 is an important issue that teachers are raising with the Government at this point.

There is lots more to talk about in a future debate, Presiding Officer.

16:54

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I have enjoyed listening to today’s debate, but a little bit of balance always has to be inserted into our debates. [*Interruption.*] The cabinet secretary groans. I know that she will not want to listen to me, but she has committed to listening more widely.

I have spoken many times in the chamber on the subject and have drawn on the words of Lindsay Paterson. It would be wrong for his voice to be absent from the debate, so I will start by citing a couple of his thoughts on the Hayward review. He said that

“the Review ought to be challenged, rigorously and radically, because it is deeply disappointing. Its methods were flawed, and its recommendations vapid. It has a few good ideas, but they are not worked out in any detail and their practicability is doubtful. Implementing what it proposes would perpetuate the harm already inflicted by the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, that two-decade-old reform which the present Review extols as admirable.”

I am happy to acknowledge that there are good things in the review and that it is a good opportunity for a conversation about how we move forward, but I share the concerns about how rigorous the review has been in terms of its starting point and the evidence base on which it is built.

I worry—a number of members have touched on this—that not enough consideration has been given to how the changes will impact our most deprived communities and the young people who

face the biggest challenges and barriers to education. Lots of things sound good in the abstract when we talk about them here in the chamber, but, like some other members, I worry about the “personal pathway”. I worry about what it means for young people in my constituency who do not have after-school clubs to go to, or access to exciting national programmes.

Opportunities such as the Duke of Edinburgh’s award are not attainable for all young people at the moment. There are schools in my constituency with young people who would love to continue playing a musical instrument, but that opportunity is not there for them, or is not properly supported. Many young people have the aptitude and ability to take on an interdisciplinary project, but maybe not at the age of 15 and maybe not from the starting point at which they currently find themselves.

Martin Whitfield: Does Oliver Mundell agree that youth work could feed in exceptionally well to those groups of people and provide support that they might not otherwise get?

Oliver Mundell: I acknowledge that. However, the very good youth work services in my patch, which are award winning and for which I have huge admiration, do not have the resources to deliver that kind of support.

I also question whether such support would be a substitute for the teaching and academic support that those young people deserve; they would flourish if those things were there, too. I am concerned that, in some schools, in some parts of the country and in some quarters of our society, we say that it is okay for some people to opt out of qualifications and formal academic learning, despite the fact that they have the ability and the desire to achieve qualifications. We say, “These other things are the things for you. Don’t worry that you don’t have the qualifications that you need to follow your dreams—we’ve found some other things that can work as part of your qualification to make up for it.” We have to be very careful that we get the balance right and that we do not allow reform to be a chance to write people off.

16:58

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Although the debate focuses on the qualifications and assessment review, it is impossible to look at that in isolation. Falling teacher numbers, increasing instances of violence and aggression, a drop in our programme for international student assessment scores, declining school attendance and the pandemic—the impact of which was highlighted by Fulton MacGregor—are just some of the challenges in education that provide the context for the debate.

Reform of Scottish education needs to begin with addressing the outstanding issues. Our young people deserve an education system that supports them to reach their full potential. Our teachers and school staff deserve an education system that recognises and values their dedication and hard work.

The recommendations of the Hayward review, which have been broadly agreed with, at this point lack the detail to make them workable. Without that detail, it is difficult to see them as being achievable. Can there be any confidence in the sector that they will go ahead, when we have seen review after review over recent years, without the Scottish Government enacting the reform that is required?

From looking at the findings of the school and college teacher consultation on the recommendations, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that respondents deemed such a range of issues—including funding, qualifications assessment and clarity around reforms—to be priorities that there was little consensus on what the overall priority should be.

Many respondents pointed to the importance of adequate and sustained funding. The success of any reform will be dependent on sufficient and long-term funding for staff and resources to deliver the proposed changes, but there are concerns that funding will be insufficient. Those concerns reflect the challenges of workload, resourcing and support that affect our schools, teachers and pupils right now. We need adequate and sustained funding in order to increase teaching and support staff, to address workload, to support pupils with ASN and to improve resources for subjects in schools. The cabinet secretary and I heard about some of those from pupils at Newcastle primary school on Monday. Without delivering the workforce support that will allow the professional teaching and learning development that is required for the reforms, they will not be achieved.

The recommendations are welcome, but we need them to be workable. A recurring theme in the responses was that the recommendations are too vague. There needs to be clarity on how assessment will be standardised if early-stage examinations are reduced, and on whether that will mean more work for individual teachers. There is potential to develop online submission methods that could be used by pupils and teachers. That could present savings in resource and assessment costs, because it would remove some of the need for physical locations for verification processes.

Who will be responsible for project learning, and will there be national resources? Demonstration of commitment or achievement in extracurricular activities is something that employers recognise, but at present it can be difficult to present that to

colleges or universities for those who are not skilled at writing a personal statement.

There are also challenges in ensuring that people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are not further disadvantaged—which many MSPs have raised this afternoon—in relation to project learning potential, which will require investment in opportunities for extracurricular activities and the ability to record personal achievements. We know that some opportunities that previously existed, such as groups with an environmental focus, have been lost to some schools as a result of funding pressures and lack of scope among school staff for the additional work that is required.

The recommendation for parity of esteem between academic, vocational, professional and technical qualifications is welcome, but it will bring additional resourcing challenges that need to be recognised. Our schools are, right now, struggling to provide the necessary resources for practical subjects such as home economics, and in some schools such subjects are being dropped for cost reasons. In January, technology departments were told that there is no money left in the budget until the next financial year. Delivering those courses for pupils means properly resourcing them in all parts of the country.

Since 2016, the Scottish Government has commissioned a series of reviews on various aspects of Scotland's education system but has neglected to act on them. The outcomes of the Hayward review present an opportunity for change, but we need more detail on how they would work in practice. If the Scottish Government is serious about taking them forward, it must, as its first step, address the current and significant challenges that our schools, pupils, teachers and staff face.

17:02

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak to the "It's Our Future" report. I spend much time thinking about the future of my children and grandchildren, all eight of whom have made or are currently making their way through the Scottish education system.

This fully comprehensive report spans 152 pages, but I wish to focus my remarks on the elements that strike a personal chord with me and that I know will strike a chord with many families across Scotland whom I have had the privilege of working with throughout my time in politics. The points that I wish to focus on are about how we can better support children and young people who have neurodivergent conditions to not just get by but fully participate and thrive on their educational journeys.

Recommendation 1, "Change Qualifications and Assessment in the Senior Phase in Scotland", is very welcome. The report notes that many learners who were spoken to as part of the review reported high levels of stress caused by the overt focus on examinations. I agree that

"change must be carefully planned and resourced."

We know that stress and anxiety are often one of the major aspects of having a neurodivergent condition. Supporting neurodivergent children in our education system demands a holistic and inclusive approach that not only recognises their unique ways of learning and interacting with the world but their unique ways of showing and understanding their learning. It is about creating environments where neurodiversity is seen as a valuable perspective that enriches our whole system and not a barrier to success.

Allowing for more long-term overviews of the educational progress of children and young people will, in my view, result in a fairer picture of their progress. By fostering that inclusive approach, we can ensure that our education system is not merely inclusive by design but empowering in practice. To allow neurodivergent children to flourish academically and socially, without there being the pressure of what is to come, assessments could be immersive and integrated into learning.

Recommendation 7 states:

"All learners should be offered a broad range of courses including academic, vocational, professional and technical courses."

That will ensure that our children and young people reach their full potential and are able to do what they need to do in order to have their needs met.

I have had many interactions with children and young people over the years—as well as being a mother and a grandmother, I was a young women's leader for a few years and ran a local playgroup—and it is obvious, when interacting with a wide range of young children, from many different aspects of life and from different demographics, that one is no more or less worthy than another when it comes to showing either academic abilities or vocational talents. I welcome the report's remarks on parity of esteem for each learning pathway.

On that point, I look forward to visiting local businesses in my Banffshire and Buchan Coast constituency next week as part of Scottish apprenticeship week. Such businesses support many of our local young people through the valuable learning opportunity of apprenticeships.

Our aim should be for young people to leave our Scottish education system with the tools that will

help them to navigate their personal and professional lives. More important—this is vital—they should be able to look back at an experience that has had a positive impact on their life. For that to happen, we must ensure that, when building or reforming our education system, we build it not to be modified but in an inclusive way from the foundations up.

17:07

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It has been a fascinating debate. As always, it is a great pleasure to follow Karen Adam, who is an incredibly strong advocate for our neurodivergent young people. If we can get it right for them, we will get it right for all our young people, because the processes that work best with neurodivergent children are also the processes that allow children who are struggling to develop skills to do so much more quickly than would be the case if they were being lectured at from the front of the class, which rarely happens now. One of the standards that we should seek is that classrooms should be welcoming to all young people who attend. We know from the rising numbers of children with additional support needs that our teachers and other pupils face that dynamic in our classrooms daily.

I was going to list all the reports, but Liam Kerr did that, so I refer members to his speech. We anticipate the Government's response, in the near future, to the international council of education advisers' most recent report, but it is worth pointing out that the report says:

“the time for commissioning reviews is now over.”

I think that members across the chamber recognise that. There is strong consensus on the need for action, but the specifics remain to be determined.

We are concerned that the momentum of change might not match the appetite for change within the system, and I look forward to the responses to the six strategic areas. Although there might be disagreement when we vote at decision time—perhaps we could have had this debate without a motion or with a very short motion, which might have been an interesting strategy to pursue—members from across the chamber have given their ideas, and there has been a great deal of consensus, which the Government can build on.

However, there are also areas of concern. The specific report that this debate is about is just one piece of the jigsaw or, as one member put it, one part of the “tapestry” of education.

It is important that a number of contributions indicated the need for a discussion about the

vision behind the reform. The cabinet secretary, better than most, will recall the roll-out of curriculum for excellence. There was a period of enormous enthusiasm for change among the education profession, which saw it as a great opportunity. However, for whatever reason, systems that sit around our education system just kept battering at it, knocking it and asking it to shift slightly, so that some of the great strengths of curriculum for excellence have started to be lost, as Ross Greer highlighted.

A number of members commented on the shortage of time for this debate. I think that it is fitting that we have debates in which members struggle to get to contribute, because that shows the importance of what we are talking about.

Willie Rennie's contribution, which highlighted the use of the SCQF—which could be used more widely—also speaks to the proposal for a diploma and whether we have an opportunity, which we did not have with curriculum for excellence, to redraw the language of assessment and with regard to how we allow young people to show their ability.

There was a fascinating contribution from Ivan McKee about the importance of the relationship with business and the perception that still exists, rightly or wrongly, about there being a misunderstanding about what the two areas of business and education demand of each other. This is an opportunity to bring those areas together. Ivan McKee's contribution about meta learning and the ability of project learning to facilitate that was very interesting. That ties in with the report and with that demand with regard to the tension between the meta skills and the personal knowledge that we need. Again, that has been a tension in curriculum for excellence almost since day 1. This process is an opportunity to look at and address that.

Alex Rowley's contribution on GIRFEC, who it applies to and the fact that it boils down to resource spoke to the tension between the change that we need to see in the short term—which does require resource—and the vision for the long term. We should not take steps in the short term that damage our long-term vision. However, without that vision, we are really challenged in that respect.

I thank Bill Kidd for his contribution on youth work—it saved me two paragraphs of my speech—because of the importance of the role that youth work plays, which I made an intervention on, in the lives of some of our young people, particularly in the short term for those who are challenged with regard to their engagement. I echo his call to explore that further.

Ross Greer's contribution was fascinating, because there is a tension with regard to whether

we trust teachers. During Covid, we had an insight into the potential of teacher assessment. A number of contributions referred to the insurance that people outside the education environment perhaps need on that. However, we must also remember—again, this speaks to the challenge with regard to CFE—that strange piece of AI that suddenly reduced certain young people's grades, depending on their postcode.

I thank Oliver Mundell. I think that he was concerned that he was going to change the tone of the debate but, to be fair, I do not think that he did. He raised very important issues. There is a tension with regard to academic achievement and young people. One of the things that this Parliament can do is not instruct but debate what that the solution to that tension should be.

17:13

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank every member who contributed to the debate. It is a privilege to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, not least because it is a rare occurrence that we are debating the substance of the education of our young people. I agree with Willie Rennie and Ross Greer that our time today is, unfortunately, just a little too short.

As my colleagues have highlighted, we understand the need for reform. Sue Webber is absolutely right that we need our education system in Scotland to evolve and adapt at pace. We want urgent action to reverse the decline of Scottish education, instead of dithering and delays. However, it is essential that the needs of pupils are prioritised throughout that process. There has been too long a delay, with review after review, and it is our pupils who are let down all too often.

The need for a varied education offer and the general acceptance that no one route is the single route to success are of personal importance to me. I have mentioned before that I did not leave school to go to university—that route was not right for me. At school, I found the whole process of learning in an overtly structured way very difficult. I had an aptitude for function and discussion, so a positive destination for me was a management training scheme within what we called, at that point in the 1980s, “big business”. I started at House of Fraser stores.

It has been interesting to listen to the debate. I will highlight a couple of contributions from members across the chamber that I think are particularly worth noting.

Straight up, I have to tell Pam Duncan-Glancy that I like a jigsaw analogy, so I thank her for that. Along with Liam Kerr and Willie Rennie, Pam

Duncan-Glancy mentioned the number of reviews that we have had and how important it is that they all work together to bring forward a joined-up strategy, so that we can catch any duplication, as was mentioned by my colleague Liam Kerr.

Pam Duncan-Glancy also mentioned the difficulty of the current system for ASN students, and she said that moving forward with reform is needed sooner rather than later. I agree wholeheartedly with that.

I accept the cabinet secretary's comments that a move to continuous assessment cannot add to teacher workload. However, we must improve outcomes for young people. I highlight that comment.

Willie Rennie was right to comment that there are expectations in the country around the need to move forward and that those expectations have to be met. He was also right to mention misbehaviour in our classrooms. We need consequences rather than discipline, which is what, for some time, we on the Conservative benches have been calling for.

Ivan McKee was right to mention the important link to business growth and entrepreneurship, which I will also comment on.

I highlight the comments from Oliver Mundell. It was right for my colleague to raise concerns, because that is the whole point of debate. It is how we, in this place, make changes that work for everyone.

I know that I have a short amount of time, so I will finish by raising the following points. I have to be honest and say that, when Professor Hayward—supported by an independent review group including learners, teachers, employers, universities and colleges—published the report, back in June last year, given the breadth of the review group, I assumed that there was a level of buy-in to the recommendations. However, I was surprised yesterday to read the level of disagreement with some of the proposals. The classic example of that is in relation to the recommendation about the Scottish diploma for achievement, which had 23.5 per cent approval but 38.2 per cent disapproval. The personal pathway recommendation had 23.5 per cent approval but 38.6 per cent disapproval, and project learning had 16.8 per cent approval but 44 per cent disapproval.

The fact that 57.6 per cent of respondents disagreed with the proposal to reduce examinations highlights to me a worrying situation whereby the teachers who have to implement the changes and who know the current position in our classrooms regarding getting a proper blend of educational options for our children and young people are perhaps not as comfortable with the

recommendations that the independent review has highlighted.

The motion refers to the
“need to make significant progress”

and

“agrees that these reforms must be taken forward with young people and teachers, with changes clearly understood by parents, carers, employers and further and higher education institutions”.

Given that assurance in the Government’s motion, it is imperative that the concerns of almost 10,000 teachers and people who are working in the education process are taken into consideration. I urge the Scottish Government to listen to those trusted professionals who are working in Scotland’s schools on the adoption of any proposed new approaches.

I will also mention the need for business contributions as a matter of urgency. As I said, the issue was mentioned. It is important that we ensure that changes towards modular courses and practical education in our schools open doors for onward employment and positive destinations instead of sending children and young people down an educational cul-de-sac.

Too many times, employers resort to examination results or further education certificates and degrees because they highlight an ability to work through a problem, a tenacity of character and a sustained work ethic that is essential for successful employment. However, those are not the only qualities admired by businesses. We have the opportunity to truly reform, and, if we include employers with the same gravitas as our college and university sectors, we will certainly find greater buy-in and a more positive move towards the essential parity of esteem that so many of the teachers agreed with.

I would really like to know more about the next steps. I accept that the final page of the report on the results of the consultation mentions the debate. However, we do not have a lot of detail, and I look forward to the Government’s formal response on how it plans to take forward the reviews. I know that that is coming. In particular, considering the percentage of teachers who are not in agreement with the initial recommendations, engagement has to be part of the way forward.

As with many things, how implementation progresses is paramount to success. It is time for action. Our children, young people, employers, colleges and universities deserve nothing less.

17:20

Jenny Gilruth: Time has been a key theme in the debate, and I recognise that the debate has

been truncated because of other parliamentary business. I put on record my commitment to come back to Parliament to have a further, fuller debate, perhaps after the publication of the Government’s formal response to the review, as was outlined.

I also commit to engaging with the Opposition more generally outwith the chamber along with my officials, as we did last week, because that will help to inform the process as we move forward. We have a great deal of consensus in the Parliament on education reform, to touch on Martin Whitfield’s point. I am keen to solidify that opportunity more formally and more regularly.

Mr Whitfield also spoke about the tensions with the introduction of curriculum for excellence. I hope that he still has a copy of his green folder, as I do. However, I understand some of the challenge that is inherently attached to educational reform. We need to be mindful of the potential pitfalls of that, as I outlined in my opening speech.

I will respond to some of the comments from members in the debate, which was positive and helpful. At times, undoubtedly, there was challenge. I welcome the challenge from Oliver Mundell. I agree with many of the points that he made about project-based learning, broader achievement and how that might be accredited in the future. We need to be mindful of equity issues, which have been a challenge. That was discussed by the review group in relation to the approach that Professor Hayward has taken throughout the review.

Liam Kerr rightly noted that there is room for different views on the recommendations. He spoke about the Government’s survey. It is important to reflect the range of different views that exist. The challenge from the profession has been reflected to us because the profession will always think about the practicalities of enacting reform and what it means in classrooms. We need to ensure that our teachers are part of the process, but we also need to listen to them. That is exactly why I built in the additionality to give teachers the opportunity to contribute and for us in the Government to hear their views and better reflect that in the formal response.

Mr Kerr touched on apprenticeships in his region. I would be more than happy to engage with him on a visit, if he is offering that, to look at the work that is being done on developing the young workforce in his area. Indeed, Mr Dey might wish to take up that kind offer.

Mr Kerr also spoke about some of the inequity issues that Oliver Mundell touched on. We need to be mindful of those, particularly in relation to the personal pathway element.

Pam Duncan-Glancy spoke about the compelling case for change. I hear two views on

that. I hear one strong and compelling case for change and another view from the teaching profession in the survey that we published yesterday, which is to be mindful of the current challenges in the system. Those two things need to be balanced. However, we built in additionality in the previous year, and now is the time to move forward.

Ms Duncan-Glancy also spoke about the importance of splitting the inspectorate function from Education Scotland. I will bring forward legislation to that end later this year. However, on Willie Rennie's points in relation to the national agencies, there is an opportunity to ensure that Education Scotland works better and more closely alongside the teaching profession to provide support where it is needed.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I thank the cabinet secretary for taking my intervention, although I ask her to forgive me, because she had moved on slightly to Willie Rennie's point. Does she also accept that it is important to split the accreditation and awarding function from the new qualifications body?

Jenny Gilruth: Ms Duncan-Glancy knows that the Government does not support that approach. That has been outlined in our approach thus far. However, I look forward to engaging with her on the substantives of the legislation when it is introduced in due course. I was reflecting recently on the role of school in that regard and more generally post-Covid. Evidence from the Centre for Social Justice, talked about the fraying link between home and school post-Covid. It is important that we reset that relationship with the school and with our parents, particularly in relation to the reform of the qualifications system.

There was a discussion about the range of qualifications in Ms Duncan-Glancy's contribution. The point that I made in my initial remarks was that the plethora of different qualifications that currently exist in the senior phase can be confusing for many young people. We need to declutter and rationalise that offer, which is one of the key recommendations from Professor Hayward's review, so that our young people can see those pathways more clearly and identify opportunities accordingly.

Willie Rennie spoke about the pressure in the system at the current time, and I absolutely accept what he said. I also agree with him that the status quo cannot hold. The past year has been important in allowing us to capture teacher views and to hear a contrasting view about some of the recommendations. The words that I used in the chamber before Christmas were that the status quo cannot hold. That was about the challenge that was presented to the Government in relation to the programme for international student

assessment statistics, but I think that, more generally, we need to move forward now.

It was interesting to hear Mr Rennie's views on the two-plus-two-plus-two model. It took me back to my time on the Education and Skills Committee in the previous parliamentary session, when we debated the issue at length with Ms Duncan-Glancy's predecessor, who might have had a different view. Mr Mundell might also remember some of those conversations about subject choice. That speaks to the practicalities of how we timetable curriculum change. We need to be mindful of what it means for our teachers. That is why there is a degree of hesitancy in the profession at the current time, because teachers are always thinking about how such things will work in practice in the classroom.

Willie Rennie: Does the cabinet secretary think that the inconsistency between one school and another and between local authorities on that split is adding to the difficulties of making sure that we raise standards throughout?

Jenny Gilruth: Undoubtedly, there are different approaches. One of the key strengths of curriculum for excellence was meant to be that it allowed for local decision making in local schools. However, if Mr Rennie is asking for the Government to give more of a direction on how many subjects a school should teach, perhaps we should have another debate on that. More generally, we need to reflect that there are inequities in terms of entitlements across the system at the current time. The language of entitlements that Professor Hayward uses in the report is interesting, because we know that there is variation across the system at the current time, so perhaps we need to give more firm guidance on that. I do not think that it would be my role as cabinet secretary to provide that direction to schools, but we need to think about how Education Scotland could support a more equal system across the board, because this is fundamentally about the entitlements of our young people and ensuring that they all have access to the full suite of qualifications that Pam Duncan-Glancy spoke about.

I am conscious of the time.

Ivan McKee spoke about the importance of meta skills and knowledge for employers and a number of other members also touched on that this afternoon. One of the key drivers of curriculum improvement has been ensuring that the role of knowledge is better reflected. Although Mr Mundell might think that I do not listen to Lindsay Paterson, I broadly agree with him on the point about knowledge in the curriculum, which is why we are taking forward this work on curriculum improvement.

The points that Roz McCall made on the involvement of business and how we can use business expertise to inform our educational offer are important. As we heard from Mr McKee, business has a key role to play in qualifications reform. I know that it has many views on our current offer, and that is why we need to have a coherent offer. That has been one of the key messages that have come out of this afternoon's debate.

Ross Greer cut to the heart of the challenge in relation to continuous assessment and high-stakes examinations, on which we continue to rely in Scotland at the current time—unlike many other countries, I should say. We heard from Karen Adam about the stress that that can create for our young people, but we should also reflect on the stress that it creates for our teachers. In my initial contribution, I talked about the reintroduction of some of the qualifications requirements that took place this year. I know that they are creating pressure in the system at the current time, and that is why I have asked the SQA to review and be mindful of those arrangements this year and to take that pressure into consideration in the grading approach that will be used in this year's examinations.

I hear the challenge from Mr Mundell and others about project-based learning and programmes of learning, and I am live to those issues. However, I have outlined today where we can make progress and where we have been able to move forward at pace, specifically in relation to qualifications, which I think are important and allow us to identify opportunities while working with the profession.

The pandemic was undoubtedly an extraordinary time in all our lives. Our children lived through that period and they also had their education turned upside down. Our teachers stepped up and moved at pace to respond to a global emergency. Now is the time to recast our educational offer to ensure that it is fit for purpose for Scotland's children and young people, to best equip them for life after school or whichever pathway they see fit to follow.

Business Motions

17:30

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-12320, 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 5 March 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Ferguson Marine

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scotland's Place in the World

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 6 March 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy;
Finance and Parliamentary Business

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 7 March 2024

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:
Transport

followed by Scottish Government Debate:
International Women's Day: Global Perspective

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 12 March 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Housing (Cladding Remediation) (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 13 March 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands;
NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 14 March 2024

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:
Social Justice

followed by Social Justice and Social Security
Committee Debate: Addressing Child
Poverty Through Parental Employment

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 4 March 2024, 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]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-12321, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 1 extension.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 22 March 2024.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:31

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-12322 to S6M-12324, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Care (Personal Care and Nursing Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Consumer Scotland Act 2020 (Relevant Public Authorities) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Provision of Early Learning and Childcare (Specified Children) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2024 [draft] be approved.—[George Adam]

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

Decision Time

17:31

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S6M-12130, in the name of Tom Arthur, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2024, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:32

Meeting suspended.

17:34

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on motion S6M-12130, in the name of Tom Arthur, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2024. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes if I could have got connected.

The Presiding Officer: We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond 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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (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)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (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)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)
 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 Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-12130, in the name of Tom Arthur, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2024, is: For 65, Against 0, Abstentions 52.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2024 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-12317.1, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12317, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill: referral back to lead committee at stage 1, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond 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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (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) (Alba)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (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 Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-12317.1, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, is: For 51, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-12317, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill: referral back to lead committee at stage 1, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond 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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (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)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (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 Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-12317, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill (Referral Back to Lead Committee at Stage 1), is: For 52, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Motion disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-12304.2, in the name of Liam Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12304, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, on the recommendations of the independent review of qualifications and assessment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 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, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond 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)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (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) (Alba)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-12304.2, in the name of Liam Kerr, is: For 31, Against 86, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-12304.1, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12304, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, on the recommendations of the independent review of qualifications and assessment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. If I could have connected, I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: We will ensure that that is recorded.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am not sure whether my vote has connected, but I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote has been recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 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)
 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)
 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond 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)

Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (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)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (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 Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-12304.1, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, is: For 51, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-12304, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, on the recommendations of the independent review of qualifications and assessment, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond 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)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-12304, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, on the recommendations of the independent review of qualifications and assessment, is: For 96, Against 20, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes *It's Our Future*, the final report of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment; notes the report's recommendations, including proposals to change the balance in assessment methods in the Senior Phase; acknowledges the substantial engagement from teachers on the Review's recommendations since publication; agrees that it is crucial that the Scottish Government ensures a fair and credible qualifications and assessment system that enhances learning and teaching and creates improved outcomes for young people; reaffirms the need to make significant

progress in the reform of the qualifications and assessment landscape in this parliamentary session, with initial changes starting in 2024; agrees that these reforms must be taken forward with young people and teachers, with changes clearly understood by parents, carers, employers and further and higher education institutions; recognises that the process of education reform must not solely be about qualifications and structures, but also about continuously improving Scotland's 3-18 curriculum framework to ensure seamless progression and to support pupils and teachers in classrooms, and agrees that trusted professionals working in Scotland's schools must be provided with the necessary support to enable the adoption of any proposed new approaches to assessment.

The Presiding Officer: Unless any member objects, I propose to ask a single question on three Parliamentary Bureau motions. The final question is, that motions S6M-12322 to S6M-12324, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Care (Personal Care and Nursing Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Consumer Scotland Act 2020 (Relevant Public Authorities) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Provision of Early Learning and Childcare (Specified Children) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2024 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time, and we will now move to members' business.

A77 and A75 Infrastructure and Connectivity

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-10634, in the name of Sharon Dowey, on local infrastructure and rural connectivity on the A77 and A75. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it sees as the significance of developing local roads and enhancing rural connectivity, particularly in relation to the A77 and A75; considers that well-connected road networks play an essential role in fostering economic growth and rural development; emphasises the impact of what it sees as inadequate infrastructure on rural livelihoods; believes that the A77 and A75 are vital transportation routes connecting various regions along the west coast of Scotland, including the South Scotland region; notes the view that it is important to improve the condition, capacity, and safety features of the A77 and A75; believes that the development of local roads, such as the A77 and A75, is crucial in improving rural connectivity and access to essential services; notes the view that the Scottish Government should explore funding opportunities to support the development of local roads and rural connectivity, while recognising that such investments will, it believes, yield long-term benefits; further notes the view that MSPs should promote what it sees as the importance of rural connectivity and local road development, and believes that roads such as the A77 and A75 are critical roads for fostering regional growth, developing Scotland's rural communities, supporting tourism, and enhancing the overall wellbeing of the people that they serve.

17:48

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): I have brought the debate to the chamber in the hope that it will spur the Scottish National Party Government into action to improve the A77 and A75. The Government appears to have forgotten the importance of good local roads. It does not seem to be focused on improving critical infrastructure, and it does not put growing Scotland's economy at the top of its list of priorities. Too often, it neglects rural areas and places outside the central belt.

With regard to the A77 and A75, the SNP has been in power for almost 17 years but, in all that time, the Government has not been ambitious enough. It has never had the vision to rejuvenate the South Scotland economy by investing enough in the roads, and it has left the region behind in the process. It has not recognised that well-connected road networks play an essential role in fostering economic growth and rural development. It has never accepted the consequences of inadequate infrastructure for rural livelihoods. It has not realised that development of the A77 and A75 is

crucial in improving rural connectivity and access to essential services.

In January, the A77 action group wrote to the then Minister for Transport to sum up how local people are feeling. I could not agree more with what the group said. It wrote:

“as an area, we feel that we are the Forgotten, Ignored, Neglected, and Deprived corner of Scotland.”

Having lived in Ayrshire all my life, I feel that that is spot on. Today, therefore, I hope that we can find some cross-party consensus to finally change that. I hope that, today, the Parliament will make a commitment to improve the A77 and A75. Those roads need investment, and they need it now.

It is not only my Scottish Conservative colleagues who are making that point. This year, the East Ayrshire Council leader, Douglas Reid, said that Transport Scotland’s decision not to prioritise the Bellfield interchange for almost 20 years was “scandalous”. That is the verdict of an SNP councillor. My colleague Brian Whittle will mention that in his contribution.

I have been talking about the A77 since my maiden speech in the Parliament. The A77 connects the central belt to Northern Ireland, so improvements on that road will impact not only the south-west of Scotland but central belt businesses that send their products to Northern Ireland. That is why more central belt MSPs should be in the chamber today, calling for improvements. Every MSP should be shocked that it takes an average of 69 minutes to travel along a 43-mile stretch of road. That makes the A77 the slowest A-road in the country, with an average speed of just 37.7mph. We cannot, therefore, have any more deflections from the Government, which has dodged responsibility and shifted the blame.

There are so many potential benefits of improving both roads. It would increase safety and reduce the number of accidents, improve journey times and reduce carbon emissions. It would open up the beautiful south-west to more tourism, and it would create jobs and mean that our economy could grow more quickly. What incentive is there to start a business near the slowest A-road in the country? What incentive is there for people to move to the area when it takes so long to get to work?

Improving the A77 and A75 would be a game-changer for Ayrshire and the south of Scotland, but we need urgent action now in order to realise the benefits. We need more constructive work with the United Kingdom Government to speed up the feasibility study on the A75 bypassing of Springholm and Crocketford. We need to fast-track the improvements to both roads and look at the feasibility of fully dualling the A77.

Today, I was notified about essential structural waterproofing that will start tomorrow on the A77 at Burnfoot bridge. The work will last for seven days and will involve a full road closure over the weekend, which will impact about 4,000 vehicles a day. That will force heavy goods vehicles on to smaller B-roads, thereby increasing journey times, impacting businesses and putting pressure on the roads themselves. That would not be the case if the road was fully dualled.

We know that a better road would increase economic growth and improve our public services and connectivity, but it is about so much more than businesses and the economy; it is about saving lives. It is estimated that there is a casualty every three days on these roads. Michaela Yates lost her partner of 35 years, Tony Sheil, in a crash on the A75. Recently, she told the press:

“I don’t want any other family to go through what me and my daughters are still going through because of neglect towards the road.”

Tony left behind two daughters, Samantha-Jane and Natasha. They recently said:

“Our dad, our best friend died on the A75 that night after finishing work. He never got to say goodbye to us, and we never got to say goodbye to him. That will always hurt.”

They have also said that the road is “not fit for purpose”. Tony’s partner and his daughters are right. That is a heartbreaking example, but it is not the only one.

My colleague Finlay Carson is unable to be in the chamber today, and I wish him a speedy recovery. He has been raising the need for upgrades on the A75 for years, and he wanted to highlight today the fact that, only two weeks ago, two more fatalities were reported on that road. On Monday, there was another crash, which left three people in hospital. Tragically, there are hundreds of families in a similar position, having lost loved ones on the A75 and A77. The human cost of delays and inaction is terrible. It is leaving families suffering in pain that will never heal.

The Parliament and the Scottish Government cannot allow that to continue. For all the families who have lost loved ones and for everyone who drives on those roads every day, the Parliament and the Government must act now.

17:55

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank Sharon Dowe for bringing the debate to the chamber. I think that all of us, as MSPs who represent south-west Scotland, have either raised the issue in debates previously or asked the Scottish Government questions on the need for improvements to those main arterial routes, the A75 and the A77. The A75 is part of a 95-mile long

Euro route, which is fundamental to the UK's connectivity and our wider access to Europe.

Fundamentally, it is time that we see much-needed upgrades to improve safety and efficiency. I pay tribute to the A75 and A77 action groups. Their continued campaigning efforts cannot be overplayed. It is vital to note that there have been fatal accidents on the road, as Sharon Dowe said. That includes two very recent accidents on the A75 in as many months. We now have a wife and two daughters without a husband and a father, and, as a result of the other accident, near Annan, we have a community that is devastated by the loss of a friend. My thoughts and my condolences go to the families.

We have commitments from both Governments, but the focus now must be on transforming those commitments into action as quickly as possible. I made that clear at the recent south-west Scotland transport alliance summit in Stranraer, which was held on 29 January at the North West Castle hotel. The summit was attended by MSPs and by representatives from the ferry companies Stena Line and P&O and from Belfast Harbour. There were also national health service representatives there, as well as Dumfries and Galloway and South Ayrshire council leaders. There was a consensus from all those in attendance on the absolute need for road upgrades. I know that my colleague Elena Whitham, who has attended our joint meetings on the issue, agrees that there is a critical need for road improvements.

In 2022, the Scottish Government published its second strategic transport projects review, which states that the A75 and A77 will benefit from

“improving junctions, enhancing overtaking opportunities ... or climbing lanes ... where slow moving traffic leads to risky overtaking manoeuvres, and widening or realigning carriageways to alleviate ‘pinch points’”.

Those recommendations will bring the change for which constituents have long been calling. However, the issue now is funding. The Scottish Government continues to operate in a tight economic situation—[*Interruption.*] I will not take any interventions, because I have only four minutes.

The Scottish Government continues to operate in a tight economic situation, with a budget that is handed to us without the ability to commit to huge infrastructure spending. That means that it is necessary for the UK Government to provide funding to ensure that the upgrades progress. That was acknowledged in the final report of the UK Government-commissioned union connectivity review.

Since the publication of STPR2 and the “Union Connectivity Review: Final Report”, progress has been made. I welcome that the Scottish and UK

Governments have been working together, and I welcome collaborative engagement to explore the options for making funding available. The Scottish Government has secured £8 million from the UK Government for a feasibility study on creating bypasses for Springholm and Crockettford villages. Again, I ask the Cabinet Secretary for Transport to provide exact timescales for when the STPR2 commitments will be enacted.

In addition to the need for improvements for better safety and efficiency, I seek further clarity on the strong economic case that the central belt benefits from the connectivity to Northern Ireland. I have written to Transport Scotland to seek an update on figures and travelling patterns for cars and HGVs, so that we can show that other parts of Scotland benefit from A77 connectivity and that it is important for goods and services.

Just this week, my office has been in touch with Gist logistics, a major distribution hub in Motherwell that employs more than 2,500 people. Gist has stated how important the A77 is as part of its distribution network. The economic importance of both roads cannot be overplayed, and I ask the cabinet secretary for a commitment that the Scottish Government recognises that.

In conclusion, I ask the Government to do all that it can to get shovels in the ground on the A75 and A77 to deliver those much-needed improvements.

17:59

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I start by congratulating my colleague Sharon Dowe on bringing the debate to the chamber. I make it that every South Scotland MSP has now initiated a debate on this topic. As my colleague has said, Fin Carson is not particularly well, but he is well enough to have penned a few lines and, with your indulgence, Deputy Presiding Officer, I will read them out during my speech.

For as long as I have been in this place, the issue of the A75 and A77 upgrades has been debated, always with assurances from the Scottish Government. There is a long-standing petition with the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee that continues to press the Government to act. The reality of those routes is highlighted when we realise that 60 per cent of the goods going into and coming out of Ireland come through the port of Cairnryan. It is the third-biggest port in the UK, and it links Ireland to the south, to England, and north, to the central belt. That is under threat from the Dublin to Holyhead route. There is now a motorway between Belfast and Dublin, and there is dual carriageway from Holyhead, so the difference in the time that it takes to get goods south is now only 44 minutes. Ferry

operators at the conference that we attended told us that they will not now invest in new upgraded and bigger ferries directly because of the state of the infrastructure in the south-west.

The situation goes back to 2010, when Alex Salmond, in opening the port of Cairnryan following £240 million of investment, assured the ferry operators that the Scottish Government would invest in the A75 and the A77. In 2011 Alex Neil became Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, and he said that it was a disgrace that Labour had not upgraded those roads during its time in government.

One of the first meetings that I had when I came into the Parliament was in Dumfries, with Humza Yousaf and John Swinney, listening to more than 100 people in a room. They listened, and they took away the points that were made. Since then, we have had Derek Mackay, Michael Matheson and Jenny Gilruth. They have all listened, but none has acted. The reality is that, since 2010, only 0.04 per cent of the transport spend has been in the south-west.

My colleague Sharon Dowe mentioned the Bellfield interchange. I remember contacting Transport Scotland about it right at the start, and I highlighted the fact that traffic was queuing off the Bellfield interchange on to the M77. Transport Scotland agreed with me that having traffic queuing on the M77 was dangerous, but all that has been done is for a sign to be erected, saying "Queuing traffic ahead". More than 40 per cent of the vehicles that go into North Ayrshire go through the Bellfield interchange, so it is a really important interchange. For as long as I have been in here—and longer ago, as others have told me—members have been lobbying the Government to do something about the interchange, but nothing has happened. For all that time, those routes could and should have been improved. Now that the clamour over the A9 is taking over all the headlines, I fear that the south-west will once again be pushed to the side and ignored.

My colleague Finlay Carson, the MSP for Galloway and West Dumfries, cannot be here today, but he has been one of the driving forces in the campaign to have the A75 upgraded and essentially made fit for purpose for this day and age. Having lived in the shadow of the A75 for most of his life, he knows only too well the importance of improving the road safety record and of the reliability and resilience of the key arteries that serve the ports of Cairnryan. Granted, progress is now slowly being made, with the UK Government committing to providing £8 million towards a detailed study to identify options for the realignment of the A75 around Springholm and Crocketford. Along with Transport Scotland, it will consider the delivery of other targeted

improvements along the A75 to alleviate various pinch points, as well as targeting the notorious Haugh of Urr road end.

The growing urgency of the need for improvements cannot be emphasised enough. Only last week, two more fatalities were reported on the A75. This time, a 41-year-old woman who grew up in Wigtownshire lost her life, along with a 35-year-old van driver. That came after Finlay Carson had highlighted another tragedy in the chamber earlier this month, when he spoke about the death of Tony Sheil following a collision with an HGV in November 2023. Finlay recalled meeting Tony's widow, Michaela Yates, and their two daughters, Samantha-jane and Natasha, who have now launched a petition demanding that average speed cameras be introduced along the Euro route. We know that average speed cameras have been deployed on other dangerous roads such as the A77 and the A9 and they have brought immediate improvements to road safety.

I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Transport has already given a commitment to examine their introduction on the A75. I strongly urge her to ensure that that happens sooner rather than later, in order to avoid another family having their lives torn apart. The transport secretary has rightly said that

"Any tragedy ... is one tragedy too many".—[*Official Report*, 8 February 2024; c 58.]

Will she now deliver on that promise?

Talk is cheap, and the south-west is no longer the forgotten part of Scotland, but the ignored part. In order to halt the migration of people from their rural communities to urban Scotland, and to raise average earnings in the area, which are the lowest in Scotland, we need connectivity to encourage businesses and enterprise into the area. In turn, that can persuade people to stay. So far, however, that realisation seems to have fallen on deaf ears.

18:05

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Sharon Dowe for lodging her motion. This is not the first debate that we have had on the A75 and A77, and, to be frank, it will not be the last, because we know what the cabinet secretary's response will be today. There is currently no delivery plan from the Scottish Government, even for the modest and inadequate improvements that are proposed for both roads in STPR2. There is no timeline for the feasibility study on the A75, and the £8 million for the study has not been received from the UK Government. Not a single penny has been committed by either Government to delivering a single major improvement to either of the roads.

Last month, many members in the chamber attended the summit that was organised by the south-west Scotland transport alliance in Stranraer. There was anger among the ferry firms, businesses, the community, the council, the health board and politicians across parties at the utter lack of action from the Government. However, there was also a determination that we are not going to sit back and let that summit be another groundhog day. The case for making those crucial arteries safer, greener and better is clear, and that has never been more important.

I will read out some comments that Samantha-Jane Sheil, a constituent of mine, made to me recently. She said:

“On the 24th November my dad Tony was involved in a collision with an HGV on the A75. He was pronounced dead at the scene. He was just 3 minutes away from home. No daughters should carry their dad’s coffin at just 19 and 16. He shouldn’t have missed my 20th birthday in January. My dad didn’t deserve what happened to him. Just like everyone else who has died on this road”.

Every three days, there is a casualty or an injury on the A75 or A77. There have been 564 in just five years. Whether those involved are driving a car or a truck or riding a bike, too many lives are being lost, and many more will be lost unless we invest to make those roads safer.

As well as putting the safety case for improvements, we also need to nail the myth that investing in improving those roads would be bad for the environment. One haulier reported that its emission data shows that, on average, lorries on those roads emit two tonnes more CO₂ every day than they would on a dual carriageway. Does anyone really think there is anything green about 40-tonne wagons rattling past the front doors of homes in Crocketford or Springholm on the A75, or in Lendalfoot, Minishant, Kirkoswald, Turnberry, Girvan and Ballantrae on the A77? Those villages have not been bypassed on what are supposed to be key trunk roads and the route to Northern Ireland.

We also know that it is better for the environment to ship freight by sea than to do so by air, by having freight traffic from Scotland use Cairnryan rather than travelling further, but sometimes more quickly, to ports in the north of England. The fact that the A75 and the A77 are too slow and too unreliable is damaging not just to the south-west economy, but to Scotland’s economy as a whole.

The majority of the 400,000 freight vehicles and 1.75 million passengers per year who travel through Cairnryan come not from Ayrshire or Dumfries and Galloway, but from the central belt and the north of England. When the average speed on the A77 between Ayr and Cairnryan is just 37.7mph, and 44.9mph on the A75 between

Gretna and Cairnryan, that stifles our economy and holds back businesses across the country.

The Government’s current plan—or rather, the lack of one—is not good enough. Every day, those roads are becoming less safe, less green and less economically efficient. I finish with another quote from Tony’s daughter. She said:

“Our dad, our best friend died on the A75 ... We don’t want any other family to go through the pain we are going through”.

Sadly, however, that is happening to too many families.

When I last raised the issue in the Parliament, I asked the cabinet secretary to meet campaigners such as the A77 and A75 action groups. I hope that she will do so and will listen to why the Government’s current plans are simply not good enough for the communities that we represent.

18:10

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank Sharon Dowe for securing the debate. However, it is rather a shame that we need to have it, because, as Colin Smyth said—and I agree with him—we have had it before and, sadly, will probably have it again and again, because there has been a total lack of action to improve those roads.

Sharon Dowe started her speech by calling for good local roads. The A75 and A77 are local roads, but they are more than that—they are of national importance, as other speakers have said. I speak as a central belt MSP; Sharon Dowe called for central belt MSPs to take part in the debate. Those roads, given their importance and how they connect to Northern Ireland, are of national significance.

In my region, particularly in Lanarkshire, a number of haulage logistics companies, to which I have spoken, have vehicles that, usually, travel along the A77 to reach Ireland. As soon as anything goes wrong on that road, their deliveries are impacted. For example, if they are bringing goods from Ireland to Scotland and something goes wrong on the A77 or the A75, those goods do not get to market, and Scotland’s economy is affected.

Improving those roads is therefore vital, and we need an action plan from the Scottish Government. It is responsible for roads in Scotland, so it needs to come up with a plan and say when those roads will be improved.

I welcome the fact that the UK Government has offered money to fund a study relating to the A75. That is good, but it is not enough. We need a timetable of when things will happen, because that

is what the communities that are served by those roads need.

Road safety is a huge issue. There have been too many accidents and too many deaths on those roads. Sadly, that will continue until improvements are made. I say to Brian Whittle that that will continue on the A9, as well, until improvements are made on that road. I will not get into the game of trading off one road against another—as, I am sure, Mr Whittle was not doing—but key roads across Scotland require investment and are not getting it.

I again thank Sharon Dowey for securing the debate, but it should not be necessary, and I hope that we will not be here again. We need to hear today from the cabinet secretary about what she is going to do.

18:13

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): I express my sympathies in respect of anyone who has been killed or injured on our roads, and our thoughts are with the families and friends of those involved in recent incidents, including the serious accident that occurred on Monday on the A75 near Newton Stewart.

I have listened closely to the discussion, and I fully appreciate that members wish to see action on improvements to both the A75 and the A77. Investment in both roads is crucial for improving rural connectivity and access to essential services. That is reflected in recommendation 40 of STPR2.

I will set out the progress that the Government has made to date and what we plan to do. This financial year alone, we will deliver vital structural maintenance worth more than £3 million on the A75 and resurfacing works worth £1.4 million on the A77.

Since 2007, we have completed five major improvements on the A77, including, most recently, the £29 million Maybole bypass, which opened in January 2022. In their remarks, the Conservatives ignored that major project, and it is wrong to say that there has been a lack of action.

Brian Whittle: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: Let me continue.

The Government is entirely committed to improving safety and resilience on those routes. Since 2015, we have spent more than £85 million on the maintenance of the A75 and A77, in addition to other works. That is more than £170 million of road investment. I add that the 2024-25 budget includes a 31 per cent increase in the trunk road maintenance budget.

Earlier this year, on 5 February—the same day that the south-west Scotland transport alliance wrote to me—I raised the need for further discussion on improving connectivity with Northern Ireland, with Lord Davies of Gower at the transport interministerial group. As members know, the A75 and A77 are important connections in the flow of goods and people between key economic centres. The Northern Irish minister was not in attendance at the interministerial group meeting as he had just been appointed that day, but I requested that we discuss the matter at a future meeting, when he can attend.

The Scottish and UK Governments agree that investment is required on the A75—that is not disputed. I confirm that, in December, the Scottish Government secured a commitment from the UK Government for multiyear funding of £8 million to improve the A75. In the short term, that funding is essential in making demonstrable progress on the A75. It will cover the design, development and assessment of options for improvements to the A75, specifically around Crocketford and Springholm, up to the announcement of a preferred route. For a variety of statutory-driven reasons, such work can take a number of years.

Although funding has been confirmed, it has not yet been allocated or received. My officials are working with the UK Government on the matter, and only once that work has been completed will we be able to set a draft timetable. Nevertheless, we are taking every step necessary to have the work ready to commence in the next financial year. Work to prepare procurement documents to appoint a technical adviser has begun, and, once funding formalities are complete, we will immediately progress that.

Although the funding for the A75 is welcome, the fact remains that Scotland is facing—

Graham Simpson: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: I will, if it is very brief.

Graham Simpson: It must surely be possible for the cabinet secretary to set out a rough timescale, because that is what people need to know. They want to know when the work will actually start. When will that happen?

Fiona Hyslop: As he is the Conservative transport spokesperson, the member will know that there are steps that need to be taken, including going through regulatory and statutory processes, which might be subject to legal challenge and so on. As, I think, the member genuinely understands, it would be disingenuous for me to set out a timetable.

The UK Government has not inflation proofed its capital budget, which is forecast to result in a 9.8

per cent real-terms cut in our capital funding over the medium term. Therefore, we are having to make tough decisions on our infrastructure projects pipeline.

I will talk about the wider road safety concerns that have been raised. We are committed to achieving safer road travel for all road users in Scotland, now and in the future. Only this morning, I attended a road safety summit in Edinburgh, where I was clear that road safety remains an absolute priority for the Scottish Government. I am determined that we continue to make investments that support our road safety framework to 2030. That is why we have earmarked a record £36 million for road safety in the next Scottish budget.

As part of our commitments to casualty reduction, to reduce the risk of accidents and to manage traffic speeds, significant investment has been made on the A75 and A77 over recent years, and a route study will be carried out for the A75 in 2024-25 to investigate route-wide collisions and risk-reduction measures.

In addition, we are exploring potential safety enhancements on the A75 at both the Haugh of Urr and Twynholm junctions, with delivery planned in 2024-25, subject to funding. Partial signalisation is currently being designed for Cuckoo Bridge roundabout to address a recent history of accidents at that location. Construction is programmed for the next financial year.

On the A77, improvements were delivered at the A751 junction. Improvements are also being delivered in Girvan to support casualty reduction, speed management and active travel. Those will be completed before the end of the year. Similar schemes are planned for Kirkoswald and Ballantrae.

Further road safety investigations are planned between the Bellfield and Grassyards junctions and on sections of the A77 around the Holmston and Dutch House roundabouts.

One of the key technologies that we have for helping with road safety is safety cameras. Across Scotland, we deploy cameras through the Scottish safety camera programme, primarily where they have the greatest potential to reduce injury and collisions, and where there is evidence of both collisions and speeding.

A mobile safety camera enforcement strategy is in place along the length of the A75. It covers 17 locations, and safety camera resources are regularly deployed along the route to encourage good driver behaviours and compliance with the speed limit. The change in driver behaviour is reflected in the 73 per cent reduction in the total number of casualties on the route over the past three years, when compared with the three-year

period before the enforcement strategy was in place.

An average-speed camera system has been in operation on the A77 since 2005. It was upgraded in 2016 and extended in 2021 from Whitletts to Bankfield.

As with all safety camera sites across Scotland, the effectiveness of the enforcement strategies on both routes is assessed through the annual safety camera site selection exercise.

The Government will continue to invest in the A75 and A77, as it has done for many years. We have a firm plan for what we want to improve on both routes, which is set out in STPR2. However, our ambitions for investment are tempered by the reductions in our capital budgets.

We know all too well the devastation that road traffic accidents cause, and we continue to invest in the safe and efficient operation of both routes. I assure members that we are committed to improving the A75 and A77, as well as the wider transport network in south-west Scotland, so that the region can achieve its ambitions, as it so rightly deserves to do.

Meeting closed at 18:21.

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