

# **MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

**(GLASGOW)**

Thursday 25 May 2000

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## Scottish Parliament

Thursday 25 May 2000

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

### Race Relations

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Good morning. The first item of business is motion S1M-887 on the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill, with an amendment to that motion. This will be a short debate, and I hope that members will stick rigidly to the time limits. I call Jackie Baillie to move the motion.

09:30

**The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie):** I am pleased to open this debate on the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill on behalf of the Executive. This is an important opportunity to put on record the fact that establishing race equality and tackling racial discrimination are fundamental to the Executive's commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity for all. The proposed changes to the Race Relations Act 1976 that are being considered at Westminster reinforce and extend the Executive's remit to tackle discrimination and to promote race equality. By agreeing to the Executive's motion, this Parliament will send a strong signal of its commitment to race equality and the new framework.

The Executive firmly believes that no institution in Scotland can afford to ignore the findings of the Macpherson inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the evidence that proves that racism exists here in Scotland. That is why the Executive set up the race equality advisory forum at the end of last year. The forum's remit is to provide the Executive with advice on a strategy to address broad racial equality issues, to develop action plans to eradicate institutional racism, and to advise on better ways in which to consult people with ethnic minority backgrounds. Its members have been working extremely hard and will report formally to the Executive later this year.

The forum is also working alongside the steering group that is chaired by the Deputy First Minister, which was set up to oversee the implementation of the Executive's action plan in response to the Macpherson report. Together, their work will inform the broad range of activities in hand, to take forward the Executive's commitment to promoting race equality and to tackling institutional racism. I want to place on record the Executive's particular appreciation of the dedication and hard work of the

forum, the steering group and the Commission for Racial Equality. Their contribution is proving to be invaluable and, as ever, thought provoking.

We knew that it would not be easy to secure the deep-rooted change that is necessary to eradicate racism and discrimination. However, I am confident that, through the efforts of individuals such as the members of the forum and the steering group, we will continue to move in the right direction and that we will do so—and this is important—in closer partnership with communities.

Our efforts will depend not only on the few with whom we have been able to work in those groups; we are also seeking to develop the Executive's lines of contact with the full range of interests that are dedicated to tackling racism. Vital to that will be work to engage with grass-roots black and ethnic minority interests across Scotland. That is part of the development of the Executive's equality strategy and comes from the work programmes of the forum and the steering group.

I shall say why the Executive considers it appropriate for this Parliament to agree unequivocally to the principles embedded in the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill, the UK legislation that is the subject of today's debate. As I said, the bill makes changes to the Race Relations Act 1976. Members may wish to refer to the Executive memorandum, which provides a useful outline.

The bill's main purposes are: to extend the 1976 act in relation to discrimination and victimisation by public authorities; to place a statutory duty on specific public authorities to promote race equality; to make chief officers of police vicariously liable for acts of racial discrimination by police officers; and to amend an exemption under the 1976 act for acts done for the purpose of safeguarding national security, thus remedying a provision thought to be incompatible with the European convention on human rights.

The UK Government brought forward a number of amendments in committee at the House of Commons. They include a new general duty on specified public authorities to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are carried out with due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups. The wording of the new general duty largely reflects the wording in section 71 of the act that places a similar duty on local authorities only.

The amendments to the 1976 act provide the framework within which the new duty on public authorities to promote race equality will operate. The amendments set out the general duty on public authorities, give ministers the power to

make regulations imposing further specific duties to back up that general duty, provide for the CRE to issue codes of practice giving guidance to public authorities on how to fulfil those duties, and provide a compliance and enforcement mechanism giving the CRE the power to issue a compliance notice and, ultimately, apply for a court order.

The new general duty on public authorities to promote race equality will impact on devolved areas of responsibility. The powers in the new section 71(2), as inserted by clause 2 of the bill, fall within the terms of the exception to the equal opportunities reservation in the Scotland Act 1998. The Executive has therefore agreed that, in relation to certain Scottish public authorities, the bill will confer regulation-making powers on Scottish ministers in relation to that general duty. The new power to make regulations imposing specific duties on public authorities is to ensure the better performance by authorities of the new general duty to promote race equality. Much of the detail of how the general duty will operate in practice will depend on the content of the regulations.

**Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP):**

Will the minister clarify how far this Parliament is able to put duties on authorities to promote equal opportunities in race relations or any other areas, as there has been some confusion in the Education, Culture and Sport Committee about that?

**Jackie Baillie:** The Scotland Act 1998 is clear on the powers of the Scottish Parliament in relation to equality of opportunity. The mechanism by which legislation is undertaken is part of the UK-wide framework and that power rests with Westminster. We have the power to promote equal opportunities and to place duties on devolved areas to carry out that promotion. I hope that that gives the clarity that is sought.

There will be consultation between the UK Government and the Scottish Executive on what should go into the regulations. We will contribute to UK discussions and undertake similar discussions with Scottish interests such as the race equality advisory forum and community groups. We see that combined approach as the most effective way of ensuring that, in the implementation of the new arrangements, full account is taken of Scottish circumstances and interests. We will aim to get Scottish solutions tailored to our circumstances within a UK framework of principle, firmly in favour of a UK-wide commitment to delivering on race equality.

The amendments give the CRE the power to issue codes of practice to provide guidance to public authorities on carrying out their new duties. The UK ministers, in deciding whether to approve

or reject such codes, will be under a duty to consult Scottish ministers. They will also be required to consult Scottish ministers before the codes are enforced.

The Scottish Executive is keen to ensure that Scotland has a modern and effective framework within which its commitment to promoting race equality can operate. The provisions in the bill offer an early opportunity to reinforce and further promote race equality in Scotland and I therefore welcome this legislation.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees the principles contained in the provisions of the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill including the power to impose duties on public authorities so far as those provisions relate to matters within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or confer functions on the Scottish Ministers.

09:40

**Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP):**

I welcome the opportunity to consider the Race Relations Act 1976, as it is a matter that I have raised in Parliament in previous debates on equalities issues. The Scottish Parliament allows us to debate racism in greater depth in a forum that we have never had before. Across the chamber, there is recognition that we must be united in our determination to tackle racism in Scottish society.

Modern Scotland has a wide diversity of cultures, linguistic and racial, which serve as a source of enrichment in all aspects of our society. Although Scotland has a multicultural population, racial incidents are unfortunately far from uncommon; indeed, the number of them is increasing. The experience of racial harassment and violence is all too often a common experience for those who come from an ethnic minority background.

We have only to consider the statistics of racial incidents recorded by the police here in Scotland to see the nature of the difficulties. In 1988, there were 299 recorded racial incidents. By 1998-99, that figure had increased to 1,271. In the Strathclyde area alone over the past 10 years, the number of racial incidents has increased by two and a half times. Although there are a number of reasons why more racial incidents are being recorded—partly because people are now more likely to come forward to the police to make a complaint—it is undeniable that racism is on the increase in Scotland. This Parliament has much to do in dealing with that problem and we should be prepared to take whatever action is necessary to tackle that rising tide, whether through strategies or legislation.

The Race Relations Act 1976 has played an

important role in tackling racism in society. However, we should be mindful of the fact that the act has required amendment for some time. In 1985 and in 1992, the Commission for Racial Equality undertook reviews of the act and stated that it needed to be toughened up. Unfortunately, the Home Secretary at the time—a Conservative Home Secretary—chose to ignore those recommendations.

The CRE undertook another review in April 1998, when it came up with around 50 recommendations on how the act could be improved. Although the Home Secretary accepted a number of those recommendations, he delayed acting on them—mainly as a result of a lack of parliamentary time.

Concern has been expressed about the way in which Westminster has delayed improvement of the Race Relations Act 1976. However, we welcome the fact that the Queen's speech last November indicated that a bill would be brought forward to address the CRE's recommendations and the issues in the Macpherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

The SNP welcomes the amendments to the act, especially the removal of the exception of indirect discrimination. That will ensure that the act will apply in full to all functions of public authorities. That change will make it clear that public authorities must not discriminate directly or indirectly in carrying out their functions.

Although the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill, if passed, would make the Race Relations Act 1976 apply to public authorities, immigration services will still be excluded. In effect, discrimination on the grounds of nationality or ethnicity will not be unlawful when it is carried out with ministerial authorisation or by officials who are acting on immigration laws or rules. The SNP is not alone in being concerned about that. The CRE described the Government's decision to allow that to happen as giving higher priority to immigration control than to good race relations. The Scottish Refugee Council is also concerned. It has stated:

"No matter what, discrimination on grounds of national origin or ethnicity is unlawful."

I regret that the Government in Westminster has chosen to follow that route.

Section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976 has a particular effect on the situation in Scotland. It places a greater duty on public authorities to promote racial equality and it enables the Secretary of State for Scotland to make regulations that impose specific obligations. Although the general thrust of the section is to be welcomed, members may have serious reservations about the way in which the

Government proposes to define and impose duties on public authorities. Public authorities will be required only to "make arrangements". The bill makes no mention of whether a minimum level of arrangements that authorities must put in place will be specified.

Another concern about the section is that it merely enables ministers to make regulations. As ever, ministers will leave and others will take their place; some will choose to exercise that power to make regulations and others will not. The section should place a mandatory responsibility on the minister to act. That view is supported by the CRE, which is concerned that ministers might act purely on the basis of their own political will.

In conclusion, although the SNP welcomes the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill and the impact that it will have in Scotland, we have serious reservations about whether the changes are strong enough. In particular, we do not believe that the decision to exempt immigration services is acceptable.

The SNP believes that equal opportunities policy should be the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament. The Parliament, which has responsibility for tackling racism, is limited by its legislative powers in the matter. Most people accept that, although the problems of discrimination are the same for people throughout the world, particular circumstances in different countries make legislative needs different. The problem of discrimination in Scotland can best be addressed by Scotland's Parliament.

I move amendment S1M-887.1, to insert at end

"but regrets that discrimination on the grounds of nationality or ethnicity will not be unlawful where it is done by Ministerial authorisation or by officials acting within immigration laws or rules."

09:48

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** The Conservatives approve of the basic aims of the bill and we identify with Michael Matheson's comments on racial harmony, but we cannot—regrettably—support his amendment.

The aim of the bill is to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity. The Conservatives wish that people in other countries—especially in Africa and Asia—would adopt such objectives. I ask the minister why, if racial discrimination is already unlawful, we need to legislate to underline that fact. It is regrettable that we need to resort to legislation, particularly in relation to the upholders of the law.

The minister referred to the Scottish police, who are covered by schedule 2 to the bill. Bearing in mind the Macpherson report, I note that there is a

specific requirement in the bill

“to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.”

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)** *rose*—

**Phil Gallie:** I will give way to Alex Neil after I have finished this section of my speech.

My impression of the police in Scotland is that they are particularly conscious of their responsibilities in respect of racial harmony. If anything, I believe that there are some signs of positive discrimination in favour of minority groupings. I have evidence in two cases to suggest that, on race issues, senior police officers are treading on glass. There is a perception that, in areas of contention, they are erring on the side of ethnic minority interests. That is dangerous for society’s—

**Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)** *rose*—

**Phil Gallie:** No, I promised Alex Neil that I would give way to him, and I have time to take only one intervention.

**Alex Neil:** Phil Gallie asks why we need additional legislation, particularly in relation to law enforcers. I remind him that this issue has arisen because of the failure of law enforcers in London to enforce the existing race relations legislation. It is the view of the chief constable of Strathclyde police that additional legislation is required for the police force and other law enforcement organisations.

**Phil Gallie:** That leads me to my next point. I find it strange that Alex Neil should refer to the situation in London when the Scottish Parliament is discussing, in the main, the situation in Scotland and how this bill affects us.

I ask the minister what evidence there is in Scotland of the police or other public authorities acting in ways foreign to the objectives of the Race Relations Act 1976. We recognise that this is a UK bill and that we have little input into it. The objective today is to allow local input into the workings of the resultant act, by permitting the Scottish Executive to make regulations imposing specific duties on specified authorities. We support that, but on the presumption that any such regulations will be laid before the Parliament for scrutiny and approval. It is particularly important that codes of practice prepared by the CRE should be the subject of consultation with the Scottish Executive—just as, in the past, Scottish Office ministers in the UK Parliament were able to have an input into such codes. Given the considerable differences in community make-up across the UK, it may be that approval, rather than consultation, should be sought. I suspect that that would reflect pre-devolution practice.

Will the minister comment on the effect that the bill will have on immigration and asylum applications? What will be the implications for Scotland of perhaps lengthened appeal processes? I note that aspects of discrimination on immigration matters are excluded from the bill, but will the minister assure me that open immigration into the UK, which is currently being encouraged by Labour and SNP members—as I witnessed at a meeting just over a week ago organised by a racial equality group here in Glasgow—will not be a product of this legislation?

The national health service, local government and transport authorities are among the bodies covered by the bill. How will issues such as health treatment, the siting of local authority facilities and bus routes be affected by it? What cost implications would implementation of the bill have for the police, the national health service and local authorities in Scotland?

I note the contents of schedule 2, which would insert new schedule 1A into the 1976 act. Which

“Bodies and other persons subject to general statutory duty”

are excluded, apart from the Security Service, the Intelligence Service and Government Communications Headquarters? If there are none, why could not the schedule have been shortened to refer to “all bodies and other persons except those listed”? That would surely have created a catch-all provision that is in line with the spirit of the bill. I recognise that the minister cannot legislate for a change, but she could, as part of the internal Government consultations process, raise that issue. That, after all, is the role for which the minister is seeking approval today.

09:54

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** The Scottish Liberal Democrats support this extension to existing legislation. We are committed to the principle of equality for all, regardless of race, colour, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation or geographical location. Equality is one of the underpinning principles of this Parliament. Sadly, equality of treatment or opportunity is a distant aspiration for many of our citizens. Not everyone welcomes the increase in multiculturalism in Scotland as an enrichment; many see it as a threat. It is an unpalatable fact that some groups or individuals tap into those fears and exploit them for their own ends.

The battle against inequality and discrimination is a long-running one, which we will have to continue to fight, and fight vigorously, for years to come. It is a battle for hearts and minds, to raise awareness and change attitudes. That cannot be done by legislation alone, but a strong and



appropriate legislative framework that demonstrates unequivocally what is unacceptable—and that provides a means of redress through law against the unacceptable—is an essential foundation.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the extension of the Race Relations Act 1976 in relation to public authority functions that were not previously covered. The bill will bring within the scope of the Race Relations Act 1976: the police, for all aspects of criminal investigation, arrest, bail and detention; the Prison Service, for allocation, discipline, punishment and searching of visitors; the immigration authorities, for regulation of entry, detention, asylum decisions, prosecution and deportation; HM Customs and Excise in respect of search, seizure, collection of duty and prosecution, and the criminal justice system in respect of prosecution and probation; local authorities in respect of their enforcement powers over private landlords, street trading, environmental health and child protection; the Health and Safety Executive in respect of inspection and enforcement; and the Inland Revenue in respect of collection and enforcement. The extension of the act will also cover compulsory detention under the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984. I apologise for the lengthy list, but it shows the scope of the bill, and the need for it. I am sure that many people will be surprised that those areas were not previously covered by the Race Relations Act 1976.

The extension of the act is the response to recommendations from the Commission for Racial Equality and from the Stephen Lawrence inquiry report. Stephen Lawrence's death was a tragedy and an indictment of our society, but at least the shock and shame has been a catalyst for progress, even if that progress has been painfully slow. Although the bill covers many areas, the CRE was concerned that indirect discrimination was specifically excluded. The Government has indicated that it intends to extend the bill to cover that, and we strongly endorse that move.

In conclusion, the bill is to be welcomed; we support it and believe that it should apply in Scotland. It is to our shame that we need such legislation, but we do, and we need it to be right and comprehensive. We also need to shoulder the responsibility, collectively and as individuals, of opposing racism and all the other ugly manifestations of prejudice and intolerance wherever we encounter them.

**The Presiding Officer:** If members keep below the four-minute limit, I will be able to get everybody in.

09:58

**Kate MacLean (Dundee West) (Lab):** I welcome the fact that we are having this debate,

albeit it a short one, because although racial equality is a reserved area in one sense, the ethnic minority communities in Scotland, as well as the Parliament, have a clear interest in the impact of the legislation, particularly on practice in devolved areas.

The Home Secretary is to be congratulated to some extent on his willingness to listen to the critics of the bill. In particular, the CRE should be congratulated on suggesting changes that will make the Race Relations Act 1976 more effective.

It is rather depressing that we are having to strengthen the act. There has been no societal change that makes the act unnecessary. In fact, in some cases, matters have got worse. It is also depressing that people like Stephen Lawrence's family and others are forced to parade their grief in public before any changes are made in Parliament. However, we should not be negative, and we should make the most of the opportunity to ensure that the bill is a tribute to people such as the family of Stephen Lawrence.

If we are to ensure that the bill is effective, some issues will be critical. I would like the Executive to respond to some points; although I do not necessarily expect it to give all the answers today, I will write to the minister with all my concerns.

I have not done much homework on this, so it may be too late to suggest what I am about to suggest. I wondered whether there was still some leeway to ensure that the bill covers core elements of public duty. I am not sure whether that is possible, but it is a concern that regulations can be changed or watered down. I also wondered whether we could rely on the minister to ensure that certain core standards will form part of all regulations and that the Scottish public authorities will be leaders in race equality.

I have to agree with Phil Gallie—something that I do not like to do very often, because it is probably not good for my reputation. However, like Phil, I cannot really understand why there is not a fuller list in schedule 1A or why the list does not include everyone, so that people who wanted exemption had to apply for it. There are some glaring omissions—for example, local enterprise companies are not included, despite the amount of public money that they spend. Of course, it would be impossible to have an exhaustive list or to add new public bodies to it when they were formed, so it would be better to include everyone. The process of applying for exemptions should be transparent, so that we know why bodies have been exempted.

This is a one-hour debate, which does not give us long enough to go into some areas of concern. We have not heard reports on some of the initiatives that have been taken in the Parliament. I

hope that there will be an opportunity to do so very soon. The minister is coming to the Equal Opportunities Committee, so we will be able to ask about progress that has been made following the Stephen Lawrence report, but I wonder whether the Parliament will have the opportunity to discuss that progress.

As I said, I will write to the minister. I do not want to sound too negative, and I welcome the fact that we have been able to discuss this subject today. However, I worry that, years from now, following another review, we could still be standing here without anything having really changed. I hope that the minister can, either now or later, answer some of the points that I have made.

10:02

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome, as do my colleagues, the implementation of at least some of the recommendations of the Macpherson inquiry. As we have said before, equality is no more and no less than justice. That is why I support the SNP amendment. It is bad enough that we have immigration laws that are debated and approved at Westminster, which are clearly racist in conception. However, the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill compounds that by continuing the exemption of immigration officers from charges of racist behaviour.

It is positive that we now recognise that institutionalised racism exists in our country as well as in the rest of the United Kingdom. Scotland, as a growing-up country with its own Parliament, can now make some headway in addressing the problems of intolerance that face many of its people. However, it is perhaps because we are beginning to recognise Scotland's problems that the contradiction between the fine words here and the actions of the Westminster Government is becoming so stark.

**Phil Gallie:** Will the member say whether it is her party's policy to have open immigration into the United Kingdom and into Scotland? That seemed to be the impression given by Shona Robison in a public meeting just over a week ago.

**Linda Fabiani:** We are talking about different issues. Every country has to have immigration policies; in this debate, we are talking about whether it is acceptable for a public officer in our country not to be open to complaints of racist behaviour.

Jim Wallace told the first meeting of the Stephen Lawrence steering group that he wanted the group to deliver real, practical changes in the way in which criminal justice agencies addressed racial issues. Jackie Baillie has identified the need to target institutionalised racism as a priority.

Those are admirable sentiments, but compare them to the reality of how Scotland is obliged to behave by Jack Straw—possibly the most illiberal Home Secretary whom Tony Blair could have appointed. Compare the sentiments expressed in this Parliament with the Home Secretary's policies of forcible dispersion of asylum seekers; forcing asylum seekers to live below poverty level; using vouchers that make them a target for exploitation; and even the regrettable photo opportunity, with people being pulled out of the back of trucks.

It is little wonder that Bill Morris denounced Jack Straw for creating a climate of racial intolerance towards asylum seekers. Straw has created an environment in which the Tories can begin, once more, to play the race card. William Hague's recent rant about a massive influx of bogus asylum seekers hardly embodies the spirit of humanity, yet it could just as well have come from a Home Office press release. Neither Hague nor Straw will let facts get in the way of a good prejudice.

Less than 5 per cent of the world's refugees come to Europe, never mind the UK. In the European Union, the UK ranks ninth in the number of asylum seekers per head of population, nor are most asylum seekers bogus—nearly 60 per cent of applications are granted. Even a regime as intolerant as Jack Straw's has to admit that those cases are deserving. Among the others, there are many whose cases fail for procedural reasons.

When we consider the sentiments that were expressed when our Parliament was opened, it is surely gross hypocrisy to treat potential Scots in the way that we do. This Parliament should, as Jackie Baillie said, send a strong signal to Westminster that—reserved matter or not—that is not on.

We should also send a signal that discrimination is discrimination, no matter who discriminates. The police and immigration service officers have to deal with people in the most traumatic circumstances. The events surrounding the Stephen Lawrence case have created a climate in which it is no longer acceptable for the police to be exempt from race relations legislation.

We in the SNP argue that there is no excuse for the immigration service to be exempt from that legislation. I commend the SNP amendment.

10:06

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** I generally welcome the Executive's statement on the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill.

I will add one point to the debate. Racism is endemic in our society and it is pervasive; it is not safe to assume that it does not exist in any

institution.

It is probably rather dangerous to talk about a rising tide of racism at this point. We have endemic racism; in future, there will probably be more and more reporting of racist incidents as we become less tolerant of racism. Therefore, we must be careful about how we present the issue in Parliament, because we should encourage the reporting of racist incidents by ethnic minority groups. That is the way in which to address the problem in the future.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Alex Neil, who has two minutes.

10:08

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** I will make two points instead of three.

There is unanimity in the Parliament on the condemnation of racial prejudice in all its ugly formats.

Phil Gallie asked about the cost of implementing the legislation. My answer to that question is very simple: this is one instance in which the price cannot be too high. The cost of not implementing the additional measures and not eradicating any aspect of racial prejudice and hatred from our society is the cost that would be too high—not the cost of implementing the proposals.

**Phil Gallie** *rose*—

**Alex Neil:** I am sorry, but I have only two minutes.

We should not underestimate the problem in Scotland; it would be foolish of us to do so. About 45 per cent of all racially motivated incidents in Scotland relate to the Pakistani community. We need to take initiatives in a whole range of areas, to ensure that prejudice against the Pakistani community in particular is tackled as a matter of priority.

Other forms of racial prejudice are equally deplorable, no matter how numerically insignificant such cases are. It is my party's policy that any racial prejudice against anyone from south of the border is as abhorrent as any other form of racial prejudice, as indeed is any so-called anti-Jock prejudice south of the border. The issue transcends borders, not just between Scotland and England, but between this country—the UK—and every other country. Racism in any form is deplorable.

I have done a lot of work in Romania. The racism there against the 10 per cent of the population who are the real Romans—the gypsies—is as abhorrent as prejudice against the Pakistani community in Scotland. We should not just take initiatives in Scotland, the UK and Europe

but, because this is an international issue, adopt a global approach. As well as considering what the bill legislates against, I urge the Executive to produce a series of specific initiatives actively to promote racial harmony in Scotland and elsewhere.

10:10

**Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** This has been a good debate, in which many good points have been made in an impartial spirit on all sides. We have all picked up a good deal of information from those who have spoken.

To a large extent, the bill concerns public authorities. The experience of many people in ordinary life who deal with public authorities is that it can be like punching jelly—anyone who has to deal with the Department of Social Security, the housing department or the police will know the nature of the institutional scene. Therefore, it is important that we get the attitude as well as the legislation right. As Nora Radcliffe said, the legislation provides a strong background against which to change attitudes and conduct the battle for hearts and minds.

It is important that we do not fall into the trap of allowing the public authorities to talk politically correct language without the spirit coming through in action throughout organisations. There must be as much ownership of the process as possible by the groups that are affected. For example, there should be a reasonable balance of ethnic minorities in the police force.

I am pleased that the bill has been strengthened since it first went before Parliament. It is important to recognise the link between the internal and external aspects of the issue. The SNP amendment may or may not be correct—that is another matter—but it is right to identify the relationship between the question of asylum seekers and the question of internal race relations. What Michael Matheson said about that link was correct.

I have had experience of legal matters concerning the immigration department. One of the main issues was the difficulty in getting from that department answers to telephone calls, replies to letters, or any information about progress on cases. It is hugely important that the Government should introduce mechanisms to improve the situation.

The theme must be partnership. The Liberal Democrats would have liked equal opportunities to be within the scope of the Scottish Parliament. That is not how it worked out. Partnership—whatever the legal definition is—is the way forward. I am encouraged by what the minister said about that this morning.

This issue seems to return to the slogan of the French revolution—liberty, equality and fraternity. Those themes run through this debate and should inspire us to achieve better race relations in this country.

10:13

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** It is appropriate that you are in the chair, Presiding Officer, because you played a leading role against apartheid earlier in your political life. It is our determination and resolve that racism must have no place in the Scotland of today. The Scotland of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must learn to value the unique contribution that is made by each individual, regardless of background, race or creed.

We are fully committed to a fair and just society in which everyone, whatever their race or ethnic origin, has equal rights. We are therefore fully committed to eradicating racial discrimination. That is why we are glad to support the Commission for Racial Equality, as it works towards the elimination of discrimination and promotes equal opportunities and good relations among people of different racial groups. We believe that it is right that the new statutory duty should be imposed on specific public authorities and that Scottish ministers should be consulted on whether to approve any code of practice prepared by the CRE.

Nobody benefits from racial discrimination. It is manifestly harmful and unjust to those who suffer. I became most aware of it when a bad episode of bullying among the prisoners in Barlinnie prison was reported to me some 10 years ago. Since that time—indeed, almost immediately afterwards—new procedures have been put in place. Racial discrimination is also harmful to Scotland as a whole, because it diminishes all of us and prevents everyone from making their full contribution to the life and health of the nation. It is important to reinforce and value the important part that everybody has to play in our society, wherever they or their ancestors come from. The measures are sensible and just and should be supported.

10:15

**Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** The debate is welcome. There have been few occasions to discuss this crucial area of race relations. Like Kate MacLean, I hope that we will have the opportunity to debate the issues in more detail and, in particular, to examine the steering group's findings and the Macpherson report. The wishes of the CRE have been granted in part. It said:

"we hope that the Scottish Parliament will have a full debate on the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill otherwise what is the point of the Scottish Parliament".

That is absolutely correct.

We welcome the bill's intention to make it unlawful for a public authority to discriminate directly in carrying out any of its functions, which was a key recommendation of the Macpherson report. Phil Gallie alluded to police officers walking on glass. William Macpherson himself said that the Metropolitan police—I suppose that it could go for any police and right-wing critics—should stop whining and complaining about the report and get on with it. Phil Gallie should perhaps take that advice.

**Phil Gallie:** Will the member give way?

**Shona Robison:** I will move on, as I do not have much time.

The message is clear: public authorities must not discriminate directly or indirectly in carrying out any of their functions. The bill gives important new powers to the CRE, which have been covered.

The Executive memorandum states that the UK Government will consult the Executive during the coming months and that the Executive will contribute to the UK discussions. I hope that the Scottish Executive will be prepared to say that there are areas where the UK Government could have done better. Kate MacLean and Phil Gallie referred to the fact that the schedule 1A list does not include some public bodies. The main omission, however, is the exclusion of the immigration service from the provisions of the bill. The meeting that Phil Gallie and I were at, which was well attended and at which Phil had a hard time, was about the fact that immigration policy should not be based on racism and prejudice. I stand by those comments.

**Phil Gallie** *rose*—

**Shona Robison:** The CRE has described the Government's omission as giving a higher priority to immigration control than good race relations. The Scottish Refugee Council is equally concerned about the omission.

I welcome Jackie Baillie's clarification that the Parliament has the ability to place duties on public bodies, because there was confusion about that following Peter Peacock's evidence to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee.

We are all here today because racial incidents are far from uncommon in Scotland and their number is, as Michael Matheson said, increasing. We need action to deal with the situation across all areas of Scottish life. The bill is a start, which is to be welcomed, but unfortunately it does not go far enough. By passing the amendment, we can try to

persuade the UK Government to go a stage further by outlawing all discrimination in all public bodies, without exception.

I urge members to support Michael Matheson's amendment.

10:19

**The Minister for Communities (Ms Wendy Alexander):** I am pleased to be able to acknowledge the support from all sides for the cause of race equality. It should be an issue on which we can work together. As many members have acknowledged, Scotland's record on the matter is far from unblemished.

The new Scotland is entitled to strong leadership from its politicians on the issue. We all benefit from Scotland being truly inclusive and actively supportive of multiculturalism and diversity. We all benefit from ensuring that no one should suffer discrimination on the grounds of race, colour or ethnic origin. We all benefit when everyone can achieve their full potential.

The new legislative framework, to which we seek the Parliament's agreement, is an important step change in the interests of Scotland's black and ethnic minority communities, as well as of the whole of Scottish society. The Executive looks forward to working in partnership—as we were invited to do—with the UK Government, the CRE and indeed all interests, to ensure that the commitment to racial equality and tackling discrimination is more firmly rooted across Scottish life.

The strength of equality issues lies in a single UK framework. Equal rights should be indivisible. People have an equal right not to suffer discrimination wherever they live or work in these islands. People want to know their rights and to be able to exercise them. The Race Relations (Amendment) Bill brings the culture of the enforcement of equal opportunities much closer.

Across the UK, we now have a common framework of commitments on equality issues. The bill invites Scotland to take responsibility for delivering on those common commitments. Today's debate is about Scotland's legislators taking responsibility, here in Scotland, for delivering on those commitments. The bill is a step forward and an opportunity to reaffirm not a passive, ritualistic endorsement of the principles of equal opportunities, but a commitment to an active determination to promote race equality. The bill will allow Scottish ministers to make regulations imposing specific duties on certain public authorities.

Let me deal with some of the issues that have arisen in the debate. The SNP began with two

issues. The first was whether the order-making powers were robust enough. We believe that they are robust because they have to be tailored to the character of the body concerned. What is right for a large public body might not be right for a small body. The critical protection that people seek is the obligation on ministers to consult the CRE before making an order.

The second issue was immigration, to which I shall return. The decision to maintain a separate stream of legislation for immigration and asylum is essential if we are to retain the flexibility that we need to operate the policies that, during the recent Balkan conflict, allowed some Albanians and Kosovans to come to Britain. Phil Gallie asked whether the bill affects the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 in any way. It does not affect the act directly. However, he raised a point about the speed of processing; one of the aims of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 is quicker processing of claims through the new asylum support directorate, rather than by individual authorities.

Kate MacLean raised several salient points, such as the coverage of public bodies. I am happy to confirm that we are conscious that there are some gaps in the list of public bodies that are subject to the new duty to promote equal opportunities, and Scottish Executive officials are working with officials across the UK to ensure that the list is appropriate. Kate also asked whether there would be new core standards. There will be mandatory consultation with the CRE, to ensure that the duties imposed on each body are appropriate; the Parliament will scrutinise those new duties.

**Phil Gallie:** I have a question on the previous point, about the list of public bodies in new schedule 1A, inserted by schedule 2 to the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill. Given what the minister said in respect of Kate MacLean's point, does she not agree that it would be better to remove the list and to list the bodies to be excluded instead? That would make the list all-embracing, so answering that point.

**Ms Alexander:** No. It is important to have flexibility. The order-making power will allow new public bodies to be added as we go along, so it is not fixed in time and the coverage is as comprehensive as it needs to be.

I wish to reflect on the contributions in the debate that have dwelled on what is outwith the powers of the Parliament. This amending bill should not be just another constitutional battering ram. I say to the Opposition: yes, let us have scrutiny, but let us have scrutiny on the real merits of the issue, which is what the legislation can let the Parliament do, to advance the cause of racial equality in Scotland.

The debate should not be about what the Parliament cannot do. Every speech that is devoted to what the Parliament cannot do does not allow us to fulfil our role of scrutinising legislation in the way that the Equal Opportunities Committee has sought to do on the matter.

**Linda Fabiani:** Surely the Parliament has the power of protest.

**Ms Alexander:** The more important responsibility of the Parliament is to provide for Scotland proper legislation in the areas for which we take responsibility. Every time we try to turn the chamber into a forum for rhetoric about the separatist cause, we lose the opportunity for the diligence in scrutiny that is falling to the Parliament's committees.

The SNP said that it would make the Parliament work. It should do so in a meaningful sense. Let us not reduce every debate in the Parliament to one long whinge about the SNP's failure to bludgeon the rest of us into support for its constitutional settlement.

**Alex Neil:** Will the member give way?

**Michael Matheson:** Will the member give way?

**Ms Alexander:** Let me finish.

It has been an harmonious and helpful debate. On every point—

**Michael Matheson** *rose*—

**Ms Alexander:** Let me finish.

On every point that has been raised, dealing with the substance of the legislation, the Executive is keen to listen to and work with all parties in the chamber. The bill is about using the framework of UK legislation to create the appropriate framework in Scotland for the Parliament to act and for us to take responsibility. It allows us to tackle race equality in our society with a new determination. I welcome the support from all sides of the chamber for that.

**The Presiding Officer:** I congratulate all who took part in the debate on sticking so rigidly to the time limit. It was a short debate and we have finished three minutes early, which means that, if Mr Finnie is ready to start ahead of time, we can add three minutes to the rural affairs debate.

## “Rural Scotland: A New Approach”

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-896, in the name of Ross Finnie, on “Rural Scotland: A New Approach”, and two amendments to that motion. I call Ross Finnie to speak to and move his motion.

I ask all those who would like to take part in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now, so that we can organise the list of speakers.

10:28

**The Minister for Rural Affairs (Ross Finnie):** I welcome the opportunity to have this debate, so that the Parliament can demonstrate the importance of rural Scotland to Scotland as a whole and so that I may highlight what the Executive is doing to give rural issues the priority that they deserve.

It is a year since we gave a commitment in “Partnership for Scotland” to

“work to support and enhance rural life, rural communities and the rural economy.”

That was a serious promise and one that we are working to deliver. At the outset, we began by creating a rural affairs department and a Minister for Rural Affairs. We recognised that, for our commitment to be achieved, we needed to move from the traditional departmental approach to policy making to a more cross-cutting style of government. That is why we established the ministerial committee on rural development, which includes ministers from across all the Executive's policy fields.

Although it is still early days, I believe that we have started to address the issues that matter to rural Scots, and to ensure that rural issues feature much more prominently on policy agendas right across the Executive.

On Monday, I published “Rural Scotland: A New Approach” to highlight how the Executive is taking a different approach with the aim of delivering a better future for rural Scotland. We are determined to move away from the predominantly urban view of rural Scotland as being about pretty places that have problems and are in decline. Although rural Scotland faces many challenges such as the difficulties in the agriculture industry—there is no question about that—it also has a great many assets that should be developed and valued.

Our approach is based on a recognition that rural Scotland covers about 89 per cent of our landmass and comprises about 30 per cent of our

population and is therefore an important and integral part of the whole of Scotland. We want to value rural Scotland, and see its distinctiveness as an asset. Furthermore, we want to ensure that our policies and activities meet the needs and aspirations of rural people. In short, we in the Scottish Executive want to put rural Scotland at the heart of Scotland's future.

"Rural Scotland: A New Approach" is very much about looking to the future, which is not to say that there is no need to deal with short-term issues as they arise. However, we are determined to move beyond that and provide a framework for a longer-term direction.

I believe that we cannot take this longer-term view without having a vision for the kind of rural Scotland that we are aspiring to achieve. That is why we have set out at the start of the document a broad schematic of how to develop such a vision. The vision will underpin the development of policies and priorities that meet the needs of rural Scotland, and are designed to suit rural circumstances.

We hope that the vision that we have set out in the document will be shared by everyone who cares about rural Scotland, particularly those living and working in our rural areas. As the document makes clear, we want to create a rural Scotland that is

"integral to Scotland's success, dynamic in harnessing its traditional strengths, and with an appetite for change".

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**Ross Finnie:** I will conclude the vision, and then I will give way.

Secondly, we want a rural Scotland that provides

"opportunity for our young people—so they don't have to leave to get on".

Thirdly, a rural Scotland should offer

"a high quality of life to all its citizens, with access to services".

Finally, we want a rural Scotland that sustains and makes

"the most of its natural and cultural heritage".

**Fergus Ewing:** I am sure that we all subscribe to the general aims and principles that the minister has set out as demonstrably desirable. Does he accept that the greatest threat to Scotland's rural economy is the fact that we have the highest fuel costs and fuel tax in the world? Will he support or oppose the Liberal Democrat policy, announced by Charles Kennedy on 16 March, to increase fuel tax by 5p a litre?

**Ross Finnie:** It is always rather disappointing

that the—[MEMBERS: "Oh."] No, it is always disappointing when, at the point in any speech in this chamber where we try to acknowledge difficulties but also to give some vision for the way forward, other members say that they do not want visions and want only to discuss specific problems. At the start of my speech, I acknowledged that there are very serious difficulties in rural Scotland, of which transport costs are one. However, in this debate I am trying to set out a vision and a framework to find solutions to issues across the rural agenda. I am aware that our vision is ambitious, and cannot easily be delivered by the Executive alone.

We have to work in partnership with those in rural Scotland. The Executive must have a vision of where it is going so that it can prioritise its policies in a sensible way. We must bear in mind chiefly that rural Scotland is diverse. A solution that suits Caithness and Sutherland might not suit the needs in Wigtown. As a result, it is difficult to apply some policies across rural areas as a whole. We have to adopt a new approach and work with others to find ways of examining the issue and develop solutions that are appropriate for each rural area.

"Rural Scotland: A New Approach" demonstrates how we have started—only started—to pull together what the Executive is doing to measure up to the aims that we have set. That process has enabled us to take stock and assess where we are already delivering policies as well as identifying some failures and gaps in policy development.

The document focuses on the Executive's activities through some of the examples of good practice that exist. We should not run down rural Scotland: there are examples of good practice throughout rural Scotland and one of the jobs of the Executive is to disseminate that information across Scotland to ensure that communities benefit from things that are happening elsewhere.

**Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** The minister said that we should not run down rural Scotland. However, in Tuesday's *Daily Mail*, he is quoted as saying that it is not his job to "prop up dying communities". Why did he say that? What is his definition of a dying community?

**Ross Finnie:** Dear, dear, dear. I wish that Richard Lochhead would read the *Daily Mail* more often. If he did, he would know that that was a misquote from an address that I gave to the rural branch of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors at least 12 weeks ago.

Anyone who was present at that meeting will be able to tell Richard Lochhead that the thrust of my remarks was to express support for rural communities. What was taken out of context was a

criticism that I made of the way in which the announcement of the new crofting community was handled in the press, which treated it as yet another example of rural Scotland's being a subsidy junkie. I remarked that there was more to the exercise than propping up communities and that we wanted to develop their strengths.

I regret that my remark was taken out of context. I have talked to the *Daily Mail* about that but, as Richard Lochhead will know, the press is not particularly interested in things like that. My remark does not detract from my commitment to rural Scotland.

The document acknowledges that there are two specific areas on which we have to do some work. The first relates to the provision of public and private services in rural areas. As many members who represent rural areas will be aware, the availability of services locally is often a key indicator of the health and well-being of rural communities. The closure of a bank, a shop or a post office can often be seen as a major threat to that community's future. However, service providers often find that commercial pressures make it difficult for them to continue to provide a service.

I recognise that this is a tricky issue with no single or easy solution. However, we have seen examples of a different kind of development. The Executive can play a role in bringing communities and service providers together to explore innovative and imaginative ways of providing services in rural areas. To that end, we are collaborating with the Scottish national rural partnership to examine innovative ways of delivering services in rural areas and to find out if there are perceived or real barriers that prevent such innovation occurring elsewhere. We want to learn lessons from examples and build on those experiences.

I have asked the bodies which make up the Scottish national rural partnership—the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the enterprise bodies, Scottish Homes, Scottish Natural Heritage and the voluntary sector, amongst others—to oversee this work and report back to ministers by the end of November.

The other key issue is rural poverty, which is not understood well outside the rural communities. I am conscious that we need to develop a better understanding of its characteristics, to ensure that the policy instruments and actions aimed at tackling poverty are suited to rural areas and are having the intended effect, and to determine whether further action is needed.

Some useful work has been carried out recently to improve our understanding of rural poverty and disadvantage. However, it is not enough. We

therefore propose to establish a small group to undertake that work, the membership of which will be announced shortly. It will include representatives from local authorities, enterprise bodies and the local communities, who have direct experience of rural poverty. Our aim is to push rural poverty higher up the agenda, as the statistics that are available are woefully inadequate and are impeding the implementation of crucial policies in our rural communities.

Those are just two examples of how our new approach is leading us to recognise where we need to work with others and build on existing expertise to ensure that we fully understand the problems that face rural Scotland and the way in which they can best be tackled. The publication of "Rural Scotland: A New Approach" is intended as the beginning of that process; by no means is it intended as the last word. To make a lasting difference to the lives of people in rural areas, we need ideas, commitment and a willingness to change.

The Executive can take the lead, but the process will require the commitment of others. I look forward to working with colleagues throughout the Parliament in advancing this new approach, building on the strengths of our rural communities and recognising their potential as we develop a rural agenda that is positive and proactive, rather than negative and reactive.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication by the Scottish Executive of the document *Rural Scotland: A New Approach*; notes the progress which the Executive has already made in placing rural Scots in the mainstream of its policies and activities, and endorses the vision for rural Scotland presented in the document and the approach which will be taken, working together with others, to put and keep rural Scotland at the heart of Scotland's future.

10:41

**Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP):** I welcome the principle of publishing a document that deals with Scotland's rural communities. Not before time, rural Scotland is receiving more focused attention than it has received in the past. All members welcome the setting up of a rural affairs department as a first step towards co-ordinating Government action for rural Scotland.

However, all members would recognise—and this is acknowledged in the document—that the setting up of the rural affairs department will not in itself address the many problems that rural Scotland faces or exploit the many opportunities that exist in those areas. The overwhelming bulk of the department's budget is allocated to traditional agriculture and fishery, and a large proportion of that money is totally controlled by



European Union regulations, with no scope for ministerial involvement.

We live in an age in which presentation is all, or at least considerably more important than substance. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the various documents, white papers and green papers that have been issued by this Government and the one at Westminster over the past few years. Those booklets are intended to grace our coffee tables; they are triumphs of the designer's art. It requires a degree of concentration to discover that the quality and substance of their content does not always match the quality of their presentation.

If we open the document that the minister has introduced—and I realise that that is not the intended purpose of books on coffee tables—I think that we will be disappointed that the contents of today's offering do not live up to the promise of its title and introduction. It is clear that the brief that was issued to the civil servants who prepared the document was to scour rural Scotland to find out everything that is being done, or has been done, by every organ of government, quango and group that receives any money from the Government, to write down all the good bits—noting a few particularly attractive success stories, to be highlighted with illustrations—and to put the resulting mishmash in an attractive folder called "Rural Scotland: A New Approach". I am slightly puzzled as to why a document, much of which is about what has already been done or announced, merits the title "A New Approach".

**Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):** Will Mr Morgan accept that the whole point of the new approach and what has been lacking in the past is an integrated, holistic approach to policy in rural Scotland?

**Alasdair Morgan:** I agree, but I do not think that these 70 pages give us that. That is the problem.

One small example of how to present a situation to its best advantage can be seen on page 40 where, in a paragraph on water services, we learn that £1,800 million will be invested over the next three years, which will

"improve drinking water standards . . . particularly in the Highlands and Islands."

Good as far as it goes, but an element of balance, a slight counterpoint to the euphoria, might have been introduced by mentioning that water charges in the north of Scotland have gone up by 111 per cent since the general election.

Even leaving aside the glossy presentation, assembling a series of disparate facts in one document is not in itself evidence of a co-ordinated approach. Ministers will need to offer more than this document to convince us that that

is the case.

The Executive's ability to co-ordinate policy on rural areas is severely hampered by only being able to operate within the context and powers of the devolved Parliament. The economy and other aspects of rural life are influenced by decisions taken at Westminster as well as by the decisions of the Executive. It is difficult to see how, even with the Executive's best intentions, we can achieve the necessary co-ordination with the Government at Westminster, especially when the Chancellor of the Exchequer's economic policy is not influenced by sectoral considerations, whether of manufacturing, agricultural industry or the wider rural economy.

In the document the Executive says:

"The Executive will work with the UK Government to ensure that the distinctive needs of rural Scotland are reflected in decisions on motoring fuel taxation and other reserved matters."

I would be interested to hear how much success the Executive thinks it has had on that. I make no apology for mentioning fuel costs again because, in the rural affairs meetings we have had over the past month or so throughout Scotland, that is the biggest single topic raised by people at every single meeting.

As a result of the on-going legacy of the previous Government, about which we are supposed to have developed amnesia, exacerbated by the first three years in office of the current Labour Government, the price of fuel in rural Scotland, as has been said many times in this Parliament and again this morning, is among the highest in Europe.

**Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** I would like to take the opportunity to put the record straight after Fergus Ewing's intervention. The Scottish Liberal Democrat MPs at Westminster voted against those rises, whether imposed by Labour or Conservative Administrations. The SLD policy in Scotland is to differentiate urban from rural taxation for transport.

**Alasdair Morgan:** I can understand that Mr Rumbles is anxious to cover up the splits between the Liberal Democrat party here and at Westminster.

We are meant, apparently, to be obsequiously grateful that the chancellor, in his most recent budget, only put up fuel duty by the rate of inflation. If something is already far too expensive, putting it up by the rate of inflation means that it remains far too expensive. That would even be the case if the chancellor had used the real rate of inflation instead of the higher measure he used when he increased duty.

The document also mentions the laudable aim of switching freight from road to rail. Here again the Government is over-egging the custard.

"Freight facilities grants are enabling the removal of various significant freight flows from rural roads."

Due to the lack of railways, it would be a distinctively imaginative scheme that would shift freight from road to rail in Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, or in the Borders or many other parts of rural Scotland. There is also a reference to an increase in road maintenance budgets. That is essential, given the backlog of neglect, but it is no substitute for major investment in new roads.

**Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** Would Mr Morgan accept that there has been a considerable movement of freight from road to rail in the northern Highlands and that that is a success story for the Executive?

**Alasdair Morgan:** As I said before, it would be difficult in 70 pages not to get something right. I quite gladly acknowledge that.

The document highlights, quite rightly, the potential importance of information and communications technology for rural industry. That is an area in which, particularly for small businesses, rural areas can compete on a level playing field with their urban counterparts. It also acknowledges that we need to develop, maintain and continue to improve the infrastructure so that rural areas can keep up.

Several members have asked over the past few months just precisely what the Government will do to ensure that rural telecommunications infrastructure continues to improve. The Minister for Finance, in response to a recent oral question, seemed to indicate that it was up to the telecoms companies to provide that infrastructure. There is no legislative imperative for them to do so. They are under no legal obligation to act as a common carrier everywhere in Scotland. Although the Administration can quite happily point to previous partnerships, notably with British Telecommunications in the Highlands, there is no indication of how continuous improvements in infrastructure will be achieved.

Let me use a constituency point to illustrate the problems of co-ordinating between departments. I refer to one of the good-news illustrations—sorry, the case studies—in the document: the Scottish national book town in Wigtown, which is having its third book town fair this coming Saturday and Sunday. That is a success story, but its continued success is not guaranteed unless it gets the number of visitors that it requires.

In that context, I have raised with ministers the problem of getting signage from the national motorway network to Scotland's national book

town. If the co-ordination that the minister seeks to achieve in this document is to be a reality, we must have signage from the national motorway network to one of the success stories for it to remain a success story.

No one will argue that the vision and aims set out in the document cannot be pursued. However, I am sceptical as to whether a ministerial committee and yet another task force will be able to cut across departmental boundaries sufficiently to overcome old prejudices and achieve those aims. I am certain that they will not be fully achieved until this Parliament has full control over Scotland's resources.

I move amendment S1M-896.2, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"notes the publication by the Scottish Executive of *Rural Scotland: A New Approach*; recognises the need to place rural Scots in the mainstream of its policies and activities, but regrets that the retention of many powers at Westminster undermines the ability of the Scottish Executive to be fully effective in dealing with the affairs of rural Scotland."

10:52

**Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):** I begin by drawing the attention of the Parliament to my entry in the "Register of Members' Interests", where I have declared that I am a farmer and a landowner.

I welcome the publication of "Rural Scotland: A New Approach". At the risk of sounding a little sarcastic, if we judge the priorities of the Executive by the thickness and glossiness of its documents, rural Scotland has little to worry about, as this document extends to 72 very shiny pages, putting it right up there with the top priorities compared with other glossy brochures that we have seen recently.

As I look through the pages, I see that it is a genuine attempt to put rural Scotland in perspective, to take a holistic view, to try to understand better why things have gone desperately wrong and to seek ways to improve the lot of those who are sliding into Scotland's rural poverty trap. However, I have to say that it also bears a striking resemblance to what the Executive has been saying for a whole year now.

Worse than that, its roots can be traced back still further. I have a copy of a speech made by Lord Sewel to the rural forum annual general meeting in Oban on 31 October 1997, in which it is easy to recognise the Executive policy of today. He said:

"Today, I want to signal a new approach to rural development policy in Scotland, one based on sustainable development, and one which places the rural citizen at the heart of the process. Only by involving and empowering local communities can genuine, lasting, sustainable development for rural Scotland be achieved."

**Alasdair Morgan:** Does Alex Johnstone agree that that speech might indicate that, despite the fact that ministers change, the speech writers remain the same?

**Alex Johnstone:** Alasdair Morgan might say that, but I could not possibly comment.

Reading the text of the speech, I must confess that, like his successor, Lord Sewel knew what problems face rural Scotland, but perhaps he also thought that he knew how to solve them. Two and a half years later, the same ideas are starting to sound a bit like rhetoric or a mantra to be chanted when the truth becomes too much to bear.

What is the truth? If my answer sounds like repetition, it will be for the same reasons that other speakers repeat things. The truth is that rural Scotland's precarious economic structure—which has, none the less, proved to be sustainable for generations of rural Scots—is under attack from all sides.

The first attack is through taxation. Since 1997, the Labour Government has cut income tax. That is a sound policy and one for which I am prepared to commend the Government, but it does little to help anybody in rural Scotland, where wages are low and where businesses have been squeezed dry. If rural businesses must pay income tax, profit is a prerequisite.

The second attack is through fuel tax. Members know that a car is a necessity in large parts of Scotland. Although many of us believe that public transport should be improved, there are places in Scotland where that will never be a practical solution. On that, I will divert slightly to mention that we will have a debate on the Borders rail link one week from today.

**Mr Stone:** I thank the member from the bottom of my heart for giving way.

I have heard Alex Johnstone's comments on taxation. Do they mean that he is distancing himself from John Major's Government?

**Alex Johnstone:** If Mr Stone will tolerate me for a moment longer, he will see that I am, effectively, distancing the minister from the current Westminster Government. The plot thickens.

We must never forget that fuel taxation goes far beyond the cost of running a car. The cost of fuel to the road haulage industry is a cost to every industry in rural Scotland, including, as mentioned in the document, shops and post offices. The cost of hauling raw materials to the north and north-east is bad enough, but the cost of getting them to the Highlands and Islands is worse. The cost of hauling products out of those areas is also exaggerated by the tax. Every penny that is added to the cost of a litre of diesel is another nail in the coffin of the rural economy.

Another attack comes through the increases in council tax, which brings me to another point. There has been systematic erosion of the support that the Executive gives to rural local authorities. As resources are concentrated on what the Executive sees as priorities, the continuously escalating costs of providing the most basic services in rural Scotland remain unacknowledged.

**Mr Rumbles:** Alex Johnstone's speech has been entirely negative so far. He has not made a single positive contribution. Is there anything in the document that he welcomes? While I am on my feet, will Alex Johnstone remind everybody who it was that introduced the fuel duty escalator and who had the opportunity to remove it, but did not?

**Alex Johnstone:** I remind Mr Rumbles that I welcomed the principle of the document in my opening remarks.

The resources that the Government is currently failing to concentrate in rural areas have resulted in the loss of schools, police provision, road maintenance and even, in Aberdeenshire, public toilets. Worst of all is the damage that is being done to the rural economy by the erosion of our primary industries.

**Fergus Ewing:** I ask the member to give way—although I am being prompted to do so by the Liberals.

**Alex Johnstone:** I have already given way to a significant extent and am in danger of running out of time.

The main concern that I want to express before I end is about rural primary industries, although I must say a few positive words about the Minister for Rural Affairs, Ross Finnie, and his deputy, John Home Robertson. Anyone who is in an industry that is dependent on farming, crofting, fishing or forestry for its living must acknowledge that the level of financial support that they have provided has remained high.

I do not blame them for the catastrophic erosion of our rural primary industries. That I blame on the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The failure of the European single currency experiment has led to Scotland's rural primary industries being unable to compete with their EU rivals. The failure of the chancellor to act to protect them is scandalous. In the light of the enormous benefit that he has reaped from the Fontainebleau agreement, his failure to provide full agrimonetary compensation to our farming industry is a breach of contract of epic proportions.

**Fergus Ewing:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Johnstone:** Unfortunately, no.

That is where "Rural Scotland: A New Approach"

falls short. The Conservative party has always believed that the primary rural industries of farming and crofting, fishing and forestry are the bedrock on which our rural economy must be built. Since prehistory, and until well within living memory, those industries have sustained a vibrant and diverse rural economy.

In this document, I see a series of ideas, some better than others, relating to the things that the Minister for Rural Affairs can do—and, by omission, the things that he cannot. I call on the minister to acknowledge that this document alone cannot cure the ills of rural Scotland, and to accept that the recovery of the rural primary industries is a prerequisite for a healthy rural economy.

**Ross Finnie:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Johnstone:** I cannot take an intervention, as I am about to close.

I call on the minister to ensure that the financial aspects of that recovery are dealt with directly by the inclusion of the Minister for Finance, Jack McConnell, in the ministerial team on rural development, and to redouble his efforts—with my support—to secure fair treatment from the UK chancellor, as a way of mitigating the worst effects of the euro as it limps off into a corner to die. There is much in this document that I can support, but I must protest at what it fails to include.

I move amendment S1M-896.1, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“notes the publication by the Scottish Executive of the document *Rural Scotland: A New Approach*; further notes the lack of progress which the Executive has made in placing rural Scots in the mainstream of its policies and activities, and calls upon the Executive to acknowledge that Scotland’s rural economy was in the past, and must continue to be in the future, based on its primary industries.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The debate is now open. Speeches are limited to four minutes plus interventions.

11:01

**Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD):** I am delighted that we have decided to spend some time this morning debating the issues that affect rural Scotland. I am pleased that the document the minister has produced has exercised the minds of many members over the past week. I am sure that it has been welcomed by many people in rural Scotland.

I claim some credit for the debate, because it was the Liberal Democrats’ involvement in rural Scotland that enabled us to bring influence to bear on the Executive and to secure its support for the steps that are now being taken. We have considerable problems in rural Scotland. Much has

been done and over the past year great efforts have been made. Although the effect of those measures may not be immediate, I am sure that in the long term they will have the results that everyone hopes for.

One of the main planks of the rural economy of Scotland is the tourism industry. Much more needs to be done to support it. I hope that in the months and years ahead the Executive will support the industry in larger measure.

As we have heard, aquaculture has had its problems, which have had a serious effect on rural Scotland, as 6,500 jobs are associated directly or indirectly with the industry, many in very remote parts of the country. I hope that aquaculture’s problems with various bugs and diseases have been addressed and overcome. I am thinking particularly of the problems the shellfish industry faced last year, which continue. Algal bloom has caused devastation for scallop farmers. The fishing ban remains in force in some parts. More should be done to address the problem, because we are now arriving at the time of year when the algal bloom will develop again, and there may be another ban on scallop fishing.

The other activity that has been brought to my attention over the past few weeks is that of the dairy industry. We have seen in island communities the problems that arise out of the closure of some of the dairy industry and of the creamery in Islay. I have spoken to colleagues and dairy producers in Highland who are most distressed about predation by other dairy companies, which are almost determined to have a monopoly by squeezing those small producers out of business.

**Fergus Ewing:** Does John Munro agree that the recent permission by John Reid to allow his face to be shown on the side of milk cartons of Wiseman Dairies is seen in the Highlands, where some companies are possibly facing difficulties, as a singularly inappropriate and ill-advised move?

**Mr Munro:** Fergus Ewing is well aware of the situation that I referred to. I hope that the Scottish Executive will take steps to ensure that predation is arrested before we have more havoc and devastation.

The thought for today is the threatened strike by Caledonian MacBrayne, which will affect huge areas of the west Highlands. Island communities will be cut off for four days. Can members imagine what would happen if that were to happen in Edinburgh or Glasgow? If there were a blockade for four days, there would be anarchy and civil war on the streets, yet little is being done to address the situation.

I need not point out that the Scottish Executive is responsible for the Caledonian MacBrayne

empire. I hope that the Executive will bring its influence to bear on the meeting that is taking place this morning in Oban to try to resolve the situation, so that the strike can be averted to the benefit of the communities that depend, on a daily basis, on the services of the Caledonian MacBrayne empire.

11:07

**Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP):**

I say to the minister that the real test lies not in declarations of intent or national initiatives, but in the experience of local people. The decline in the primary sector and its impact on downstream activities, public expenditure constraints, high unit costs, rural fuel costs, the withdrawal of basic services—with consequent redundancies among local authority staff—and inevitable population loss, form a downward spiral that shows no sign of slowing down.

The Executive will be judged on how well—or otherwise—it delivers for rural Scotland, particularly those parts that are experiencing rural poverty. With 20 per cent of rural households on an income of less than £108 a week, and with figures from earlier this year showing a further 22 per cent drop in farm incomes, rural poverty is an issue that needs to be addressed.

The Rural Affairs Committee was advised this week that rural policy responses need to be more subtle. I want to address one area in which that could usefully be achieved. We urgently need to develop systems for the identification and measurement of rural deprivation. That is vital information in ensuring equitable funding and effective targeting of scarce resources. I am pleased that rural poverty gets a wee mention on page 37 of "Rural Scotland" and that the minister elaborated on the issue in his remarks, but this issue is not new. We have known for a long time that measures are needed.

I wish to underline the importance of making progress quickly, because current measures are totally inappropriate for rural settings. For example, high levels of car ownership in a rural area serve to indicate only the lack of public transport, not wealth. Low levels of registered unemployment mask the fact that much work is seasonal or short-term and that young people have to migrate to find jobs. Very few return. That is devastating, because they are the life-blood of the community.

Current statistical analysis does not allow the fine detail on rural poverty to emerge. Because Aberdeenshire is lumped in with Aberdeen and Moray, the data are skewed such that they hide the pockets of poverty. The case for funding rural initiatives in Aberdeenshire is therefore very

difficult to make.

In a recent enterprise network review paper, Henry McLeish said that the per capita gross domestic product of Grampian is 136 per cent of the national average. That, of course, is the figure for Aberdeen city only. It is very unfortunate that that misapprehension is being perpetuated by such a senior figure. According to Aberdeenshire Council statistics, earnings in north and west Aberdeenshire are only 75 per cent of the national average. We must establish a system of collecting local, rather than regional, data.

**Ross Finnie:** The problem Irene McGugan has highlighted is the very problem that I think I acknowledged. There are concerns about the distribution of data in local and central Government statistics. Despite Mr Morgan's reluctance to have another task force, does the member accept that we need to bring people together to tackle this issue? There has to be a group to examine the data and statistics for rural poverty. That issue needs to be addressed urgently and it is a disgrace that present policy instruments do not reflect that.

**Irene McGugan:** I accept that. The point I am trying to make is that we have known for a very long time that we need to do that.

In closing, I would like to give the minister one example of an excellent community initiative—such as the one that is promoted in the Executive's document—that has been failed by the current system. It is now too late for that initiative. Portsoy and District Ltd was a community-led economic development project in north-west Aberdeenshire that was set up in 1996. The communities saw the economic decline and the loss of services, amenities, post offices and shops; they wanted to address those problems locally in cost-effective and sustainable ways.

The project's list of achievements is impressive, but adequate deprivation indicators were not identified or were not sufficiently refined to support its case for funding to build on and develop the pattern of services it provided. The communities fear—and I fear—that by the time the much-needed index of rural deprivation is completed and published, the organisation will be a distant memory. It ceased to be funded in March this year. I urge the Executive to provide—sooner rather than later—the data the project's successors will need.

11:12

**Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab):** I welcome the publication of this document. I note that, despite my partnership colleagues' claiming a great deal of the credit for what is in it, it actually follows on very logically

from a document that was published by the Scottish Labour party in 1997—"New Life for Scotland's Rural Communities". As a member of the Scottish executive committee at that time, I had a great deal of pleasure in working on it.

I would like to take a slightly different approach to the debate. We have already heard the single transferable amendment from the SNP. We have also heard the Tory time warp—giving us lessons in history but omitting 18 years of it that certainly destroyed part of the rural community that I represent.

**Alex Johnstone:** Is the member prepared to accept that the vast majority of rural businesses would be delighted to exchange their financial circumstances today with the ones they had in May 1997?

**Cathy Jamieson:** The miners in my community would not exchange their circumstances now for those the Tories left them in. They live and work in the rural communities, and are part of them.

Transport has already been mentioned. I welcome the move to get heavy lorries off small rural roads and on to rail, but there are difficulties. The forestry and opencast coal industries in my constituency have attempted to do that, but unless there are trains and track to put them on, and unless we can tackle the problems with English Welsh and Scottish Railway Ltd and the availability of rolling stock, they will not be able to do so.

For some small rural communities, we have to recognise that quality of life in terms of transport is about having a decent road system. We will never have a system in which car use and road haulage are stopped—nor would we want it.

Traffic congestion problems in cities are very different from problems in rural communities.

**Fergus Ewing:** I am pleased that Cathy Jamieson has recognised the problems that road hauliers face. Does she accept that many road hauliers, such as Donald Watt in my constituency, have already had to close down because of the high burden of fuel tax and vehicle registration duty on lorries imposed by her Government? How can she defend the appalling record of Gordon Brown in his anti-Scottish fuel tax and vehicle registration duty, which have been imposed since the document that she referred to a few moments ago was produced?

**Cathy Jamieson:** Not only do we have the single transferable amendment—we yet again have the single transferable speech. I will not even respond to that intervention, because I want to say something about the people I represent.

Rural transport is an issue for people in villages who, perhaps more than people in cities, rely on

public transport to access services. There are problems in my constituency at the moment as Stagecoach has announced that it will close the bus garage in Girvan, which means that drivers who live in that area will have to make a 22-mile journey in the morning, without a bus, to Ayr to start their work to provide the services that are desperately needed in rural communities.

The Save the Children Fund has published a report that draws on the views of children and young people who find it difficult to access transport services in rural areas to get to education or to a workplace. I will make a wee comment on the press reports that a new political party is about to be set up to take on all those issues. Apparently, the countryside party is going to be set up. In *The Scotsman* this morning, there is speculation about whether it would represent low-paid workers, who I am glad the Tories acknowledge live and work in rural areas—although I remind them again that they did not support the national minimum wage for those workers. The article questioned whether this countryside party would stand up for low-paid rural workers. I suspect that it would not, because that is our job.

I am a representative of the Transport and General Workers Union as well as a member of the Labour party. The TGWU has a proud record of supporting low-paid workers in rural areas. I will pose a question that is of relevance to us. Will the minister indicate, in his reply, the time scale for a report on the future of the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board, which is under review at the moment? It is crucial and the Labour party has campaigned for its retention over a long period of time.

11:17

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I like the thistle on the front cover of "Rural Scotland: A New Approach", but I remind the minister that weeds and tares are normally a problem—especially to farmers in the Highlands.

I have read this document from cover to cover. While I agree with its aims, it will have been a waste of time and money if actions are not taken immediately to stop another Highland clearance. Those who live in the country should have a quality of life that at least approaches that of their urban counterparts.

As usual, I am speaking from a Highlands and Islands point of view. At a time when we are continually reminded of the UK's wealth and prosperity, the people in the Highlands and Islands must wonder whether they are on the same planet, let alone in the same nation. Agriculture, especially sheep and cattle farming, is the

cornerstone of the Highland economy. A recent survey by the National Farmers Union of Scotland found that two thirds of farmers' children do not want to carry on in farming as they can see no future in the industry. That is hardly surprising at the moment. Those aware of economics watch with a mixture of incredulity and polite sympathy the struggle that their parents face to put plates of food on the table. Given the chance, the majority would follow in their parents' footsteps, but with prices plummeting and costs spiralling they do not see the point.

The special skills that are passed from parent to child will soon disappear, especially the skills of handling livestock that have been fostered by generations. We will also lose the dogs that are specially trained to make the job possible and whose handling is a special skill. We lose those practical skills at our peril. It is not the fault of farmers. This crisis has been brought about by continuing rafts of unnecessary regulations, which have resulted in a vast drop in farm incomes and reams of extra paperwork that greatly lengthens the farmer's day as he struggles to understand it.

Diversification schemes such as renewable energy and tourism-related activities are good, but hill farmers mostly have huge overdrafts and cannot find the capital that is required. In some cases, they lose their money thanks to extraordinary governmental bungling, as in the recent agricultural business improvement scheme fiasco. There is nothing wrong with the product, and a way must be found of transferring a proportion of the added value from the supermarket shelf back to the producer.

The Government must halt now the extra legislation that is not imposed elsewhere in Europe. The Government must either drop or pay for the meat hygiene inspection charges. It must call on the Brownies of Westminster to match accessible European aid and drop interest rates.

The fishing industry, which is vital to jobs in rural Scotland, gets no help at all. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation said recently that the Government had contributed a great deal of rhetoric and a modest amount of financial incentive.

**Richard Lochhead:** Will the member give way?

**Mr McGrigor:** Hang on.

Last May, even that modest contribution was withdrawn, apparently to relieve a funding crisis at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. That money was for safety measures. While our taxpayers contribute to the modernisation of the French, Spanish, Portuguese and Irish fishing fleets, the Executive refuses to access available EU funding for our own rapidly aging fleet. Our valuable shellfish and white fish are at rock-bottom

prices while we are still importing £485 million of fish per annum. Although I am glad that the final restrictions banning scallop fishing in certain areas were lifted yesterday, the ban that we were originally told might last a month lasted a year and caused misery in rural areas, with no compensation of any sort.

I am pleased that freshwater fishing is mentioned on page 48, as that sector would contribute greatly to the rural economy all over Scotland if it were helped. If the Executive really wants to help rural Scotland, it must lower fuel prices significantly—at least 20p a gallon. Liquefied petroleum gas may be an alternative in future, but at the moment high fuel prices are ruining everything.

Last, I wish to talk about information technology. Rural populations do not become internet fluent overnight without help. If we want entrepreneurs to drive rural economies and act as capitalists, better infrastructure and incentives are needed.

11:21

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** The challenges and opportunities that are faced in rural Scotland are, of course, extensive. I will concentrate on the first element of the vision statement, which is given on page 5 of the document:

“Our future prosperity depends on combining traditional strengths with an appetite for change.”

Obviously, some of the traditional strengths of rural Scotland are its traditional industries, such as agriculture. One of the appetites for change that we need to have is to harness our burgeoning knowledge economy to support rural Scotland, expand the markets for its traditional industries and give rural residents access to employment and education.

Eleven per cent of Scotland's rural population works in agriculture. We have debated the problems of that industry many times in the chamber. Short-term assistance to the industry relies principally on actions that are taken in Westminster and Brussels, but long-term strategies to support agriculture and to help it survive are the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament. We should concentrate on those strategies instead of yet again reducing every issue to a debate on the constitution.

The Executive's commitment to agri-environment schemes such as the countryside stewardship scheme is welcome. Farming is extremely important to the environment, but environmentally friendly practices often impact on farm incomes and it is difficult for farmers to bear the cost.

The document makes a welcome commitment to using Scotland's science and research base to support the industries on which the rural economy depends. For example, the use of technology to reduce bureaucratic burdens on farmers will be welcomed. I will talk about the use of research and development.

I was pleased to read on page 12 that the Executive is working with the food and drinks industry, enterprise bodies and research institutes throughout Scotland, to maximise the industry's potential. On page 14 the document says that

"the five Scottish Agricultural and Biological research institutes, and the Scottish Agricultural College"—

contribute—

"by identifying innovative products and technologies which could be exploited commercially."

I am relieved to read that, because when I asked a question at the meeting of the Rural Affairs Committee on 9 May about the role of agricultural colleges in supporting primary producers and commercialising research, the Scottish Executive rural affairs department representative told me that the research programme is not near market and is not aimed at solving today's problems; that near-market research is done by the private sector.

I was concerned about that and would like reassurance from the minister that the Executive's intention is as stated and that the rural affairs department will use its research and development base, which has a budget of £40 million, to support rural industries.

I have already mentioned the importance of new technology in enabling people in rural areas to access employment and education. I agree with Alasdair Morgan about the need for the infrastructure that would allow remote and rural areas to get access to the internet. I hope that the Executive, in partnership with others, including the telecommunications companies, will address the problem caused in rural areas by the fact that the cost of installing the necessary infrastructure increases in inverse proportion to population density. Unless we overcome that problem, there is a real danger that rural areas will become information poor and will be disadvantaged.

I was interested in the report of the digital Scotland task force, which also came out this week. Recommendation 60 suggests:

"the Scottish Executive, working with SEn and HIE, should continue to review telecomms infrastructure capacity and availability throughout Scotland."

Recommendation 61 states:

"The Scottish Executive should work with Scottish Enterprise, HIE and telecomms companies and others, to review supply of and demand for digital links in remote and rural areas . . . the enterprise bodies should explore with

the telcos ways of encouraging investment in services".

Unless we do that, rural areas will not be able to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by new technology.

I want to say a little more about education. In particular, I want to mention the Crichton campus in Dumfries, which I am pleased to see gets another honourable mention, and the University of the Highlands and Islands. There are a lot of important and interesting developments in education. I worked for the Open University for seven years. In that time, I witnessed a veritable revolution in the techniques used for distance teaching and learning. I hope that all those opportunities will be seized and utilised to stabilise and improve the economies of our rural areas.

11:26

**Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** I am afraid that I am rather cynical when faced with another shiny, new brochure. I say to Mike Rumbles: the brochure contains an awful lot of rhetoric and not a lot of specifics. Perhaps Mike Rumbles has a different copy, which has the Liberal Democrats' input, rather than a rehash of the Labour party's 1997 document.

I will try to be fair and see whether, a year down the road, the principles in the brochure match the reality. I have no problem with the Executive's statement, on page 5, that in rural areas it is supporting

"employers and communities to stimulate local and national economic success."

However, to do that, there needs to be a healthy infrastructure and supported and integrated services. We would not dispute that.

I will test what has been stated. I will start small and move big. Rural schools, which are at the heart of the success of communities, are referred to on page 20. The Executive's statement is, to say the least, disappointing. It simply reiterates:

"From time to time it is necessary for local authorities to review whether the network of rural schools in their areas continues to serve modern needs."

The report goes on to say that consultation must take place

"to ensure that the . . . issues relating to the closure proposal are fully aired and taken into account."

So what? We want leadership in the promotion of the continuance of small rural schools, because that is how we get generations to continue in villages.

**Cathy Jamieson:** Rather than criticising, will the member agree that some of the initiatives being taken by local authorities such as South Ayrshire Council—which use new technology to enable the



grouping of schools so as to keep them open as an integral part of the community—are the way forward?

**Christine Grahame:** The member is being unfair: I welcome anything that helps rural schools to stay open. The fact is that the Public Petitions Committee receives petitions from parents of children at schools that are perpetually threatened with closure. Of course I welcome the steps, but I also want leadership. I want more: I want the Executive to say that it is committed to this.

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Will the member give way?

**Christine Grahame:** No, I want to move on. Members can no doubt raise the issue later.

I want to talk about post offices. I am glad that there has been a reappraisal of the attitude towards rural post offices, which are at the heart of rural communities. They sustain the grocer's shop and the area. Once those key things go from a small village—I should know because I lived in a village for 15 years—the community dies on its feet and young families move out.

Health and community care, too, is essential in sustaining rural communities. As rural communities have more than the average of the older population, the demands on social work departments are sometimes way beyond their means. Again I refer to my experience on the Public Petitions Committee. We constantly receive petitions from rural areas; we have received petitions from pensioners in Irvine and from Oban because services for the elderly are being removed. We are not being fair to the people who have lived their lives in those areas and who find that they do have the facilities to stay in their own community. There have also been problems in the Borders and East Lothian, where there have been closures of residential homes because social work departments do not have the money to make placements. I will say more on that later, at question time.

According to the Executive's figures, investment in Scotland's trunk roads and motorways in 1998 to 2000 will amount to £23 million. In 2000-01, £14 million will be invested and in 2001-02 the figure will be £17 million. We do not have many motorways or trunk roads. In fact, the Executive gets round the problem in the Borders by detrunking the A7 so that the local authority has to pay.

I would never get up to speak without mentioning railway lines. I am grateful to Alex Johnstone for putting the Borders rail link on the agenda. The document says:

"Other rural areas have lost their link with the rail network, but, as the Borders railway feasibility study shows, the case for reinstatement can be investigated against the

background of changing patterns of travel."

So what? There has been no leadership, commitment or money.

Last week, I made the point that for £63 million, 700 jobs were created in Fife; £73 million in the Scottish Borders would create 900 jobs. That is the test of a new approach to rural Scotland.

11:31

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** I welcome the express commitment to rural Scotland that is contained in the document. I hope that Mike Rumbles will be delighted with the fact that my speech will be entirely positive—that is the way to be green.

The encouragement of local training networks, public transport, farmers' markets, organic farming and local credit unions is fundamental to preserving a sense of place and identity in rural Scotland. We would like the Executive to make it easier for farms and communities to install small hydro, biomass and wind energy systems, either individually or under community control. Many years ago that was a Labour vision—particularly hydro.

Everything possible should be done to enable village shops, and post offices in particular, to remain financially viable. That would include varying business rates, council tax and so on. Of course, replacing business rates with a turnover tax would be the fairest way in which to do that. A village without a shop or a post office is no longer a village—it is a collection of houses connected by a road and, in most cases, private transport to the nearest town. We should regard access to basic needs—food and day-to-day supplies—by foot as a basic right of all communities, whether they are rural or urban. We should enshrine those rights in planning law.

Before I finish, I would like to make one small suggestion on information technology. Many people have migrated to rural communities but continue to work in towns; they work mainly on computers. Also in many small towns and villages there are many homeworkers who work from their computers, with no one to talk to all day. This is not entirely my idea, but came from the architect who did the wonderful energy conservation job at Norton House in Edinburgh.

Think of the advantages in setting up computer centres that are open for use or rent in rural villages or small towns. They could have the most advanced computer systems available for use. Users would cut down on car journeys, they would have more leisure time, they would spend more time with their families and they would become part of the local community instead of staying in a

village and carrying out their lives in the nearest town. It would have advantages: it would benefit the environment, families, local schools and communities, which could begin to expand. Services would expand round those little nodes of computer excellence. I commend the idea to the Executive.

11:34

**Euan Robson (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD):** I welcome the document, as it mentions a number of good examples of best practice from throughout Scotland. I hope that we can work on those models for the future, taking the examples that have been worked up in some parts of rural Scotland and planting the seeds in other parts.

In my area, there have recently been a number of significant developments. Good examples are the Tweed Foundation heritage project and Rural Partnership near St Boswells, both of which have been visited by the ministers. They are examples of best practice that can be taken on and developed elsewhere.

Another of those, as mentioned in the document, is the Heriot-Watt University-Borders College link-up, which is delivering distance learning in the Borders, not only in the towns, but eventually, I hope, in villages such as Newcastleton in the south.

An enhanced communications network is extremely important, as has been said by a number of members. I had hoped that the Borders would have attracted the headquarters of the university for industry. Some of us are not particularly impressed that, while the university for industry will deliver to rural areas, the dispersal of its headquarters will be all the way from Meridian Court to Argyle Street. It would have been better if it had been located in a rural community, but there we are.

I noticed a reference to the university of the south of Scotland. That is a fine-sounding concept but, at the risk of offending Elaine Murray, it is a little dated now. Because of the development that Heriot-Watt University and Borders College have made in the Borders, the north-south link is probably more important than the east-west one.

The document rightly points out that a focus of Heriot-Watt University-Borders College activity is sustainable and environmental technologies and emerging markets in technical textiles. The future success of rural economies, such as that of the Borders, lies partly in adding value locally to local products. In fact, the textiles industry originally did just that: it took local wool and turned it into cloth. However, it has changed remarkably in the past few years. Skills and expertise are now best used in high-quality, top-of-the-range products such as

cashmere.

If we could process more products closer to source, we could do much for rural Scotland. For example, red meat produced in the Borders is made ready for the consumer largely outside the region. The fish landed at Eyemouth is processed largely elsewhere. Our timber is hauled out of the area to be cut and finished elsewhere. However, there are examples in the Borders—and in other parts of Scotland—of successfully adding value locally, including Farne Salmon in Duns and the Woodschool at Ancrum that the minister visited. Scottish Enterprise Borders, with the Scottish Borders Council and the local branch of the National Farmers Union, is investigating means of producing, processing and finishing red meat locally.

The minister can help by considering international examples. Perhaps he could fund a study of how value is added locally in other parts of the world. For instance, can we learn anything from Iceland about fish processing and packing? Can we consider niche producers, such as the cranberry growers in New England, who have developed locally a particularly strong product? What about wine producers? Are there international comparisons that we can draw on to help to add value locally to products?

I commend the energy supply from crops project, about which I recently wrote to the minister. Not only would the capital investment locally be welcomed, but the model could be taken on and used elsewhere in rural Scotland.

The minister and others have mentioned transport. Strategic investment in roads and rail is immensely important. If we are to get finished goods to market, we need effective communications; in the south of Scotland, we need good communications north to the central belt and south into England. Perhaps the minister will consider promoting better cross-border liaison between those responsible for trunk road and local authority road improvements and maintenance. Although the extra money for trunk road maintenance is very welcome, there should be a matching increase in grant-aided expenditure for local authority roads. The car will be the predominant form of transport throughout most of rural Scotland, and local authorities will be maintaining the majority of roads. We must address the 25 years of under-investment in that area.

11:39

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I welcome the strategy document, as it seeks to take an holistic approach to the problems faced by rural communities. That does not appear to be the

case with the SNP. Before Christine Grahame criticises rural schools closures, she should remember that an SNP education convener in Argyll and Bute is seeking to close them.

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Will Rhoda Grant give way?

**Rhoda Grant:** No, I am not taking any interventions.

SNP criticism of care of the elderly in Oban bears no relation to what is happening on the ground—I have had a first-hand view of the excellent services that are provided there.

I am pleased that, in his introduction to the document, the First Minister acknowledges that, when rural areas are seen through urban eyes, they have not always benefited. That is why it is necessary to use the people and agencies on the ground to ensure that we have the best policies for individual areas. I am glad that the minister has acknowledged that rural areas are diverse and that what is appropriate in Shetland might not be appropriate in Argyll and Bute.

**Mr McGrigor:** Although the principles about child care and education on page 19 of the document are wonderful, six rural schools are being closed in Argyll and Bute. Does Rhoda Grant accept that primary schools underpin the rural communities that the document is striving to support?

**Rhoda Grant:** The six rural schools in Argyll and Bute have not yet been closed. The campaign to keep them open is on-going and the whole Parliament should support it.

This morning, I will concentrate on two issues, the first of which is assistance to crofting communities. I am pleased that the Executive's initiatives are encouraging people to take up crofting. For example, the croft entrants scheme will encourage 260 young entrants into crofting by April 2002. However, I am concerned about the level of assistance that is received through the crofting building grants and loans scheme. Financial assistance does not meet the costs of building a house, and the scheme is all the more vital in view of the difficulties that crofters face in obtaining finances through banks and building societies. As those institutions do not understand crofting tenure, they are unwilling to lend money to crofters unless they are owner-occupiers. Purchasing a croft restricts people's access to grants and creates a vicious circle.

For example, a three-bedroomed house might cost approximately £40,000. Anyone seeking help to pay for that would receive a grant of £11,000 and a loan of £17,500, which totals £29,000, leaving a deficit of £11,000. A young person would be prohibited from taking on a croft in the

knowledge that they would be unable to provide themselves with a home. As it is essential that measures to encourage young entrants into crofting go hand in hand with the measures that allow them to take up those opportunities, we need a package that addresses the full cost of building a house.

The second issue on which I want to touch is fisheries. I am convinced that local fisheries management is the way forward, as local communities can set priorities and ensure that there is a healthy fishery for future generations. Inshore fishing must not be seen as the poor relation to deep-sea fishing; it should be recognised as an economic generator for small fragile communities. Local management would provide such a focus.

We must find ways of improving the standard of the catch in all sectors, ensuring that the fish caught will fetch the premium market price. The economic well-being of fishing is inextricably linked to the economic conditions of areas that are dependent on fishing.

The Executive's new approach is the way forward, as it integrates rural policy, allows departments to work together to formulate sympathetic policies and, most important, enables people and agencies on the ground to be the driving force of this rural strategy.

11:44

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** At the outset, I must respond to Rhoda Grant's cheap and pathetic point about Argyll and Bute. The SNP's policy is the same as it always was: we oppose the closure of rural schools. That policy will not change. I point out to her that a Labour member of the Argyll and Bute Council is as involved in the situation as the other members and that the council is led by a Liberal Democrat. Given those facts, it was not helpful of her to try to score a cheap party political point. If Rhoda Grant wants to do something useful for once and defend the schools in Argyll and Bute, she should get behind the campaign to get special islands needs allowance status for Argyll and Bute. That would mean that the schools would not have to close.

Unlike some of my colleagues, I want to try to say something positive about the document. We have to recognise the environmental concerns that are at the document's heart. We have a recycled speech from Lord Sewel and a recycled Labour policy from before the election. At least the Executive is sound on the environmental question.

Away from the airy and comfortable concepts in the document, we have to look hard for some detail. We read that we should consult, talk, have committees, build on best practice and so on—

well whoop de do. Everyone agrees with that. It is hardly groundbreaking; it is not the stuff of radicalism that we would expect from this Executive. [*Laughter.*] Well, maybe it is what we should expect. Perhaps the summit of the Executive's ambition is to put a thistle on the front of a glossy document and hope for the best.

The minister claims to want to consider people's priorities. I hear of two issues from people across the Highlands and Islands: ferries and fuel. Whenever fuel is mentioned, particularly by Fergus Ewing, a collective groan rises from the chamber: "Why is Fergus going on about fuel again?" The reason why we keep coming back to the question is that we never get an answer and we never get any action. The Liberal Democrats do not know whether they agree on the subject with their leader in London; when Fergus Ewing asked whether they agreed with the UK party's policy of putting another 5p a litre on fuel, we did not get an answer.

**Mr Rumbles:** Will the member give way?

**Mr Hamilton:** If Mr Rumbles tells me his party's position, I will be delighted to give way.

**Mr Rumbles:** I will repeat our position again. Duncan Hamilton probably does not understand it, so I hope that he will listen carefully. The Scottish Liberal Democrats make a clear distinction between urban problems and rural problems. Our MPs in London have consistently voted against the fuel duty escalator that the Tories imposed and that Labour has perpetuated. We are against fuel tax in rural areas.

**Mr Hamilton:** I am not singling the Liberal Democrats out for the blame. I am fully aware of the fact that the Tories introduced the fuel duty escalator and that Labour increased it. However, I am also fully aware that the Liberal Democrats are committed to increasing it even further, which strikes me as odd. Instead of the glossy brochures, it would be useful to have some action.

The minister should also consider the situation with the ferries. The threat to Caledonian MacBrayne is real. People like to have a go at it but it has the advantage of being a public company: Donald Dewar is a shareholder. That means that it is directly accountable to the people of the Highlands and Islands and that they have some input if they want to improve the service or lower the fares. We know that Scottish Office research from 1994 advocates lower fares. That would be a radical move, but we are unlikely to see it. Instead, Sarah Boyack's recent announcement threatens the cohesion of the network. We have a situation where private operators can bid for the profitable routes and leave the loss-making routes in public ownership. What does that mean for the overall subsidy?

Crucially, does it mean that there will be higher fares on those routes? Those are the issues that this document should be addressing.

I do not oppose the document—I do not even rate it. There is nothing in it of controversy or progress. If the minister wants to deal with people's priorities, I suggest that he take radical action on fuel and ferries. He should stand up for Scotland, rather than apologising for his national leader.

11:49

**John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** I declare an interest, as I am a farmer.

I welcome the wonderfully glossy brochure that the minister has launched. I particularly welcome his commitment to the rural stewardship scheme for agriculture, the change in emphasis on tourism and his recognition that the average wages of rural manual workers are far too low. I remind Cathy Jamieson that it was the National Farmers Union that voted for the retention of the Agricultural Wages Board the last time that there was a review.

**Cathy Jamieson:** Will John Scott give way?

**John Scott:** I shall give way briefly, but I would like to get started.

**Cathy Jamieson:** Will the NFU support the retention of the Agricultural Wages Board this time?

**John Scott:** I do not know how the NFU will vote this time around. There is now a minimum wages board, so is there a need for an agricultural one?

The issues that have been raised are of great importance, and no one can disagree with the minister's motherhood-and-apple-pie statements this morning. I hope that what will set this review apart from the previous and remarkably similar one that was conducted by Lord Sewel and John Home Robertson is that the fine ideas and glossy brochures will be translated into action. Action is badly needed.

Scottish agriculture is drinking in the last chance saloon. In three short years under a Labour Government, Scottish net farm incomes have fallen from £470 million to just £75 million—in other words, they have fallen by more than 80 per cent. The day of reckoning is at hand. Last week, Brian Pack, the chief executive of the ANM group, raised the prospect of there being no agricultural production in Britain if present trends continue. North of Carlisle, farming is no longer viable in the prevailing agricultural climate. Unless that situation is addressed quickly, there will be an exodus from Scottish farm land on a scale that has not been

seen since the 1930s. Those are the stakes that we are playing for.

The process of leaving the land has already begun. One has only to read last week's *Scottish Farmer*: suddenly, there are more farms on the market, to let or buy, than there were. The dam that has held for so long is about to burst, as farmers finally admit defeat and get out. Last week, at the Ayr show, which is normally a celebratory event, I was struck by the mood of despair among colleagues and friends, which appalled me. This Government must take its share of the blame for that.

I welcome the initiatives that Ross Finnie has outlined in "Rural Scotland: A New Approach" as a forward strategy for Scottish agriculture. I hope that he can make them work. Farmers perceive that, in the Government, an ideological battle is being waged between town and country interests. Farmers accept that in the past the Government did not have the funds to sort out the problems of the rural sector, but they know that that argument no longer stands up. Gordon Brown has the money, but he has no intention of parting with it. The policy of importing food from abroad is leading, as surely as night follows day, to the destruction of a once great and proud industry.

The minister must make the reviews and glossy brochures work, or he will witness an exodus of farmers and farm workers the like of which has not been seen in Scotland since the 1930s. In my constituency, dairy farming is on its knees and cannot get up. Hill farming and pig farming are on the verge of collapse, and arable farmers and nursery growers are having an equally difficult time. Although I do not question the sincerity of Ross Finnie's attempts to sort out the problems, I feel that his hands are tied—tied by Nick and Gordon Brown who in fact hold the purse strings for rural Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson):** Wind up, please.

**Richard Lochhead:** Will John Scott give way?

**John Scott:** I am about to finish.

Ross Finnie's hands are also tied because Europe cannot respond unless the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food makes the case in Brussels for Scottish farming and Scotland's rural areas. At the moment, that is not being done because the Brown twins will not allow it, because of match-funding cost implications.

**Richard Lochhead:** Will John Scott give way?

**John Scott:** Yes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have asked John Scott to wind up, so he should not take any interventions. I ask him to close, please.

**John Scott:** Sorry.

That is the scale of the problem that we face in Scotland. I wish "Rural Scotland: A New Approach" well and I hope that its proposals make a difference. I shall support the minister all the way in his attempt to implement those proposals, which are a step in the right direction. I just hope that the fine words and phrases can be turned into action.

**Mr Hamilton:** On a point of order. Is it in order for the Presiding Officer to rule out of order the taking of an intervention if the member has clearly indicated that he will take one?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes, it is. Mr Lochhead was on his feet, trying to make an intervention when I asked John Scott to wind up, so he was aware that the speech was coming to a close.

11:54

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands (Lab):** The Executive's strategy for rural areas impinges on many sectors, too many to be covered in any one speech, although John Farquhar Munro made a good attempt to do so. Appropriate policies for remote rural areas on housing, poverty, engaging the voluntary sector and promoting public health are all essential in the Highlands and Islands.

On all those matters, the Executive has shown a willingness to listen to concerns and to meet and discuss the issues with the service providers from the Highlands. Meetings that I arranged between Wendy Alexander and housing associations from Shetland, Orkney and the Highland Council area are one example and have resulted in a pilot project to deliver the best possible social housing in remote rural areas. Next week Jackie Baillie will meet representatives of the voluntary sector from the Highlands and Islands. The Executive is very open to discussing the special issues for remote rural areas.

Until recently, tourism was an industry without direction, but now it is being taken seriously by the Executive. The strategy for tourism published in February gives additional funding for the industry, prioritises training, promotes new marketing strategies and encourages the use of information technology through Project Ossian. Making a career in tourism an attractive option is long overdue. As I have said several times before in debate, we need a proper career structure and decent pay to make sure that people who enter the industry stay in it. For many years, young people particularly have received so little incentive to stay in the industry that they have decided to leave not just their jobs but more often than not the areas in which they live. The holistic approach adopted by the Executive to the problems of the

tourist industry should, I hope, reverse that trend.

Aquaculture is another industry that has had to struggle over the years. When this Parliament was established, the industry was in dire straits. Draconian EC regulations enforced a slaughter policy that destroyed perfectly healthy fish and brought the smaller-scale fish farmers to the brink of ruin. Thanks to the efforts of this Parliament, the Executive and the MEPs on the European Parliament Committee on Fisheries, we have a more flexible policy that will enable healthy fish from an affected farm to be put on the market, vaccination to be used as a tool to control the virus, and fish farmers to have the security of knowing that their stocks are not at risk. I hope that that will lead to growth in the sector and enable it to extend into white fish aquaculture, which would boost the already considerable number of jobs in the sector in the Highlands.

People in rural areas share the aspirations of people in urban areas. I believe that the Executive is delivering on those aspirations. A good example is child care and pre-school education in remote rural areas—something only dreamed about four years ago. To have delivered total cover for pre-school education for four-year-olds and 40 per cent of three-year-olds in the Highland Council area and to be about to deliver 70 per cent provision for three-year-olds by this autumn is a tremendous achievement. Family centres have been established to support the very young and their parents throughout the Highlands and Islands through partnerships with well-established voluntary groups that have experience in dealing with young families.

Provision for abused women has expanded over the past year. On Monday, I attended the annual general meeting of the Highland Domestic Abuse Forum; it is now able to employ a development officer and to roll out its education and training programme across the Highlands. In Moray, Argyll, the northern and western isles and elsewhere in the Highlands, new refuges are opening, outreach and children's workers are being appointed by Women's Aid and witness support schemes are being put in place—although I would like more money to be spent on better witness facilities in small rural court houses.

Rural areas, such as the area I represent, have needed a rural strategy for a long time. For too long problems have been looked at in isolation. On matters as diverse as tourism, aquaculture and domestic abuse, the Executive is making progress. More important, it is working in partnership with local organisations with the experience to enable them to deal effectively with the issues.

11:58

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** We are here to debate this interesting document, "Rural Scotland: A New Approach". I was interested to see that the minister states on page 3:

"I wanted to see rural Scotland for myself and hear from the people who live and work in rural areas what issues concerned them most."

Perhaps it would be a new approach to try to hear, if not to listen to, what people in rural Scotland have to say. I mean no disrespect to the minister, whom I am sure we all view with personal fondness and respect, but there is no doubt in my mind that the issue that concerns people most—and that concerns most people—in rural Scotland and especially in the Highlands and Islands is the cost of fuel. The issue does not concern people in rural areas alone. A taxi driver told me today in quite vehement terms—I shall not give an exact quote—that, when the coalition partners came to power, petrol cost 61.9p in Glasgow, but it now costs 81.9p.

**Robin Harper:** The fuel costs for road transport are roughly 30 per cent of total costs. A 3 per cent rise in fuel tax is therefore passed on to a transport company as a 1 per cent increase in costs. Most schools, universities and other public institutions are asked to make 1 per cent efficiency savings year on year. Does Fergus Ewing agree that it is not beyond the capability of road haulage companies to make 1 per cent savings year on year?

**Fergus Ewing:** No. I am fond of Robin Harper, but I utterly disagree with him. I found it difficult to understand his computation; it is a long time since my limited maths qualifications were attained. However, I have the benefit of being able to read the figures in front of me, which suggest that the ones that he has quoted are totally wrong. According to the April EC petroleum bulletin, the cost of fuel in the Highlands and Islands was 22.6p per litre, whereas the retail price a couple of weeks ago in Glenborrodale was 90p. Robin Harper's calculation of 30 per cent is completely wrong. The actual take to the Government is, broadly speaking, four fifths of the price that is paid at the pump.

I would like to help out the Liberal Democrats, who do not seem to be aware of their own policy—we want to be helpful in this chamber, as we all get on with one another. To be fair to them, their policy is that vehicle excise duty should be abolished for some cars. However, Charles Kennedy said on 16 March 2000 that that would be compensated for by a 5p rise in fuel duty. It gets worse—or better, depending on which view one takes. That 5p rise in duty is described as small. So much for the Liberal policy.

We have the highest fuel tax and fuel costs in the world. I shall devote the rest of my speech to asking why that should be. Is it because of the oil companies? Ian Wells told the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee in January that the oil companies are charging the lowest prices in Europe. I disagree with him, because I have other figures that suggest that that is not entirely true.

The actual cost of fuel does not vary hugely in the European countries. The situation in the Highlands and Islands is slightly different. I am not here to defend or attack the oil companies, because they provide valuable appointments throughout Scotland. The Office of Fair Trading is conducting an inquiry into fuel pricing, but its inquiry is an exercise in utter futility. It has been going on for what seems like centuries and there is no indication of when the report will arrive. It is about as reliable as the old British Rail timetables—or perhaps Richard Branson's, if we want to move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

If the problem is not with the oil companies, is it with the atmosphere problems in the Highlands? Is it smog lying over Strontian or gridlock in Golspie? No. The problem is not with the environment. The problem is not green; the problem is Brown. Brown is the problem and Brown is the name. Brown—the man who does not know how much it costs to buy petrol, the man who is in charge of our country. With the other parties in this chamber, the penny is beginning to drop that the argument will not go away. The SNP takes the view that it is only with independence that we can end the nonsense and the discrimination against people throughout Scotland, and especially in rural parts of Scotland, who are being treated unfairly.

12:04

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** I welcome the report and in particular the emphasis that it places on a new approach. It is vital that a joined-up, strategic approach is taken that can build communities. The Rural Affairs Committee is undertaking a major inquiry on the impact of changes in rural employment. I hope that we will be able to discuss that matter in the autumn. A number of interesting strands are already running through the evidence that the committee has gathered for its interim report and some of those issues have been discussed this morning.

I want to deal with partnership. There is clearly a need for all agencies to work together strategically; they must have a clear commitment and a common agenda. A strong message has come from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the need for community planning and I agree with that, but there must be ways of finding the bottom-up approach that will be vital to bring about change. Communities must be

encouraged to become involved in the development of strategies for themselves. Community and voluntary organisations must be seen as integral to community planning.

There is evidence in the report of good practice—for example, the new futures programme in Sutherland, Lochaber Communications Network Ltd and others. All those projects have voluntary sector input; the voluntary sector has been a key partner. I mention particularly the role of rural councils for voluntary service in those partnerships. They play an essential role not only in support of the voluntary sector, but in facilitating community participation. They are involved in the development of projects in a number of areas, including economic development, education and training, child care, housing, community care and transport. I was pleased to see CVS mentioned in the report and I hope that Jackie Baillie will take their work into consideration when she reviews their funding. There goes the advert.

Before I finish, I would like to mention our cultural heritage, which I was pleased to see acknowledged in the report. I would like to flag up the importance of folk and traditional music to tourism in rural Scotland. People travel from all over the world to hear and participate in gatherings and festivals, many of which are held in rural areas. I hope that there will be recognition of that great tradition and that some resources can be found in the cultural strategy to develop and support that wonderful asset.

12:07

**Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab):** I welcome the establishment of the rural affairs department and the appointment of the ministerial team. It shows that the Labour-Liberal Democrat partnership is committed to Scotland, despite what the best attempts of the Tories and the nationalists would have the people of Scotland believe.

I was born and brought up and now live in rural Scotland, so I know well the value of life in a rural area—the sense of community, the beautiful landscape, the positive environment, the quality of education and of life that those bring. We must begin to see life in rural Scotland as a positive choice, rather than as something that happens to us and which we are powerless to change.

I also want to express my disappointment that the document does not include South Lanarkshire Council in its data. I am not convinced that the single indicator that was used to classify rural councils is necessarily the best, or that it gives the fullest picture of rural Scotland. I accept that there are a large number of urban areas in South Lanarkshire, but my constituency covers almost

600 square miles and accounts for 80 per cent of the land in South Lanarkshire, but only 20 per cent of the population. The issues that have been identified in the document as those that affect rural areas also affect my constituents. I ask that the task forces—which I welcome—take evidence from South Lanarkshire, because I am sure that that would support my assertion that there is a clear case for South Lanarkshire's inclusion.

I would like to pick up a couple of issues in the document, the first of which is transport. I agree with much of what Cathy Jamieson said, and rather than—as Fergus Ewing did—focusing on what we cannot do, I want to focus on what Parliament can do for transport in rural areas. We can lobby Westminster, but we must be clear about what we can do.

There is a need for investment in rural roads. That is a function of Scottish local authorities, for which they receive a grant from the Scottish Parliament's block grant. I ask the ministers to consider the issue of rural roads and their upkeep, as safety is becoming a real consideration. Poor roads are also a barrier to people accessing facilities. I ask the ministers to work with their colleagues to examine ways of providing support to local councils, so that they can improve the standard of rural roads.

Railways are another issue. Tourism offers real benefits to my constituency, but its potential is not exploited to the full. Tourism facilities such as New Lanark are not able to access as many visitors as they would like because the rail services simply do not exist. Trains come from Edinburgh and Glasgow and pass through stations in the constituency, but they do not stop. We need to work with the rail companies to ensure that the trains stop, that people can get off and that there are bus services to take people to the attractions that exist. There is a need for co-ordination between the rural affairs department and the development department, so that those links can be provided. By doing that, we would be sending out a positive message about what this Parliament can do on the issue of transport, rather than moaning about what we cannot do and about issues over which we have no power. MPs at Westminster are lobbying on the issue of fuel prices. That is their responsibility.

Finally, I would like to raise the issue of community halls, which are a valuable part of rural life. For many villages, they can be a focus of social inclusion. I welcome the minister's visit to Tarbrax in my constituency, and the money that has been made available to that community to enable it to open a village hall. It will be the focus for rural redevelopment in that area.

I congratulate the minister on the document, but there is still a great deal to do. However, it

provides a positive framework for the way ahead. We should look forward to working together. Sometimes we do not need conflict to be successful; sometimes consensus can be positive. This is a document that will be welcomed in my constituency by the people whom I represent.

12:11

**Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** I am pleased to sum up for the Liberal Democrats in this debate. I have been surprised to some extent by the cynical and negative attitude taken both by the SNP and by Alex Johnstone, who led for the Conservatives. I was particularly surprised by the attitude of Alasdair Morgan, which was out of character. The SNP's negative approach was demonstrated by its grudging welcome for a glossy document.

**Christine Grahame:** There is nothing in it.

**Mr Rumbles:** SNP members say that there is nothing in the document. It seems to me that the sum total of the SNP's rural policy is a signpost to Wigtown.

**Christine Grahame:** And a railway.

**Mr Rumbles:** That is right.

Alex Johnstone also adopted a very negative approach. Given that he is a dairy farmer, I was surprised that when he was going through the woes of rural Scotland, he never mentioned the appalling disaster of the deregulation of the dairy industry, which happened under the previous Conservative Administration. I contrast his speech and that of Alasdair Morgan with the speech of Robin Harper, who made a positive contribution to the debate.

Without doubt, over the past year, the Scottish Parliament has had many successes and achievements and has taken many initiatives. It has brought government closer to the Scottish people, through the abolition of feudalism, the new Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000—which will help more than 100,000 Scots deal with incapacity in a much more civilised way—and the effective working of our robust committee system. All those initiatives have addressed and are addressing the needs of the Scottish people.

However, the initiative that I welcome most is the decision to put the needs and interests of rural Scotland at the very heart of the Executive's policies and priorities. The creation of a rural affairs department was a major manifesto commitment of the Scottish Liberal Democrats and, with the appointment of Ross Finnie, it has, in just 12 months, proved to be a real success. It is interesting to note that England does not have a rural affairs department.



The title of the document says it all—"Rural Scotland: A New Approach". It is precisely because there are so many problems in our rural areas—associated not just with farming, but with rural transport, rural schools and rural development—that it is important to strike out on a different path from that which has been taken south of the border. Not only do we have a Cabinet minister responsible for rural affairs, but we have a cross-cutting ministerial committee covering all aspects of rural development. It includes ministerial representation from several departments—transport and the environment, communities, health and community care, justice, children and education, and enterprise and lifelong learning. I tell Alex Johnstone that this is what it is about: it is about action, not an old document. It is about action, and change from what happened before.

The focus by the Executive on rural Scotland is, I am glad to say, mirrored in our Parliament through the creation of the Rural Affairs Committee. I have been heartened by the fact that our committee takes a wide view of its remit—wider, I think, than that taken by its convener. Important as they are, farming, fishing and forestry are not the sum total of rural issues. The committee recognises, as do the minister and his department, that jobs, economic development, rural schools and rural shops and services are vital to the well-being of rural Scotland.

**Mr McGrigor:** If he is so keen on rural schools, why is he so keen to close them?

**Mr Rumbles:** I do not have a clue what Mr McGrigor is talking about.

**Mr McGrigor** *rose*—

**Mr Rumbles:** Sit down. I have taken the intervention. Is the member living in cloud-cuckoo-land? The Executive is not closing rural schools.

Focusing on what we can achieve, and what we have achieved, this document is full of case studies that highlight the initiatives that have been taken throughout Scotland to address rural development, from Arran Aromatics, to the child care in rural Scotland development programme, to Wigtown book fair, as was so ably pointed out earlier. There are many other initiatives that have been supported by the Executive, but which could not be included in the document. One is the rural transport initiative in my area of west Aberdeenshire, which is extremely welcome.

**Richard Lochhead** *rose*—

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** No, the member is winding up.

**Mr Rumbles:** The publication of this document is welcomed by the Liberal Democrats. The intention is to set out the Executive's vision for

rural Scotland, and to demonstrate how this new approach—and it is a new approach to rural Scotland—will make a difference to all of us who live and work in rural communities. It is about acknowledging and valuing rural Scotland for its distinctiveness. It is about understanding the priorities and needs of rural Scotland, and it is about tackling rural issues and problems in ways that are sensitive to, and appropriate for, our rural areas. We whole-heartedly welcome and support the initiative. Now we certainly have a new approach for rural Scotland.

12:16

**Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the most negative speech of the morning.

**Mr Rumbles:** Will this be a new approach?

**Alex Fergusson:** Absolutely.

In declaring an interest in the debate, as a farmer and landowner, I would like to go one step further and declare a lifelong interest, having spent my entire short life as a resident in rural south-west Scotland. Most of that time has been spent in a small village in south Ayrshire. It is a village that is typical of almost any village in rural Scotland.

I moved to that village when I was seven or eight years old. It had a policeman, a schoolmaster, a minister, a garage, a haulage contractor, a forestry office and depot complete with head forester, two shops and two pubs. Not all that many years later, all those people—key people in any community—are gone: no garage, no contractor, no forestry office, only one shop and, despite my lifelong and unstinting devotion to the cause of trying to ensure that both pubs remained viable, only one remains open, because the landlord has alternative employment and therefore an income with which he can subsidise his business.

**Dr Murray:** Will Alex Fergusson take an intervention?

**Alex Fergusson:** Not on the subject of my drinking habits. [*Laughter.*]

**Dr Murray:** Could the member tell us which Government was in power at the time of that great disaster in rural communities?

**Alex Fergusson:** Governments of both political colours have been in power during my short life in that village. I am giving the background, which we all know. We were talking about cheap party political points earlier, but that question was the cheapest of the lot.

The scenario that I have painted is surely familiar to all of us who represent rural constituencies in the Parliament. I welcome the commitments and the promises that were made

prior to, and have been made since, the establishment of the Parliament, that the interests of rural Scotland would be high on the Executive's priority list. I am on record saying that one of the benefits of the Parliament is that all matters rural now command more parliamentary time than was ever possible before.

I am also on record saying that much of rural Scotland was sceptical about the perceived benefits that the Parliament would bring. I take little pleasure in saying that that scepticism is as great now as it was two years ago. That is little wonder when we consider some of the legislation that has been given the green light by this Administration. First, we had proposals for road tolling and town congestion charges—great ideas to cut down pollution and car use. But who, more than anyone else, has to use those cars to get into town? Those of us who live and work in the country, of course—people who are already bled dry by fuel prices that now verge on £4 a gallon. And just before Mr Rumbles gets up, I will answer the question that I suspect he and Mr Swinney want to ask. When we introduced the fuel tax escalator—yes, we introduced it—we did so at 4 per cent above the rate of inflation, and fuel prices were kept largely in line with fuel prices throughout Europe. It was the present Chancellor of the Exchequer who increased the rate by 50 per cent to 6 per cent; and it was this Government that opened the untenable gap between our prices and other European prices.

The land reform proposals have been hailed as measures to right some usually imagined wrongs that are supposed to have been gnawing at the hearts and minds of every Scot for heaven knows how many years. As so often happens, emotive words and aims that are powerful tools in an election campaign become bogged down in the cold light of day when reality begins to bite.

I much enjoyed and learned a lot from a tour of the north of Scotland with the Rural Affairs Committee, looking at examples of community buy-outs and other management practices. However, if those exercises do not get young people back into those societies, they are a waste of time. I was not convinced by stories that we heard in Assynt and other places, that young people were coming back.

Then there were the proposals on access—in particular, the proposals to allow responsible access to enclosed land. With those proposals, the Executive has stirred up a hornets' nest and it will find it hard to escape.

**Euan Robson:** Does the member accept that the common-law position is that the right to access enclosed land exists, and that the suggested statutory provision simply formalises an ancient right?

**Alex Fergusson:** That was an unnecessary intervention, but a fair enough point—which I am just about to address. It is interesting to note that the recently formed Right to Privacy Association has received 1,800 inquiries in less than a fortnight. People are beginning to wake up to the difficulties of policing and controlling a right of responsible access that would be interpreted by many of the less desirable elements in our society as a right to roam and a right to do exactly what they wanted to do. It is no wonder that much of rural Scotland feels under the cosh from the Executive.

It is with a spirit of optimism that we pick up a document that is boldly entitled "Rural Scotland: A New Approach". Our initial reaction is one of approval. It is hard to disagree with the sentiments expressed on the cover:

"Providing opportunity for young people—so they don't have to leave"

and

"Integral to Scotland's success, dynamic in harnessing its traditional strengths".

But sadly, throughout the document, we often get the right heading followed by self-righteous detail. On page 48, great play is made of the desire to create 15,000 hectares of native woodland by 2003. That is a good headline. However, although good for conservation, there is little or no commercial value in native and broad-leaf trees, and therefore little add-on value. I agree with Euan Robson that add-on value should be at the heart of the debate and, indeed, at the heart of the economic regeneration of rural Scotland.

The reasoning behind our amendment today is to establish that the single most effective way of kick-starting our rural economy is to add value to the primary products that we produce so well, and to do so by manufacturing them, processing them and marketing them as close to the point of origin as possible.

12:23

**Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** This has been an interesting debate, with many useful contributions from around the chamber. The debate has been much more useful than the document that we are debating, which is as empty as the speech that Mike Rumbles delivered.

Expectations of our new Scots Parliament in our rural communities are quite rightly high. Many people already feel that Edinburgh is a million miles closer than London ever was; they feel that our Parliament is much more accessible. However, it is fair to say that many of us are suffering from glossy document fatigue. When I

read this latest one, images are conjured up of Ross Finnie playing “Supermarket Sweep”, racing around St Andrews House, grabbing off the shelves any product that could be remotely linked to rural Scotland, and shoving it into his rural affairs shopping basket, which he then brings to the chamber to show us the goodies that he has collected—or should I say nicked, given that the Scottish Executive is not paying a penny towards many of the initiatives that the document mentions?

I will refer briefly to our traditional industries, which must be at the heart of the strategy for developing rural Scotland. It is vital that we consider rural affairs as much more than farming and fishing—a genuinely new approach is required. However, we must not forget the traditional industries, which contribute enormously to the economy and which are more than just job providers, because they are woven into the fabric of so many of our rural communities. We must help them to innovate, diversify and manage change, but at all costs we must ensure their survival.

I now refer to the concept of joined-up government and the joint ministerial committee on rural development, which we have heard much about from the minister. Rural affairs is more than fishing and farming—that is where joined-up government must come into play. That is much more than a cliché; it is an important concept. The difficulty is that we do not really know what the joint ministerial committee has been doing, what it has been up to and what it has delivered since it started to meet. It is enigmatic and mysterious.

I suggest that the next time it meets, the joint ministerial committee should invite ministers such as Wendy Alexander to attend; her right-to-buy policies, extended to rural housing associations, have caused fury throughout Scotland. Our rural housing associations had to go to war to try to get her to realise the damage that her policies would cause to the availability of affordable housing in rural communities.

Most of all, the next time that it meets, will the committee please also invite Jack McConnell, the Minister for Finance? Does Jack McConnell have any idea how his local government settlement is affecting rural Scotland? Other members, such as Alex Johnstone, mentioned that point during the debate.

There have, for example, been cuts of £13 million in Aberdeenshire Council’s budget. That hampers its ability to help rural communities to develop. Aberdeenshire Council is even cutting two thirds of the number of public toilets. What sort of message does that send out at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

The truth is that, under this Administration’s financial settlement, our rural communities are being rolled back; they are being returned to the dark ages. That is appalling. Many local authorities are being forced to close their local council offices. They cannot provide young people with proper facilities. Perhaps if the minister listens, he will be able to respond to those points later. As many others have mentioned, retaining young people in our rural communities is imperative if those communities are to prosper and survive. However, young people are dying to leave their communities because of a lack of facilities. That issue must be addressed—it is inadequately addressed by “Rural Scotland: A New Approach”.

The document also talks about the importance of education, but local authorities are having to cut back on their educational provision. Cathy Peattie mentioned the importance of voluntary groups and the role that they play in rural communities, yet most of their funding comes from local authorities, and that is being cut as well.

The budgets of drug agencies, which play a crucial role in rural Scotland, are being cut as well. Some of them, in rural areas of Aberdeenshire, faced closure recently because of those cuts. There is much in the document about transport, yet we hear that some local authorities are talking about cutting their two-lane highways to single track because they cannot afford to maintain them. Civilisation in rural Scotland has been rolled back under this Administration.

A recent article in *The Press and Journal* referred to a briefing paper that was published by Robert Gordon University, which

“warned pockets of rural poverty across the region have been ignored in fixing council spending limits. And it highlighted statistics on deprivation, drug-taking, and poor health.”

It goes on to say that the conclusions from the report

“apply to rural areas across the North and North-east, in Angus, Tayside, Moray, and Highland.”

That is the reality.

It is a pity that the document has been used as yet another delaying and stalling tactic; more shops will close, more banks will close and the heart will be ripped out of many more rural communities while we await a true and genuine response from the Executive to the many problems.

How can we trust the Executive when we look, for example, at page 40 of “Rural Scotland: A New Approach”? Alasdair Morgan referred to this in his opening speech. The Executive says:

“We will invest £1,800 million over the next three years to modernise water industry infrastructure.”

What a cheek. How can we trust a word that the document says when the Executive is claiming that it will invest £1.8 billion in the water industry, when it is people living in the north and north-east of Scotland who must foot the bill for that £1.8 billion? The Executive is not contributing a penny from the block, yet it claims in the document that it is contributing £1.8 billion. That is nothing short of lies and we need less of that. We must be much more honest with the rural communities. If we are going to be honest with the rural communities, we must talk about the reserved powers in Westminster and the damage that they are inflicting on our rural communities in Scotland.

Petrol is the biggest issue in rural Scotland right now. That is emphasised at the public meetings that the Rural Affairs Committee has held around Scotland. When committee members ask the people attending those meetings what the biggest issues facing them are, they are told: petrol, petrol, petrol.

We took a straw poll at a public meeting in Dingwall a couple of weeks ago, which was attended by 70 people from around the Highlands and Islands. We asked how many of them had travelled there by public transport: not one hand went up. Every single person who went to that meeting to speak to MSPs had to travel there by private car. That is the reality and the Executive cannot bury its head in the sand.

What does the minister think when people in villages, in the north of Scotland for example, look out of their windows and see the oil rigs sitting on top of the biggest oil reserves in the country, but know that their communities have no transport links and they have to pay the highest price for petrol in the whole of Europe? The strength of the pound is another issue about which the Executive cannot bury its head in the sand, given the damage to rural businesses that is being caused by cheap imports.

Ministers will find it difficult to make a real difference to our rural economy while they have one hand tied behind their back. The SNP amendment is right to point out that Westminster's anti-Scottish policies will continue to undermine the Parliament's efforts to develop the rural economy, just as Jack McConnell's financial settlement undermines the efforts of our local authorities in the many areas that they fund. We want all departments to work together to take into account the needs and aspirations of our rural communities, but we do not need the same old soundbites and more glossy documents. Actions speak louder than words, so let us have more action.

When we last had a rural development debate in the chamber, I said that the biggest challenge facing the Parliament was

"to make the phrase 'rural disadvantage' redundant."—  
[*Official Report*, 4 November 1999; Vol 4, c 333.]

The reality is that since the coalition was formed, matters have gone from bad to worse in rural Scotland. Scotland is a rich country and our rural communities must be allowed to have their fair share of that wealth. We need an independent Scotland, as only an independent Scotland will be good for rural Scotland.

12:31

**The Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr John Home Robertson):** I am grateful for the opportunity to reply to the debate, not only as the Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs in the rural affairs department, which the Executive established, but as someone who has lived and worked all his life in rural Scotland.

I have almost as much experience as you have, Presiding Officer, of representing rural Scotland in Parliament, so I know that rural Scotland needs a new approach. I strongly believe that the document, "Rural Scotland: A New Approach", and part of this debate have been an important step toward recognising the needs of rural Scotland, understanding the way forward for rural Scotland, and delivering policies that will make a difference to the citizens of rural Scotland. I say part of this debate because, sadly, much of it has been reminiscent of debates to which I have listened in Westminster and the silly, oppositionist style of politics that we tend to have there. Some people are more interested in scoring political points than in addressing the needs of rural Scotland.

Tory members should be aware that history did not start in 1997 or, indeed, in 1999. The problems about which Tory members have been talking have been developing for a long time, including in the period in which their people were in power, so a little bit of humility from them would not go amiss. I gently remind them that the deregulation of public transport did a certain amount of mischief to mobility in rural Scotland.

**Alex Fergusson:** Will the minister give way?

**Mr Home Robertson:** There is not time.

Tory members may recall the poll tax—I vividly remember how it affected my constituency. A hill shepherd living about 20 miles from the nearest lamppost had to pay the same regional poll tax as a merchant banker living in the centre of Edinburgh—that was not terribly clever. They acknowledge that the fuel duty escalator was invented some time ago—they have some baggage on that issue. [*Interruption.*] I am being heckled about lampposts by the member for North Tayside, Mr Swinney.

We have heard some predictable stuff from the

nationalists. For these purposes, I will include John Scott among the nationalists because practically everything that he said pointed toward detaching Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom—perhaps he will cross the floor of the chamber. Again we heard the nationalists committing to spending more money—with no indication of where the money would come from—and blaming absolutely everything on Westminster.

Alasdair Morgan is usually a fair guy. At one point in his speech he said that there could be no quick fixes for rural Scotland. So far, so good—he was right about that. However, he spoiled it by suggesting that in one bound, independence would make everything all right for rural Scotland. That is not so and he knows it as well as I do.

**Richard Lochhead** *rose*—

**John Scott** *rose*—

**Mr Home Robertson:** I am afraid that Mr Lochhead and others have taken up all my time—we are running over—so I will not give way.

If we expect Alasdair Morgan to be reasonable, we expect Fergus Ewing to be unreasonable—and he did not disappoint today.

**Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP)** *indicated agreement.*

**Mr Home Robertson:** I see Margaret Ewing acknowledging that Fergus Ewing can be unreasonable. I remind him gently that the fuel duty escalator has been done away with. The fact that that happened had some connection with representations made from Scotland by Westminster colleagues and colleagues in this Parliament.

**Fergus Ewing** *rose*—

**John Scott** *rose*—

**Mr Home Robertson:** I shall move on to the serious part of the debate. The partnership Administration represents rural Scotland, from the northern isles to the Borders, from Dumfries to the western isles, not forgetting the many rural areas in the middle of Scotland as well. We have heard about many of those areas today—Falkirk East, Dumfries, Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, Clydesdale and the Highlands. We have also heard about areas represented by our Liberal Democrat colleagues—Ross, Skye and Inverness West, Roxburgh and Berwickshire and wherever Mike Rumbles comes from. Where is it?

**Mr Rumbles:** West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine.

**Mr Home Robertson:** How could I possibly forget? It is impossible to reply to all the specific points raised, but I want to pick up two of them.

Cathy Jamieson mentioned the review of the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board. I understand its importance in underpinning the wages paid in many rural areas outside the agricultural industry. The situation is under review, but I am not yet in a position to announce anything. I understand her point. Cathy Jamieson may have pointed to one of the problems—I understand that the National Farmers Union of Scotland may have moved its ground, which could complicate the issue.

I rather agree with Karen Gillon's point about the definition of what is and what is not rural. Clydesdale is a rural constituency just as East Lothian largely is. That needs to be taken into account. This Administration understands rural Scotland, which is why we established the rural affairs department. The document demonstrates our commitment to delivering for rural Scotland.

Robin Harper and Christine Grahame raised the serious question of post offices. Members have expressed concern about the future of rural post offices, which is a subject that we have debated twice in the Parliament. I welcome the fact that we have had cast-iron assurances from the Government and the Post Office that cash payments will continue to be available for pensioners and benefit claimants after 2003. There are already developments, with every post office being connected to the Horizon computer system—I recently saw Gifford post office in my constituency being connected.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** Will the minister give way?

**Mr Home Robertson:** I do not have time.

We are actively engaged in discussion with our colleagues in the UK Government on the question of the impact of the changes on rural Scotland; we have input into the deliberations of the performance and innovation unit in the Cabinet Office. Anything that the Scottish Executive can do to help the development of business in rural post offices will be done.

The document that we are debating points the way forward for the delivery of the whole range of policies and services in rural Scotland. It states the Executive's determination to have regard to rural considerations across the board—not only in the rural affairs department, but in every department in the Scottish Executive. We are already demonstrating how that delivers benefits in education, transport, enterprise, health, justice, and communities and in understanding the root causes of rural poverty and beginning to tackle them. We are taking such matters very seriously indeed. We have come a long way from the dictatorial days of Michael Forsyth.

The ministerial committee on rural policy is the second example of a new kind of teamwork in

government, where every department has contributed to the fresh approach to meeting the needs of rural Scotland. That programme will be taken forward during this Parliament. It is important that that is done because 90 per cent of Scotland's land is rural and 30 per cent of Scottish people live in rural communities. It is a big issue for the Executive and for the Parliament. That is why we want to encourage discussion and participation by rural communities and stakeholders in the debate on "Rural Scotland: A New Approach".

When we reach decision time, members will have a choice between endorsing the Executive motion on this positive document and two amendments. The nationalists, who are more interested in breaking up the United Kingdom than in building up the rural economy, lodged one amendment. The Conservatives lodged the other, rather puzzling, amendment, which seems to ask us to concentrate exclusively on primary industries. We understand the importance of primary industries. That is why Ross Finnie and I are doing so much for fishing, forestry and farming. However, they account for only 15 per cent of the employment in rural Scotland—85 per cent of jobs in rural Scotland are in other industries such as tourism, services and IT. The document points towards the development of those industries. I hope that the Parliament will reject both amendments and will endorse the Executive motion at decision time.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate.

Before we come to the business motion, I give members notice that I have accepted an emergency question from Mr Jamie McGrigor on the threat to tomorrow's ferry services, to be taken at 3.30 pm. There have been many comments that I have never before accepted an emergency question. This is the first time and it is a good example of an emergency question. I ask members to tell other members during the lunch break that that will take place at 3.30 pm.

## Business Motion

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** the next item is business motion S1M-904, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Thursday 1 June 2000

9.30 am Time for Reflection

*followed by* Ministerial Statement

*followed by* Committee Business - Rural Affairs  
Committee Debate on Borders Rail Link

12.00 pm Business Motion

*followed by* Members' Business - debate on the subject of S1M-822 Mr Keith Harding: Bell Baxter High School in Cupar

2.30 pm Question Time

3.10 pm First Minister's Question Time

3.30 pm Executive Business

*followed by* Executive Motion on Insolvency Bill

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Wednesday 7 June 2000

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Stage 3 Debate on the Standards in Scotland's Schools Bill

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 8 June 2000

9.30 am Ministerial Statement

10.00 am Executive Business

*followed by* Business Motion

2.30 pm Question Time

3.10 pm First Minister's Question Time

3.30 pm Executive Debate on Learning Disability Review

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

and (b),

that Stage 2 of the Abolition of Poindings and Warrant Sales (Scotland) Bill be completed by 29 September 2000.—[Mr McCabe.]

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that motion S1M-904, in the name of Mr Tom McCabe, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

12:42

*Meeting suspended until 14:30.*

## Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### Modernising Government Fund (Bids)

**1. Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive when it intends to announce which of the initial bids for support from the modernising government fund have been successful at the initial stage of the process. (S1O-1806)

**The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell):** There have been more than 100 bids, which reflects a clear desire across the public sector in Scotland to modernise and improve the way we work together. An announcement of the bids that have been successful at the initial stage will be made before the summer recess.

**Lewis Macdonald:** Does the minister agree that this scheme has a role to play in achieving the aims of the social inclusion agenda? Moreover, is he aware of the dramatic increase in the uptake of free school meals since the piloting of smart card technology at two secondary schools in the city of Aberdeen? Does he further agree that that sort of project deserves and will benefit from support under the modernising government fund?

**Mr McConnell:** Aberdeen City Council has been very innovative with that particular scheme, which has made a real difference not just to the provision of free school meals but to other social inclusion objectives in Aberdeen. It is an example that could be taken up elsewhere. However, whether it will get support from the fund is a matter that we will have to consider in the weeks ahead.

#### Councils for Voluntary Service

**2. Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what its plans now are for the future funding of councils for voluntary service. (S1O-1795)

**The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie):** We have consulted on the findings of the review of the councils for voluntary service but have not yet issued our formal response. Discussions are taking place with the network to find the best way forward to develop the CVS network and to help it to contribute to our shared objectives.

**Mr Hamilton:** I was hoping for a longer answer.

Is the minister aware of the concerns of CVS services in rural areas that the new shared funding model will lead to a reduction in rural areas as it is based on population size? How will she attempt to rectify that problem?

**Jackie Baillie:** Although I was trying, in Duncan Hamilton's interests, to speak extraordinarily slowly, I take the point that there needs to be a balance between a minister having very long answers and the time needed to catch one's breath.

I am very aware of the concerns of rural CVS services; in fact, I am meeting Highland CVS to discuss those points. We are taking some time to consider the findings, because we want the right answer, not necessarily a quick one.

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** Does the minister agree that it is the Scottish Executive and Labour councils that are truly interested in furthering the needs of the voluntary sector? Does she further agree that local councils for voluntary service such as the Monklands Association of Voluntary Services and the Community and Voluntary Organisations Council (Motherwell District) in Lanarkshire respond to the training, support and development needs of local voluntary and community organisations?

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** I must ask members to speak into the microphone, because it is impossible to hear.

Perhaps you caught the question, minister.

**Jackie Baillie:** I caught most of it. I agree that CVSs have a crucial role to play at a local level in supporting and developing the voluntary sector and in working within the partnership arrangements that we have with local authorities, health boards, trusts and the voluntary sector.

## Education

**3. Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what measures are being taken to ensure that all Scots achieve an acceptable minimum level of literacy and numeracy. (S10-1783)

**The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish):** I announced on 15 May that we intend to establish a task group to identify the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy problems amongst adults. We shall then implement a programme of action to improve the situation.

**Marilyn Livingstone:** Does the minister agree that if we are to ensure that we have a truly inclusive society, we must ensure that this issue is tackled at all levels and that a joined-up approach by all the agencies involved is the way forward?

**Henry McLeish:** I wholeheartedly endorse Marilyn Livingstone's comments. This is a serious issue, but one that has been left off the political agenda for two or three decades—that is a scandal. The Executive wants to establish the issue as an important one. It is important not only for social inclusion, which is vital, but for the Scottish economy. We cannot afford to have a large number of adults in Scotland who do not have the basic levels of numeracy and literacy that will allow them to function in a modern society. It is a huge challenge and we intend to pursue it.

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** Can the minister tell me who will define what the acceptable minimum level of literacy and numeracy is? Will any consideration be given to the attitude of employers?

**Henry McLeish:** I welcome Annabel Goldie's comments. The issue affects adults and can be tackled through the workplace. I would like to think that employers and trade unions would be involved in our discussions. The key issue is that we must overcome the embarrassment and lack of confidence that many people without those skills feel. Employers have a vital role to play in that.

**Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow) (SNP):** Does the minister agree that the figures highlighted last week, which showed that up to a quarter of the Scottish adult population is not literate, are a matter of huge concern? Does he also agree that, since those figures were based on English research, there is a need for Scottish research to assess the extent of the problem in Scotland?

Does the minister further agree that the problem must be tackled in the early years of primary school and that one of the biggest barriers to that is an overcrowded curriculum? Will he try to persuade his colleague the Minister for Children and Education to secure a rebalancing of the curriculum in the early years of primary school to ensure that teachers get ample opportunity to teach young children the basic skills of reading and writing?

**Henry McLeish:** So that I do not step into territory that is not my responsibility, I will restrict myself to answering Nicola Sturgeon's first two points, with which I agree entirely. Although the figures were collected on a UK basis, part of the survey included Scotland. We have seen the Moser report, the figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the work that has been done by Glasgow Development Agency. However, we need our own figures. One of the first objectives of the task group will be to set in train original research that will ensure that we find not only the extent of the problem but also its nature. I hope that all parties will unite on this matter. It is a major campaign that is in the interests of Scotland.



### Roads (A76)

#### 4. Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to upgrade the A76 road from Kilmarnock to Dumfries. (S10-1793)

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** My spending proposals for the next two years include the construction of two road improvement schemes, at Crossroads and Gateside, and the replacement of Afton bridge at an overall cost of £2.3 million.

**Alex Fergusson:** The minister will be aware of the disdain with which the route action plan for the A76 and the A75 has been greeted in Dumfries and Galloway. Is she also aware of the considerable local concern about the effect that the welcome upgrade of the A77 to motorway standards will have on the A76, an already heavily used road? If she is, why are there no greater plans to upgrade that road, and if she is not, why not?

**Sarah Boyack:** There is a route accident reduction plan for the A76 and the schemes that I announced are a key part of that. Clearly, there are other schemes that can be pursued as part of the A76 improvement and they will be programmed for the future. We have invested £3 million in the route already and the extra money that was allocated this year will bring further improvements.

**Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab):** This is a road with which I am extremely familiar, and I am aware of the announcements that the minister made in March about the new projects. Will the minister tell us whether other projects are planned for future years, especially on the section between New Cumnock and Dumfries, which is particularly hazardous?

**Sarah Boyack:** The Afton bridge is at New Cumnock, and that is a welcome improvement. There are four improvement schemes that have not been programmed yet, which will have to be considered in a future review of investment in our trunk roads. The schemes are clearly important, and come on the back of work that has already been done. However, those outstanding schemes will have to be considered in our forthcoming review of investment in route action plan schemes.

### Regional Selective Assistance

**5. Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive, further to the answer by Henry McLeish to question S1W-5907 on 2 May 2000, how much of the £4 million in regional selective assistance given to Kvaerner Energy Ltd since 1 April 1989 was awarded in connection with its operation in Clydebank. (S10-1791)

**The Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Henry McLeish):** Kvaerner in Clydebank has received two awards of regional selective assistance since 1989, totalling £760,000.

**Des McNulty:** As the minister knows, the trade unions are in negotiation with the employers. Bearing in mind the current high level of unemployment in Clydebank, will the minister do all that he can to ensure the retention of manufacturing jobs and work with the various agencies to bring additional jobs to the town?

**Henry McLeish:** We are working hard to achieve those objectives. The new products and services divisions of Kvaerner Energy Ltd in Clydebank have been bought by GE Caledonian, which is a huge success story. The manufacturing group has a preferred bidder in the Texaco Group plc, which is also encouraging. Although we understand the frustrations of the work force, I am sure that there will be a successful outcome.

Unemployment in Clydebank and Milngavie has fallen by 240 in the past year. That is encouraging. However, 1,790 people are still unemployed, and that is far too many. That is one reason why I am going to visit the area on 14 June to discuss with Des McNulty, who has done a tremendous job in bringing these matters to my attention, what else can be done to ensure that Clydebank shares the prosperity that is developing throughout Scotland.

### Genetically Modified Organisms

**6. Mr Kenny MacAskill (Lothians) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has any plans to review the guidelines for genetically modified crop trial sites and in particular the exclusion distance between genetically modified and conventional crops. (S10-1774)

**The Minister for Rural Affairs (Ross Finnie):** Separation distances are designed to minimise the extent of cross-pollination and are kept under continuous review to take account of the best available scientific evidence. If the information that the rural affairs department is seeking on the precise circumstances of the contamination that arose in Canada provides new evidence, that will be reflected in revised guidelines.

**Mr MacAskill:** Would the minister care to comment on where the power seems to lie with regard to the recent scandal involving Advanta? It would appear that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was told about the contamination on 17 April, but that information was not transmitted to the Minister for Rural Affairs until 15 May. When did the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food find out from Advanta, when did he tell the Minister for Rural Affairs and when were the rest of the members of the Scottish

Parliament advised?

Is it not the case that, in areas in which power is devolved, this Parliament should know contemporaneously with Westminster, and that it is not up to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food south of the border to decide when, on a whim of fancy, he will tell us?

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. Questions must not contain statements of opinion. They are meant to be questions to the minister.

**Ross Finnie:** Advanta was aware of the contamination on 3 April. That information became known to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 17 April. The Scottish Executive became aware of the problem on 15 May, as did other offices such as the Wales Office.

I want to make clear two points in relation to this matter. First, the fact that Advanta knew about the contamination on 3 April, before the Scottish sowing season had started, but did not release that information is a matter that we are examining with law officers. Secondly, I make no attempt to hide my deep anger and annoyance at the failure to transmit that information to us and to other agriculture departments. That is not acceptable.

My priority has been to try to establish the facts so that we can give advice on aspects of human health, the impact on the food chain, the risks to the environment and on the question of compensation to our farmers, who would have expected to receive recompense in relation to integrated administration and control systems claims and for the sale of the crop. We are trying to establish those facts as quickly as possible in order to give proper advice.

**Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con):** On a very practical point, if alternative advice is received on minimum separation distances and if farmers who fall within the new minimum separation distances for the crop trials being conducted in Scotland are affected, will the Executive be able to compensate them in any way?

**Ross Finnie:** That question would arise if the issue of compensation actually arose. If the evidence in relation to the current incident shows that there is a need for new guidelines, we will introduce them. The implications for crop trials would be a separate matter. Since they are trials, the question of commercial return on them is difficult and I do not want to anticipate the issue of compensation. However, I want to make clear that if the evidence calls for new buffer zones, we will implement such zones.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** In view of the procrastination by Westminster that has been revealed by the minister, will he insist that

immediate compensation to farmers to enable them to take up and destroy the planted Advanta seed in Scotland comes out of the Westminster budget, and as soon as possible?

**Ross Finnie:** I have indicated my serious concerns about the way that MAFF has handled the matter, but it would be a mistake for us simply to exonerate Advanta. That seems to me an extraordinary proposition. It was Advanta that became aware of the problem on 3 April; it was Advanta that failed to notify those to whom it had distributed the seed; and it was Advanta that permitted farmers in Scotland to sow the crops without reviewing that information. I am not about to give that kind of advice to farmers until we are in possession of all the facts.

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** The crop trial on oil-seed rape in Scotland is in my constituency. Can the minister confirm whether, as part of that crop trial, pollination distances are being measured and that that will be a useful addition to the knowledge of that aspect of genetically modified crops?

**Ross Finnie:** That takes me back to my earlier answer. I am very concerned that the current advice from the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment gives us certain assurances on seed purity and that, as a consequence of that, it sets the perimeters for the buffer zones. At first sight the information from Canada suggests that they will have to be reviewed. I repeat the undertaking that if that scientific advice shows that the buffer zones need to be reviewed, the Scottish Executive will act immediately.

### Social Inclusion Partnerships

**7. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to monitor the role of social inclusion partnerships in meeting the needs and priorities of women. (S10-1796)

**The Deputy Minister for Communities (Jackie Baillie):** Arrangements for monitoring the performance of social inclusion partnerships were set out in the monitoring framework, published in December 1999. The framework requires partnerships to monitor their progress according to a number of key measures. Specifically, partnerships have been asked to disaggregate all information by gender so that the impact of their regeneration strategies on the quality of life of women in target areas can be assessed.

**Johann Lamont:** Does the deputy minister agree that there is a general issue about monitoring and re-evaluating the work of local SIPs and that it is important that communities are reassured that the process is rigorous and transparent? Will she ensure that, in the

evaluation process, local SIPs take on the recommendations about working with women and identifying their needs and priorities, and does she agree that SIPs should be in real dialogue with women, given the crucial role that women often play in holding families and communities together in difficult circumstances?

**Jackie Baillie:** That is why we introduced the monitoring framework. In addition to that, the Scottish Executive has an annual appraisal of all SIPs in which we can take on board those points. I entirely accept the need for dialogue with all communities that social inclusion partnerships represent and with the women who form the backbone of a substantial number of community organisations and regeneration initiatives.

**Mr Gil Paterson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Does the minister agree that women in the SIP areas are particularly vulnerable, and that they will be concerned about stories in today's press that the Scottish Executive will renege on its commitment to introduce anti-rape laws?

**Jackie Baillie:** I am not aware of the article to which Mr Paterson refers, but I shall address his point about women in social inclusion partnership areas. Communities in SIP areas have a significant number of problems. Through a process of dialogue and consultation, we aim to arrive at strategies and projects to address them. In the Glasgow area, for example, funding has been given to the greater Easterhouse child care project and mobile crèche, to Drumchapel Women's Aid and to the greater Pollok out-of-school care consortium. That is making a real difference to the lives of women on the ground in social inclusion partnership areas.

### Modernising Government

**8. Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it is making with the modernisation of government in Scotland. (S10-1804)

**The Minister for Finance (Mr Jack McConnell):** In recent months, we have held two successful workshops involving public, private and voluntary sector leaders and have received a large number of bids for the modernising government fund. We have bid for Cabinet Office funding for civil service reform, set electronic Government targets to be achieved by 2005, launched a review of public appointments and awarded pump-priming funding to the Scottish Civic Forum. We will publish a fuller action plan in the summer.

**Allan Wilson:** What progress has been made in delivering e-services, and are there any plans to extend such provision into local government?

**Mr McConnell:** Early in April, the First Minister endorsed the new target set by the Prime Minister

to have all public services run by Government in the UK available online by 2005. Tomorrow, Peter Peacock, Frank McAveety and I will meet leaders and chief executives of Scotland's 32 councils to discuss how the local authorities, which run most government services, can help to achieve that target. We look forward to positive discussions and are determined to take strides to ensure that Scotland leads the world in that area.

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** What consideration has been given to the significance of the location of Government departments in the quest to modernise government? In the spirit of the comments from Allan Wilson about e-services, would not there have been an opportunity for the Government to locate the Scottish university for industry in a location outwith the central belt, given its dependence on information technology?

**Mr McConnell:** I see by the expression on your face, Presiding Officer, that you are questioning the appropriateness of Mr Swinney's follow-up question, but I am happy to answer it.

The Scottish Executive has a good firm policy on the relocation of departments. We will positively consider every available opportunity for new agencies or departments, or for those agencies and departments whose leases on their buildings are coming to an end, to be relocated outwith Edinburgh. In the case of the university for industry, I am sure that Mr McLeish considered all the available options.

As we are here in Glasgow, given the nature of the university for industry, the industrial history and current position of the west of Scotland and the need for higher education facilities for adult returners and those requiring lifelong learning in Glasgow and the west of Scotland, I am proud to stand by Mr McLeish's decision. It is exactly right for Glasgow and for the whole of Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** I was listening carefully to the question, which was in order.

**Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab):** Does the minister agree that in a modern Scotland, which has been transformed by a revolution in information technology, there is no longer any need for the civil service to be in the same physical location as the Government or the Parliament? Although I hear what he said in response to Mr Swinney about moving civil service jobs out of Edinburgh, they should also be moved out of the axis between Edinburgh and Glasgow. The net economic impact will include an evaluation of any displacement effect that the project might have on other traders in the area. Some of us believe that no progress will be made in modernising government in Scotland until we see cities like Dundee getting their fair share.

**Mr McConnell:** I agree with much of what Mr McAllion says. Scotland is changing—not only do we have electronic communications, but there is a process of devolution that goes beyond Parliament. In such a Scotland it is right and proper that we should spread jobs and give opportunities to people to hold stable civil service jobs away from the Glasgow-Edinburgh axis. It is appropriate that we do that—

**Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Name one.

**Mr McConnell:** I can. The Food Standards Agency is based in Aberdeen. Members from Aberdeen campaigned very well for that and they were absolutely right to do so. If the members on the nationalist benches would acknowledge that, they would do themselves some honour.

It is right and proper that we examine all cases on their own merits. We will do that and jobs will be dispersed when the circumstances dictate that that is right.

#### Draft Transport Bill

**9. Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is committed to reducing traffic growth and whether that will be a key objective of its draft transport bill. (S10-1768)

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** We are committed to reducing traffic growth whenever and wherever appropriate as part of our vision of a sustainable, effective and integrated transport system that addresses the needs of everybody in our society. The bill will provide tools to progress that strategy.

**Robert Brown:** I thank the minister for that answer. Does she agree that improved public transport is one of the keys to achieving that aim? Will the bill facilitate early realisation of the Glasgow airport rail link and cross-Glasgow rail links, which are so essential to the improvement of public transport in the Glasgow metropolis?

**Sarah Boyack:** I agree that the bill must set a framework for the improvement of public transport services. One of the key elements of the bill, to which I would draw Robert Brown's attention, is its provision for regional transport partnerships. Those will be able to build on the excellent work that Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive has done and will be able to focus on issues such as commuting and some of the major reasons for congestion in our major cities. Partnerships will also be able to identify forums on which local authorities can work with transport operators and key business groups to identify the best ways in which to develop improvements to the public transport network.

**Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Can

the minister commit to offering new money to local authorities to provide viable alternatives to the car—alternatives such as accessible, efficient and safe park-and-ride facilities—rather than achieving the desired traffic reduction by hammering motorists again?

**Sarah Boyack:** I want to make it absolutely clear that it is not the Executive's intention to force people not to use their cars. We want to give people choice—all members in the chamber can sign up to that. We are putting new money into public transport. Our £90 million public transport fund for the next three years will provide for facilities such as those which Linda Fabiani requests. Park-and-ride facilities enable people to use their cars for part of the journey and to use high-quality bus and rail facilities for the rest of the journey.

We are also committed to providing opportunities that give parents an alternative to taking their children to school by making options such as walking, cycling or using public transport safer. That is why this morning I announced £5.2 million of new investment for local authorities.

**Mrs Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab):** Does the minister agree that one way to cut traffic growth on the M8 would be to support the extension to Airdrie of the successful Bathgate-to-Edinburgh rail line?

**Sarah Boyack:** We are examining, in our multi-modal studies of the M8 and M80, what the key investments should be for the future in terms of providing for modal shift where opportunities exist for that. I expect that those studies will examine closely all such schemes as the one that Mrs Mulligan mentioned.

#### Glencoe Visitor Centre

**10. Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will review the extent to which any public funding should be provided for the National Trust for Scotland's plans for the Glencoe visitor centre and Glencoe itself, and in particular for the trust's planned 66-seat restaurant and shops, and what assessment has been made of any effect that initiative might have on existing businesses in Glencoe and Ballachulish. (S10-1778)

**The Deputy Minister for Highlands and Islands and Gaelic (Mr Alasdair Morrison):** Lochaber Ltd is in the process of assessing an application for financial assistance that it has received from the National Trust for Scotland in respect of the trust's visitor centre and other proposed developments in Glencoe. That assessment will address the funding requirement, additionality and the net economic impact.

**Fergus Ewing:** I give a guarded welcome to

that answer.

Does the minister share my surprise this week on reading the remarks of the new chairman of the National Trust for Scotland, Roger Wheeler, who chose to compare the effect that the new commercial centre at Glencoe would have on local businesses to that of a Safeway on the pre-existing small shops in an area—which, presumably, go out of business? Does he agree that such a comparison is inappropriate, not least because Safeway does not receive grants of up to £400,000 when creating a new supermarket? Does he share my concern that people in the Highlands and Islands are worried that bodies such as the National Trust for Scotland, while performing many good works, seem on occasion to be treated in a preferential fashion?

**Mr Morrison:** I note very carefully the issues highlighted by Fergus Ewing. I assure Mr Ewing that every application for financial assistance through the Highlands and Islands Enterprise network—in this instance, through Lochaber Ltd—is given careful consideration. It is appraised in terms of viability, additionality and displacement. Surely Mr Ewing must agree that these decisions are best taken locally rather than centrally.

**Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the minister confirm whether the National Trust's remit has changed from that of guardian of our culture and heritage to that of a profit-making organisation with an economic advantage, capable of putting local people out of business?

**Mr Morrison:** That is a highly irresponsible and reckless question. I want to reaffirm the position set out in our tourism strategy, which concluded, among other things, that any business must invest and modernise if it is to remain competitive. The investment in the upgrading of the National Trust centre in Glencoe reflects the need to enhance businesses and visitor centres if we are to remain competitive in the global market.

### Fishing (Fleet Reduction)

**11. Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it is aware of any new proposals by the European Commission to reduce the size of the fishing fleet. (S10-1758)

**The Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr John Home Robertson):** On 10 May, the Commission announced proposals for further cuts in fishing fleet capacity across Europe in the context of its report on the mid-term review of multi-annual guidance programme IV. The proposals are in our view unacceptable and we will convey that view to the European Commission when I attend the next Fisheries Council on 16 June with my colleague from the Ministry of

Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

**Richard Lochhead:** I welcome the minister's comments. As he will be aware, the fishing industry in Scotland is working on technical conservation measures, so when the idea was mooted that officials in the European Commission might be making proposals to reduce further the size of the Scottish fishing fleet, it was met with absolute fury. Will the minister confirm that it is his policy to oppose cuts in the Scottish fishing fleet not just at the Fisheries Council in June, but at any future Fisheries Council?

**Mr Home Robertson:** We support the principle of sustainable fisheries, which means keeping fleet capacity and fishing capacity in line with the available stocks of fish in the sea. Those stocks can change and we must take account of such changes in the future. There may be problems of excess capacity in other European fishing fleets, but I am satisfied that we in Scotland and the United Kingdom are fulfilling our obligations by means of effort control, as well as capacity constraints. For that reason, there is no possible justification at this stage for this peculiarly timed proposal from the Commission to cut back our pelagic fleet by 14,000 tonnes. That is why my MAFF colleague and I intend to take a very robust line on the proposal at the Luxembourg Council on 16 June. We may need to reconsider it in future.

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** Does the minister share, as I do, the real concerns in the white fish sector about the supply of fish? Does that not illustrate the need for a co-ordinated examination of the scientific work that is being done in this area by the Government and by institutions such as the North Atlantic Fisheries College? Does he believe, as I do, that we need science that is believed by fishermen to underpin the decision on future catching effort?

**Mr Home Robertson:** I am aware of the excellent work that is being done at the North Atlantic Fisheries Colleague in Scalloway. When seeking to manage stocks properly, there is no substitute for good, sound science and information. One ought to take account of that information when making decisions about the size of the fleet and effort control in the future, and that is what we intend to do.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Does the minister accept that the Scottish fleet has been reduced sufficiently? Will he endeavour to induce a change of policy in the common fisheries policy whereby an element of local conservation input and control is injected into each identifiable fishery area?

**Mr Home Robertson:** I have already said that I am satisfied that we are fulfilling our obligations under MAGP IV. We will continue to do that, as a

responsible Government that intends to look after fishing stocks in our seas. Phil Gallie's point about local management and control is in tune with what the Executive is attempting to do. As he will be aware, we have already taken forward the Shetland Islands Regulated Fishery (Scotland) Order 1999. We are seeking to encourage other forms of local management of fisheries.

### Roads (A1 and A720)

**12. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what the most up-to-date plans are for upgrading the A1 and the Edinburgh city bypass. (S1O-01755)

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** My spending proposals for the next two years include the construction of new sections of dual carriageway on the A1 between Haddington and Dunbar and at Houndwood.

On the A720, work is presently under way to strengthen the road between Dreghorn and the Water of Leith bridge, and to add hard shoulders.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** While I welcome the minister's response, does she agree that the Borders, the south-east and Edinburgh rely heavily on the road network for employment, commerce and tourism and that every effort should be made urgently to upgrade the A1 and to improve the outer city bypass as quickly as possible, to make them safer and better equipped to serve people who live in those areas?

**Sarah Boyack:** I am happy to agree with Lord James that we need to tackle safety issues and that we need to ensure that we tackle the issue of improving the A1. That is precisely what our schemes are intended to do. I am aware that a public exhibition is currently being held on this matter and that John Home Robertson was there yesterday. There was great public interest in the expressway scheme on the A1. The work that is currently in progress on the A720 will bring relief from some of the main problems.

### Health Department

**13. Shona Robison (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive what the explanation is for the time taken by the health service funding authority and its health gains division to give notification of 2000-01 budgets for health councils. (S1O-01762)

**The Minister for Health and Community Care (Susan Deacon):** Health council chief officers were advised last year that in future their budgets would roll forward and be updated by a percentage similar to that applied to health board budgets.

**Shona Robison:** The minister will be aware that

there was a delay in the announcement of funding to Tayside health council that resulted in its not knowing whether it could produce and distribute its regular newsletter. Does the minister agree that health councils are the patients' voice in the health service and that funding should have been sorted out in early April? Can she assure me that there will not be the same delay next year?

**Susan Deacon:** A change has been made to the arrangements for funding health councils to provide greater stability and financial security for the future and to enable them to plan more effectively. As I said, chief officers were advised of the changes last year.

I gladly agree with Shona Robison about the importance of local health councils. The funding arrangements that have been put in place represent a 5 per cent increase on last year, which is an increase of £88,000 in the distribution to health councils. The Scottish Executive is also funding two development officer posts—one for training, the other for public involvement—to ensure that health councils can be effectively developed and play a key role in the health service.

### Enterprise and Lifelong Learning

**14. Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what progress it has made in increasing employment opportunities for disabled people. (S1O-01770)

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen):** A comprehensive range of policy measures is in place to ensure that those with disabilities or other special needs can play an effective part in Scotland's economic future and gain access to education and lifelong learning to improve their employability.

We are committed to widening access to further and higher education. The needs of people with disabilities will be a key element in taking forward our response to the Beattie committee report, our current consultation on student support and our commitment to targeting resources on the most disadvantaged students and unemployed people.

**Nora Radcliffe:** I thank the minister for his answer and welcome the things he mentions, but what assurances can the Scottish Executive give groups such as Gordon Disability Action in Inverurie, whose core funding has been cut and whose lottery funding will run out in July, that they will be able to continue their valuable work in promoting opportunities for disabled people? Does the Scottish Executive agree that more incentives and more stability of funding is needed for Gordon Disability Action and other similar innovative and user-led organisations?

**Nicol Stephen:** I am aware of Gordon Disability Action and the good work it does; I am not aware of the details of its funding. Voluntary organisations have a vital role to play in such work. I realise the importance of stable, longer-term funding to many such organisations. Having to fund on a project-by-project basis can create unfortunate uncertainty.

The Executive is making additional funding available for disabled people in a variety of ways. In our response to the Beattie committee report, funding and the role of voluntary organisations will be key issues.

**Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP):** Is the minister aware that the therapeutic earnings regulations on benefits cause difficulty for disabled people in gaining employment—especially for disabled people who live in supported accommodation—as they restrict the amount of time people can work and the level of wage they may earn?

In his commitment to ensure that disabled people have an opportunity to be involved in the employment market, will the minister make representations to social security ministers to have those regulations either relaxed or removed so that disabled people will have full opportunities to gain purposeful employment?

**Nicol Stephen:** I am aware of the importance of the benefits issue. Again, I am not aware of details of the particular example Mr Matheson gives, but one of the benefits of the joint ministerial committees is the opportunity for the Scottish Executive to work together with the United Kingdom Government on such issues and to make appropriate representations.

## First Minister's Question Time

### SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

#### United Kingdom Parliament (Visits)

**1. Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP):** To ask the acting First Minister when he next plans to visit the Westminster Parliament. (S1F-335)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** I was in the Westminster Parliament on Monday of last week and I intend to be there again some time following that Parliament's Whitsun recess.

**Mr Salmond:** As the acting First Minister is well aware, we are much further ahead on section 2A than they are south of the border. Does he welcome, as I do, the fact that the proposed amendment 141 to the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill has now been supported by every party in this chamber? Is there not an obligation on us to turn that consensus in the chamber into acceptance outwith the chamber? Will that not depend on clarity of expression? To help us in that process, will the acting First Minister reassure us by saying that, after the passage of the bill, a local authority that ignores guidelines on sex education will be in breach of its obligations to the Parliament and to parents?

**Mr Wallace:** I confirm what Mr Salmond said: the amendment that was passed has enjoyed cross-party support. I agree that there is consensus in this Parliament for the repeal of section 2A and for the amendment that has been accepted, and I hope that we can—as we ought to—generate that consensus in the community. As Mr Salmond knows well, it is being proposed that ministers may issue statutory guidance—indeed, it is accepted that they will—that will place on Scotland's local authorities an obligation to follow it.

**Mr Salmond:** I have the proposed guidance that was circulated on 28 February. It is very helpful indeed. In paragraphs 6, 7 and 8, there is specific reference to the curriculum, to the content and to the guidelines. Does the acting First Minister agree that an artificial distinction between guidance and guidelines is not sustainable? To provide the reassurance that people outside the chamber will require if they are to agree with the consensus inside it, will the acting First Minister state that a local authority that ignored guidelines on sex education would be in breach of its obligations to the Parliament and parents?

**Mr Wallace:** I confess some surprise at Mr Salmond's question because he knows well that

there is an important distinction between guidance and guidelines.

Statutory guidelines on the content of the curriculum have never been part of the Scottish education tradition and it is not the intention of the Executive to make them part of Scottish education.

**Mr Salmond:** Neither do we support a national curriculum, but we do support a statutory underpinning of guidelines.

Does the acting First Minister accept that the guidance notes contain references to the curriculum, the content and the guidelines? Does he accept that the interpretation of Judith Gillespie—who originally suggested this amendment—is exactly the same as ours? Does he accept that to turn the consensus that is growing in this chamber, which many of us have been looking for for a number of months, into acceptance outwith it—and not to squander an opportunity to resolve this debate outside the chamber—an artificial distinction between guidelines and guidance is not sustainable? Does he accept that a local authority in Scotland must have an obligation to make guidelines on sex education meaningful rather than meaningless?

**Mr Wallace:** Again, it causes me some surprise that Mr Salmond is saying that there is an artificial distinction. I think he knows the importance of the distinction between statutory guidelines, which have never been part of the Scottish education tradition, and the guidance that we believe will be statutory and will underpin the guidance that ministers issue to directors of education.

I regret very much that Mr Salmond seems to be breaking the consensus.

### Prime Minister (Meetings)

**2. David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con):** To ask the First Minister when he next intends to meet the Prime Minister and what issues he plans to raise with him. (S1F-345)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** I am sure that I speak on behalf of the whole Parliament in congratulating the Prime Minister and Mrs Blair on the birth of their new son.

I hope to meet the Prime Minister at a forthcoming joint ministerial committee meeting.

**David McLetchie:** I hope that the acting First Minister will not be asked to change a nappy; but the Prime Minister might ask him to change a policy, following on from some of the questions Mr Salmond asked today about section 28, or 2A.

As the Labour Government's replacement for section 28 in England and Wales would give

statutory recognition to the institution of marriage, a family man such as the Prime Minister would no doubt agree with the Conservatives that the same should apply in Scotland. Why is the acting First Minister not prepared to introduce a similar replacement section in the bill in Scotland, which would recognise the important place of marriage in Scottish society and in raising children?

**Mr Wallace:** It is important to make the point that we will devise a Scottish solution to this specific Scottish issue. The measure that the Scottish Executive has brought in and added as a section in the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc (Scotland) Bill, emphasises the importance of the stability of family life. I indicated, when I announced the Executive's proposals on family law, that marriage is

"the most recognisable and widely accepted way of signalling to society a couple's commitment to each other and to their life together as parents."—[*Official Report*, 20 Jan 2000; Vol 4, c 275]

I equally recognised that many children do not live in families where their parents are married. It would be wrong for the Executive or the Parliament to discriminate in some way against those children. I emphasise again that it is our belief that family settings—albeit they take diverse forms—are nevertheless the best setting for the care and upbringing of children.

**David McLetchie:** The problem with the Executive's Scottish solution is that it is not acceptable to the Scottish people. The Executive stubbornly refuses to put any mention of marriage in the replacement clause when everyone, including its colleagues in Westminster, the Churches in Scotland and Mr McMahon from its own back benches, are telling it to think again. In light of yesterday's decision at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, will the acting First Minister agree that it has, sadly, taken the eviction of the Scottish Parliament from the assembly hall for a resolution to be passed in that chamber that reflects public opinion in Scotland on this issue?

**Mr Wallace:** Public opinion in Scotland would agree with the amendment that we added to the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc (Scotland) Bill, which recognises the importance of stable family life as the best way of bringing up children.

The working group that was set up to examine the guidance and how sex education is taught in school praised the work that is being done in our schools and the draft guidance that had been prepared. With these measures in force—the statutory underpinning of guidance to local authorities, the amendment that refers to the importance of having regard to the stage of development of each child and to the stability of family life, and the removal from the statute book



of a piece of legislation that was passed in 1987 and which a section of our population finds offensive and prejudicial—we will have a package that will commend itself to the Scottish people.

**Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** The Deputy First Minister will be aware that the European Committee is undertaking a very important inquiry into European structural funds and additionality. When he meets the Prime Minister, will he tell him that the refusal by Gordon Brown and John Reid to give evidence to the inquiry is tantamount to contempt of the Parliament? Does he agree that they should attend? Does he agree that the real agenda of Gordon Brown and John Reid is to stop the Parliament growing and flourishing and to stop it achieving its full potential? Will he tell the Prime Minister that the Parliament deplores their decision not to attend to give evidence?

**Mr Wallace:** Although I am not a member of the same party as the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I have to say that my dealings with them as Westminster ministers have shown me that they are supportive of the Parliament. Tomorrow I will meet the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss issues such as the knowledge economy and tackling poverty jointly with Westminster and the National Assembly for Wales. That is indicative of their commitment to supporting the work of the Parliament.

**Bruce Crawford:** He should be attending the European Committee.

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Order. When you have had the chance to ask your question, you should not add to it by shouting, Mr Crawford.

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab):** When the Deputy First Minister next meets the Prime Minister, will he ask him what legal advice the UK Government has received on the implications of the European convention on human rights for the cross-examination of rape victims by the alleged perpetrator? Will he then have second thoughts on allowing that totally unacceptable practice to continue, or can he here and now correct the incorrect and wrong-headed interpretation of the European convention on human rights that is attributed to the Scottish Executive on page 1 of *The Scotsman* today?

**Mr Wallace:** I am grateful to Mr Chisholm for giving me the opportunity to remind the Parliament that on 20 January, in a reply to a question from Johann Lamont, I said that we wanted to introduce legislation on that issue. I did not hide the fact that there were practical issues to be addressed with regard to the European convention on human rights. Nevertheless, we intend to introduce

legislation that is robust and will stand up to challenge and give the proper protection that victims of crime, and in particular rape victims, justifiably deserve.

### Genetically Modified Organisms

**3. Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what measures can be put in place to ensure that seed growers and distributors do not sell GM contaminated seed as non-GM seed. (S1F-346)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** The Scottish Executive, in common with the other UK agriculture departments, is already taking steps to strengthen existing measures for monitoring and controlling the GM content of seeds. That involves the development of an industry-wide code of practice and the introduction of new requirements for the import of seeds from third countries.

In the light of recent events, however, we are taking further measures to strengthen controls, including introducing spot checks on seed imports from 1 June and proposals for new international standards on seed purity in relation to GM material.

**Dr Jackson:** As farmers in my constituency are now contacting me on this issue, can the Deputy First Minister give details of how farmers should effectively dispose of their GM-contaminated crop, which is now germinating? Secondly, will he add anything about compensation, which Ross Finnie discussed earlier?

**Mr Wallace:** I advise farmers not to take precipitate action that might compromise their position. As my colleague Ross Finnie said in reply to an earlier question, on the basis of current advice there are no public health or environmental reasons for the destruction of crops. We are trying to gather as much information as possible, not least from Canada. We will continue to monitor the situation very closely.

If any farmer considers that he has suffered significant loss as a result of contaminated seed supplied by the company, he should consider carefully with his legal advisers the remedies that might be available vis-à-vis the company.

**Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green):** Will the Deputy First Minister confirm that the sterile GM plants resulting from the Monsanto GM contamination of Advanta seeds can be fertilised by the rest of the rape plants? Is the Executive content for those plants to go into the food chain via animal feed, because of the lack of animal food regulations? Will he also confirm that the GM variety has not been approved under the deliberate release directive?

**Mr Wallace:** As Mr Harper will appreciate from answers that have already been given, we are making a close and detailed evaluation of the issues, including fertility, to which he referred. I understand that there is no advice yet from the relevant animal feed advisory bodies regarding possible routes into the food chain. I emphasise the importance of getting the best information that is available so that it will be possible to address some of the valid questions raised by Mr Harper.

### Age Discrimination (Guidance)

**5. Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Executive has issued any guidance about age discrimination to the public bodies for which it has responsibility. (S1F-339)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** Equality and employment legislation are reserved to Westminster. The Scottish Executive shares the United Kingdom Government's view that age discrimination is unfair and makes no economic sense.

The Executive's policy of promoting equality for all is made clear to all public bodies for which we are responsible.

**Christine Grahame:** As the minister is aware, 61,000 people in Scotland are victims of dementia. Unlike any other group, they are liable for their nursing costs if they are treated in a residential or nursing home. My question is in two parts. With respect, I would be pleased to receive a clear and direct answer to each.

Part one: does the acting First Minister accept that compelling older people to sell their homes to meet that liability is a brutal and indefensible example of age discrimination?

Part two: will he support the principles of my dementia bill, which would outlaw the practice at the stroke of a ministerial pen?

**Mr Wallace:** For a minute that was a bit like being back in May—having two-part questions to answer. As Christine Grahame knows, such questions do not relate to the employment practices of the Scottish Executive, but to the implementation of the Sutherland report, parts of which have been implemented. As is well known from recent debates in the Parliament, Susan Deacon and Iain Gray are taking forward many of the Sutherland recommendations. Some of those are reserved to Westminster, but others can be dealt with here. We are pursuing them and will report regularly to the Parliament when decisions are made.

**Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP):** Is the minister aware that the demonstration by

Strathclyde elderly forum at the Parliament today is against the very worst form of age discrimination—poverty through age? What representations does the minister propose to make to the Prime Minister on age-related poverty in Scotland? What particular protest will he convey about the dire insult of a 75p a week pension increase?

**The Presiding Officer:** The last part of that is outside the scope of the question.

**Mr Wallace:** Dorothy-Grace Elder's question is opportune. I have said that there will be a meeting tomorrow of the joint ministerial committee on poverty. Addressing the issues of pensioner poverty is on the agenda. It is important that the Scottish Executive works together with Westminster, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Office to improve the lot of pensioners in our country. I am sure that the whole chamber will join me in saying that that is a proper objective. We are trying to take concrete steps to do that.

**Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con):** Is the Deputy First Minister aware of the compulsory retirement age in the fire service? Given his earlier comments, does he agree that that can prove wasteful of experience, knowledge and expertise?

**Mr Wallace:** Mr Gallie may be aware that there is a code of practice on age diversity in employment. The Scottish Executive has conducted an interim review of retirement, although not specifically with regard to firemen. For other offices, the retirement age has been 60, but we are being more flexible about that, judging situations case by case. Indeed, the whole question of greater flexibility in regard to retirement age is currently under review.

### Digital Scotland

**6. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister how he intends to consult on the implementation of the digital Scotland task force report. (S1F-355)

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice (Mr Jim Wallace):** We are very grateful to the members of the digital Scotland task force for their contribution to the work of the group and to its report. The report was published on 22 May and the public consultation will last until the end of June. Copies of the report can be obtained from the digital Scotland website, which also offers a forum for online comment and discussion. My colleagues and I want to hear the views of as many people as possible on the important issues covered by the task force's report.

**Pauline McNeill:** Does the minister agree that in taking Scotland into the digital age—a necessary step for our industry and commerce—we must be

mindful of the digital divide that is already emerging? As one in five families has a computer in the home, we must apply the principles of social inclusion in taking forward the digital age.

**Mr Wallace:** It is essential that we bear in mind principles of social inclusion to avoid a division into the information-rich and the information-poor. That is why we want to make computers available in the classroom and in communal facilities. There are different, imaginative ways in which we must develop to ensure that the opportunities that flow from digital technology are available throughout the community.

## Caledonian MacBrayne

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** We come to the emergency question from Jamie McGrigor.

15:30

**Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it is taking to avert a strike by officers of Caledonian MacBrayne and what contingency plans it has to continue lifeline services to the Scottish west coast islands affected and to ensure that tourist traffic can reach these islands especially over the Whitsun weekend.

**The Minister for Transport and the Environment (Sarah Boyack):** The Executive attaches high priority to CalMac's vital services off the west coast of Scotland. I am delighted to be able to confirm that the strike that was proposed for this weekend has been called off. That follows the additional talks held this morning between CalMac and the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers. The Executive welcomes the news, which safeguards the services on one of the busiest weekends of the year. [*Applause.*]

**Mr McGrigor:** I am absolutely delighted to hear that news, which has averted a crisis. I congratulate those involved on reaching agreement. However, is the minister aware that my constituents in the Highlands and Islands are now extremely concerned that their lifeline services are under threat of disruption? Can she give an assurance that lifeline services will continue to operate should strike action take place in the future and that the Administration will continue to monitor the situation? Would she comment on the recent television news reports that airports in the Highlands and Islands may soon suffer strike action?

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. Let us stick to the subject.

**Sarah Boyack:** I am happy to stick to the subject, Sir David.

I am well aware that communities in the Highlands and Islands have been unsettled even at the prospect of a strike. That is why I am so delighted that we have averted the strike that was proposed for the weekend. I want to reiterate the fact that there will be no disruption to those services at the weekend. I hope that those people who were reviewing their travel plans—whether they were travelling to or from the islands—will now be able to make their arrangements with confidence.

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands)**

**(SNP):** On behalf of the SNP, I welcome the avoidance of the strike, but could I ask the minister—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order. I have already complained about shouting across the floor, regardless of which side it comes from.

**Mr Hamilton:** Is the minister aware of the enormous disruption and expense caused by cancelled trips, to CalMac and to local businesses that were expecting that custom? What mechanism does the minister plan to put in place to resolve disputes in future?

In the chamber today, the minister says that “we” have avoided the strike. Will she confirm that, towards the end of last week, when the crisis was coming to a climax, she washed her hands of the whole affair and did nothing? The fact that a strike has been avoided has nothing to do with the Executive and everything to do with the good sense of CalMac.

**Sarah Boyack:** It is appropriate that members focus on the key issues. Negotiations were carried out this week between CalMac and NUMAST, the trade union. Those discussions were lengthy; they were reconvened this morning and it is to the credit of both sides that it was possible to find a resolution. The Executive is happy that that has happened. What the chamber should now do is to follow the lead that Duncan Hamilton gave in welcoming the conclusion of those talks and look forward to people being able to make successful visits on and off the islands in future.

**Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP):** Will the minister reassure NUMAST members who deliver those services in all sorts of weather and throughout the year that, despite the calls from management, no legislation will be put in place to withdraw the legal right of NUMAST members to take strike action in future?

**Sarah Boyack:** That has nothing to do with the talks that have just been successfully concluded. I would be happy, however, to add my comments to those of Mr Sheridan, to make people aware of just how challenging it is to provide some of the services throughout the year. It may not look that way in the summer, but the work is done not only by NUMAST members, who are now going out to ballot, but by members of all the trade unions who work for CalMac. All their services are greatly valued by us all. [*Applause.*]

**Points of Order**

15:37

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** On a point of order. It is with some reluctance that I raise this point of order, which is on the consistency of rulings that have come from the chair during this afternoon’s business. On a number of occasions, Opposition members have been reminded of their obligation to stick to the subject of the main question, but ministers have not been required to stick to their obligation to answer the questions that have been posed. With courtesy and respect, Presiding Officer, I ask you to reflect on the rulings that you have given to the chamber this afternoon. [*Applause.*]

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** On the first point—questions asked by members—as always, I will look, with courtesy and respect, at the text that comes out tomorrow to see whether any such question is justified. However, I am not responsible for answers given nor do I ever rule on answers.

**Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP):** Further to that point of order. A minister, Mr Alasdair Morrison, today answered a question with a question back to the questioner. Will you give the minister some guidance about how he conducts himself in the chamber and how he should answer questions in future?

**The Presiding Officer:** There is nothing in standing orders to say that ministers cannot ask rhetorical questions in the course of their answers. However, I appreciate that it is common that people asking questions do not like the answers they get—or even the answers they do not get. There is nothing that the chair can do about that.

## Education and Training (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** Let us get on with the debate.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** On a point of order.

**The Presiding Officer:** Another point of order?

**Fergus Ewing:** My point of order is about this debate.

We are about to debate stage 1 of the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill, which is concerned with the principles of the bill. However, the bill contains no principles; it contains only a list of sections that enable statutory instruments to be brought in so that money can be spent.

Although the bill has been accorded legislative competence, a number of issues arise from having a debate on the principles of a bill that contains no statement of any principles of any kind. Perhaps the matter should be taken to the Procedures Committee so that it can consider carefully and in time whether we are setting a very undesirable precedent by allowing this debate to take place.

**The Presiding Officer:** I do not have a copy of the bill in front of me. However, I will reflect on what you have said and will write to you and the Procedures Committee if necessary.

15:39

**The Deputy Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning (Nicol Stephen):** I am pleased to have this opportunity to move on and open today's debate on the general principles of the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill. We are all grateful to John Swinney's excellent Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee for its support for the general principles and for its positive comments and suggestions.

The bill is intended to provide Scottish ministers with the necessary powers to introduce individual learning accounts as part of our overall approach to lifelong learning. It is slightly unusual, as it links to two other pieces of legislation that are currently going through the UK Parliament.

In our programme for government, we set a target of 100,000 accounts to be opened in Scotland by 2002, and we expect that tens of thousands of people will make the most of the new learning accounts from this autumn. Individual learning accounts will help people to invest in their own learning, with contributions from the state and very often employers, as well as from the individuals themselves.

We want to develop a learning society in Scotland in which everyone, from whatever background, should expect to upgrade their skills continually throughout their life. We need to revolutionise current attitudes to learning. Our priority is to reach first-time learners and individuals from disadvantaged communities and to convince deprived and disadvantaged people that lifelong learning is crucial to their future. Although that will be a major task, there is already clear evidence that there is a huge demand for new learning and new skills. Learning centres are being opened throughout Scotland and learning houses have already been successful in some of our most disadvantaged communities. However, if people are to develop the learning habit, they need ready access to information, as well as funding.

**Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** I recognise that the Executive is already targeting efforts at disadvantaged communities. How will the Executive achieve—in the current parlance—joined-up arrangements with those efforts? Nothing in any of the guidance that has been issued so far suggests how it will link the learning-house arrangements to the ILAs.

**Nicol Stephen:** The partnership of the local enterprise companies and the Scottish university for industry—now to be known as learndirect Scotland—will be crucial to that issue.

Learndirect Scotland will be launched later this year and will provide information on all kinds of learning opportunities across the country. The ILAs and the establishment of learndirect Scotland will together help many more people along the road of lifelong learning.

Employers, trade unions, learning providers in the public and private sectors, and guidance providers all have key roles to play in encouraging people to open learning accounts. We have consulted them widely throughout the initial stages and will ensure that the consultation continues as learning accounts develop.

Over the past few months, an extensive ILA pilot was undertaken by Scottish Enterprise Grampian, and Scottish Enterprise Fife had a similar initiative. Vital lessons that we learned from those experiences have influenced the development of the ILA design. Those pilot schemes confirmed concerns that the need for a special bank account was seen by many individuals from disadvantaged communities as a barrier to participating in the new learning accounts. That requirement for a special and separate bank account has now been dropped. As a result, there has been a surge in demand for individual learning accounts in Grampian. Before the requirement was dropped, around 100 account holders had come forward. Now, only a few months later, we have more than

2,000. That is a significant increase in a five-month period and shows that we are on track to meet the ambitious target of 100,000 new accounts in the next two years. Grampian is generally reckoned to have about 10 per cent of Scotland's population. Those 2,000 account holders in Grampian can be multiplied up to 20,000 to give a figure for the whole of Scotland. That shows that our target is achievable.

**Fergus Ewing:** I appreciate that the minister's approach seems to be to listen to reasoned argument and to make concessions. He has stated that, in the light of the Grampian experience, the requirement of opening what he referred to as a special bank account has been dropped. Does that mean that it will not be necessary for the qualifying person to have a bank account at all?

**Nicol Stephen:** That is correct: a bank account will not be required. That was one of the things that was seen as a barrier. The legislation from the UK Government still provides for bank accounts to be established, but that would be for a development of the individual learning accounts, which many of us see as a way forward for the kind of training that we are talking about today and for many other areas of post-16 provision.

We will continue to find ways of developing the individual learning accounts and we will be rolling out further field testing from June. Work has already started in Lochaber, as Fergus Ewing knows. I am pleased to say—this is a response to the comments from the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee—that, on a pilot basis, a small discretionary fund has been established to help to meet some travel and child care costs in the pilot area of Lochaber. That is an issue that we will continue to discuss at stage 2 of the bill and through the summer. Only yesterday, as I hinted at a meeting of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, Henry McLeish announced additional funding of £8 million for child care costs for students, particularly those in further education, although it will also assist those who are attending our universities.

The accounts will be available to everyone in Scotland aged 18 and over, but it is important that we encourage non-traditional learners to take them up. People with low levels of skill will generally have the most to gain from the initiative. We will therefore concentrate much of our marketing effort, through the local enterprise companies, on such groups.

Learndirect Scotland will be charged with promoting lifelong learning and increasing the take-up of learning by non-traditional learners, the socially excluded and smaller businesses. It will take the lead nationally in promoting learning accounts—again, that is a response to the

concerns of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. The key role in linking communities with employers and learning providers at the local level will be played by the local enterprise companies. By that dual approach—the local enterprise companies at the local level and learndirect Scotland at the national level—we hope to carry out a sustained marketing campaign to get the message across about the opportunities that are offered by individual learning accounts.

**Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP):** As Nicol knows, I am not a member of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, so I am listening with great interest. If a constituent tells me that they are interested in the scheme, to whom do I refer that constituent in order to allow them to claim the money that Nicol is talking about?

**Nicol Stephen:** There will be a national campaign and learndirect Scotland will have a national freephone number that the constituent can call. That would be the simplest gateway. The local enterprise companies will be aware of the programme and will help to put together schemes involving a group of employees in a small or medium-sized business. The role of the local enterprise company would ultimately be to put that individual, or group of individuals, in contact with learndirect Scotland, which will administer and create the gateway for the scheme.

**Mrs Ewing:** This is an important issue. None of us would want a bureaucratic and expensive system for ensuring that the money reaches the people whom we want it to reach. Will each LEC be allocated a certain amount for its area, or will the money be allocated according to the number of requests that are received from each area?

**Nicol Stephen:** The system will be demand led, based on the requests that are received. I do not want to mislead members. There will also be a contractor, who will be responsible for the administration. That contract will be let shortly, and the contractor will work with learndirect Scotland. The database and processing will be managed by the contractor, but the individual will not see the contractor: the promotion, marketing and signing-up to individual learning accounts will be conducted through learndirect Scotland.

Although unemployed people will also be eligible for individual learning accounts, their needs will most often be better met through other initiatives that are specifically targeted at the unemployed and that are already available. Those include the new deal and training for work.

Learning accounts are not aimed only at new learners. We also need to encourage existing learners to do more to develop their skills. Subject to the passing of the bill, the first 100,000 account holders—wherever they come from—will receive

£150 from the Scottish Executive towards learning costs if they commit to spend £25 on eligible learning. Thereafter, anyone who has a starter account will be entitled to a 20 per cent—and, in some cases, an 80 per cent—discount on future learning costs.

The incentives and discounts under learning accounts may be used for a very wide range of learning opportunities. Almost all types of learning are included, with only a few specific exclusions, such as driving, flying and scuba-diving lessons. The higher level of support—the 80 per cent discount—will be available for basic skills courses in numeracy, literacy and computing skills.

Many people will undertake courses leading to accredited qualifications, but others will require pre-access courses to build up their confidence and basic skills. Once people have started, we hope that they will be motivated to move on to more formal qualifications. The incentives may be used for all course costs and to pay for guidance from an approved guidance provider.

The investment in learning accounts is considerable: a total of £23 million is being invested. This initiative will take training and skills beyond the traditional college or university campus. Learndirect Scotland will have a network of local learning centres operated by a huge range of providers. The development of local learning centres, distance-learning packages and online tutorial support will transform dramatically the way in which people in this country approach learning. We need to get the right learning at the right time, and at the right cost. That means gaining access to new skills and new learning in all our communities in all parts of Scotland.

We have consulted widely on individual learning accounts, and I commend the bill to the Parliament. The bill and the subsequent regulations will provide the necessary powers to introduce this exciting new initiative in the autumn.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill.

15:53

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP):** The SNP supports the general aim—and I use that word advisedly—of the bill. The aim is to make provision for the payment of grants in respect of the education and training of certain individuals. That seems to be the clear aim of the bill, as set out in the preamble, and I think that all members would subscribe to it.

As MSPs, some of us have tried to upskill by learning how to use e-mail and computers. We have received assistance from the excellent staff,

who have helped us to become more technologically adept—with greater or lesser success. I hope that, in the Scottish work force as a whole, people are recognising the need to upskill, whether or not they are ex-boilermakers like Duncan McNeil—I know that it is going to be a long, sleepy afternoon, Duncan, but I will try to keep things going. We can all agree that we all need to upskill, especially when the role of technology, particularly computers and e-mail, becomes ever more important and apparent in life.

The committees, especially the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, have played an important role in the deliberations so far. I record our thanks to the clerks: Simon Watkins and David McLaren, who are here today, and Mark MacPherson, who I presume is somewhere working away. I also thank Alasdair Rankin of the Subordinate Legislation Committee. They have done an excellent task in a very short space of time.

The bill is a slim volume indeed. It is the shortest bill that I have ever seen—the definition of shellfish poisoning was probably longer.

**Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** What about Tavish's bill?

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** Will the member give way?

**Fergus Ewing:** I think that Tavish may give us an advertorial for his bill.

**Tavish Scott:** I am not going to advertise anything, except to remind Fergus that there is a two-line bill that is even shorter. I will be grateful for his support in its later stages.

**Fergus Ewing:** I commend Tavish Scott to parliamentary draftsmen throughout Scotland. We support the aims of his bill.

Section 1 of the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill says:

“Scottish Ministers may make regulations authorising grants to be paid”.

It also says that regulations under section 1 may provide

“that grants may not be paid”.

Section 2 says:

“Arrangements qualify under this section if they satisfy such conditions as the Scottish Ministers may make by regulations”.

Section 3 says that regulations may be made. That is all that the bill says.

With respect to the minister, whose good faith and intention to adopt a positive approach to achieve the aims to which we subscribe I recognise, let me say that the approach of this bill

is wholly inappropriate and sets a thoroughly bad precedent for the Parliament to follow. What are we debating today? We do not know. We do not know what the proposals are because the Executive has not said. We are having a debate in a vacuum. We do not know who will qualify for assistance. We are not sure whether the scheme is only for people who are employed. We do not know if it will include the self-employed. If it does not, the bill is flawed. I invite the minister to intervene—are the self-employed going to be eligible?

**Nicol Stephen:** The self-employed will be eligible.

**Fergus Ewing:** I am delighted to hear that. When I was a lawyer, people used to say, "Never ask a question unless the answer is known." Unfortunately, what the minister says is not what the illustrative statutory instrument, which is supposed to help, says. It says that one must be employed. I accept that the minister is acknowledging that the illustrative guidelines are flawed—they have been countermanded by what he has said. That is welcome, because it would be wrong to exclude the self-employed, as it would be wrong to exclude others, but it illustrates the point that I made in my point of order—that we do not know what we are debating.

Mr Swinney will talk later about the evidence taken by the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. Other members will speak about the problems identified by the committee. There are disadvantages for rural communities, for those who need child care to be able to take up learning, for those who are extremely disadvantaged, perhaps unemployed and bereft of skills, and for the disabled who may not be able to participate without additional support—we do not know whether they will be able to get support or, if they can, from which source. Moreover, we do not know how much of the £23 million is going to subsidise training that is already being done.

Mr McKelvie of Scottish Power and Grahame Smith, the deputy general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, dealt with those points very well as witnesses to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning committee. The plethora of schemes is very confusing for employers. I believe that the LECs should have local discretion, but the bill does not say whether they will. The evidence that we had was valuable, but it was insufficient. It was useful, but the witnesses could not address the Executive's proposals, because we did not have those proposals.

I am reminded of the novel by Franz Kafka called "The Trial", in which an individual faced unspecified charges in an uncertain world where nothing was ever made clear. Perhaps he could have written a book called "The Parliament" or

"The Bill". I hope that in future such a bill will not be brought before the Parliament for a non-debate on principles that have not been set out in any clear fashion.

16:00

**Nick Johnston (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

I welcome the opportunity to open the debate for the Conservatives and I welcome much of the minister's sentiment and his genuine desire to promote a culture in which people reapproach learning and place it at the centre of their lives. The Conservatives feel that it is absolutely correct that people should be encouraged to take personal responsibility for their progress through life.

The bill is before us as a result of clause 96 of the Learning and Skills Bill that is now passing through Westminster. Nevertheless, we welcome the opportunity to debate the individual learning account or, as Fergus Ewing said, the little that we know about it so far. We also recognise the need to support business by providing the training and skills needed to build a work force so that all Scotland can prosper. I thank the clerks for a job well done under pressing and trying circumstances. I got hold of a copy of the Learning and Skills Bill—or about a third of it. It is an extremely complicated measure and we must realise that all we are dealing with is the Scottish enabling legislation.

As Fergus Ewing indicated, and as the report of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee has pointed out, we are in a strange situation. We are invited to approve the principles of a bill that enables the minister to introduce regulations, without having the detailed regulations themselves to examine. We feel that the principle of skimpy primary legislation followed by weighty regulations as secondary legislation is not a practice that we would like to be adopted in the normal course of events. The principle of proper study in committee of the regulations would be a better way to proceed.

Many questions arise, some from the consultation exercise, some from the glossy brochure and some from the private studies conducted in Fife and in Grampian. The consultation document spoke of the need for a scheme that is open, transparent and easily accessible to stakeholders, employers and learning providers—a point reiterated by Glasgow Chamber of Commerce. It called for smooth linkages between the parties and mentioned the possibility of tax relief for providers of funds other than employers. None of that is before us today. It is essential that the Executive consult those bodies in drafting the final version of the regulations. That consultation must continue



through the process of introduction of the individual learning accounts.

We welcome the willingness to learn from on-the-ground experience and to amend policy by dropping the need for separate bank accounts. However, some questions will be answered only by the regulations, particularly as regards employers' contributions and how they may be withdrawn if an employee fails to complete a course or leaves the employment that has partially funded the course. We are also concerned about the practicality of small and medium enterprises releasing employees for training, given the difficulties and stress that short-handed employers can face.

We welcome the announcement of the pilot, which shows that the Executive listens to some committee members, but we have questions about barriers to learning caused by rurality and the costs of child care or travel. We are concerned about the fairness of the allocation of the 100,000 places and about the allocation of funds to employees from public bodies such as local authorities, health boards, trusts and non-governmental organisations.

The role of the Scottish university for industry in validation will come under scrutiny. It might be interesting to note and further examine the evidence from the Glasgow themed action group, which calls for all supported learning to be included and not just that which is accredited or vocationally relevant. That view was echoed by Jack Kelly of Scottish Power plc. He believes that overcoming the fear of learning might have to be achieved using a process that does not necessarily fit the Government's immediate objective. In other words, the prescriptive nature of validation must be addressed.

The Conservatives welcome the introduction of ILAs, subject to some caveats. If this is a genuine first step to a unified system of funding for all post-school education and training, it will be welcomed by the business community and by higher and further education institutions. We must also examine the costs that are associated with the bill. The explanatory notes tell us that of the £23 million that is allocated for the provisions in the bill, £16.3 million will go on grants for the first two years and 20 per cent, or £4 million, will go to the customer service providers. The Conservatives ask that the Executive examine that carefully, because it seems to be an awfully large proportion of £23 million to give to the CSPs. A further 10 per cent will be spent on monitoring, research and marketing.

It is also worth noting that the Association of Scottish Colleges questions whether the resources targeted at 20 per cent discount courses will be sufficient. That organisation also points out that

value-for-money studies must be carried out by the CSPs. We are all aware of the possibility of profiteering when Government money—even £16.3 million—is put out to the wider community.

The funding from the scheme must not be redirected from existing institutions—there must be some additionality in the system. There should be clear and unambiguous targets for progress and implementation and simple procedures that can be adopted with low levels of bureaucracy, to ensure the participation of all the target groups.

Having waded through the welter of “on-going considerations”, “further discussions with” and “continuing contributions to wider debates on”, I can do no better than to commend the view that has been expressed in the chamber in Glasgow that more detail is required to turn this sound concept into a successful scheme.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Patricia Ferguson):** I call Allan Wilson to open for the Labour party. He has five minutes. I now see that Mr McNeil will do so.

16:07

**Mr Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde (Lab):** Thank you. The second division—Fergus Ewing and I—are making speeches today, rather than John Swinney and others. *[Laughter.]* Anyway, I will press on.

I need tell no one in the chamber that the Scottish economy has seen enormous changes in the past decade. I am confronted by that fact every morning in my constituency, where traditional industry has declined. We used to build ships; we now build microchips and the computers to put them in. My constituency is now the export capital of Scotland—I never miss a chance to plug Greenock and Inverclyde—and it aspires to become the e-business and e-learning capital of Scotland.

We live and work in a global economy that is changing faster than ever before. The high-tech industry of today can easily become the museum piece of tomorrow. There is no single response to globalisation and modernisation—it cuts across large sections of our society and the economy. Our success or failure in the future will depend on our ability to adapt swiftly and effectively to change.

Part of that strategy will depend on having a highly skilled work force with the transferable skills and flexibility that will enable it to adapt to market changes. We must also embrace the knowledge economy. I hope that that will allow us to take advantage of changes, rather than fall victim to them.

To achieve the knowledge economy, we must

deliver lifelong learning. That must be done not only through schools and colleges, but through a much-neglected area—the workplace. ILAs provide a significant opportunity. The chief executive of SUFI, Frank Pignatelli, has said that there is an opportunity to make Scotland competitive through its people.

There is wide recognition of the potential for ILAs to make a major contribution to the development of the culture of lifelong learning. There is, however, also recognition that there are issues about delivery. There are a number of potential barriers to access—I hope that we will address them during the passage of the bill—that can be addressed through personal contribution and a willingness to be involved. Some can be addressed through sponsorship, either by an employer or by a trade union.

As has been mentioned—and as will be mentioned again—there are issues relating to those who live in remote areas. There are also issues to do with providing guidance and support for those who are not naturally inclined to return to education and training—people who find it practically impossible to do that because they are working long hours or shift-working, people with child care requirements, or people who simply do not have the bus fare at the end of the week. We must ensure that those least likely to learn get their share of the cash. We also need to address the issue of employers using the funds to subsidise existing training budgets.

However, those are mere details. The principle of the bill—or lack of principle, as Fergus Ewing would have it—and its aims and objectives are important. I am sure that we will return at a later stage to many of the issues that I mentioned.

Let us be positive. As the most positive member of the most positive committee in the Parliament—I do not know why SNP members are smiling at that—I say that we must reject the cynicism that leads people to dismiss SUFI as a phone-a-friend helpline. We must see this initiative as a catalyst for bringing about the partnerships that we need. ILAs are not just about payment for training. They can achieve far more than that, by creating partnerships in the workplace and the community, and by promoting the learning culture that is vital to our success.

We must also convince employers and employees to invest and participate in education and training. We need to make it possible for them to do that. We need to increase the number of companies that offer training, education and personal development opportunities. Perhaps the debate on the bill will help us to achieve that. Rather than approaching the issue negatively, we should try to open up the best training initiatives offered by employers to employees' families and

to the wider community. We could give them more money to train more people.

The goal must be to provide opportunities to people, so that they can escape low-paid, low-skill, dead-end jobs and start careers that increase their income and job satisfaction. The right to access is another issue. We must provide learning centres in supermarkets, workplaces and community halls, as well as in schools and colleges. We can use the bill to build and develop access. If we take a positive attitude, we can ensure that education and training do not end at the school gates and deliver lifelong learning for all.

16:13

**Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP):** It is my pleasure to continue on the positive note struck so ably by Duncan McNeil in his speech and to comment on the stage 1 report produced by the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee.

The minister will be aware that when the committee reports, it does so in a helpful way—to improve and strengthen proposals that the Government brings forward. If the Government brings forward good ideas, we will say that they are good ideas, although we may suggest ways of making them even better ideas. I will say something about that in a moment. However, I want to start by highlighting some of the difficulties that we face in relation to the legislation.

The legislation was introduced into the work programme of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee very late in the day, and we were given a very short time to consider it. That is not an isolated occurrence for committees of the Parliament, and a number of committees have complained about it. The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee has asked me to express to ministers its concerns about the tight time scale within which we have had to operate.

We have been able to undertake limited but adequate consideration of, and consultation on, the issues concerned, because the Government itself undertook a vast proportion of the consultation before the development of the legislation. However, there is a serious issue in regard to the parliamentary process, which we must reflect on. We have been able to consider this short bill—which is largely about giving ministers powers to spend money—in the context of policy only because the Government gave us an illustrative set of regulations for the operation of the system. If that illustrative set of regulations had not been available, our consideration would have been somewhat on the bizarre side.

Many issues regarding the policy content of the regulations are raised in the committee's report. I hope that ministers will reflect on them, and that

the minister will say in his closing remarks whether the Government can address some of them. However, in general, Parliament has to be careful about the balance between primary legislation and subordinate legislation, and how much regulation there is. All of us understand the need for flexibility. None of us wants there to be vast amounts of primary legislation to dot i's and cross t's, but we must have a balance that reflects the interests of Parliament in exercising effective scrutiny.

I would like to make three brief points on policy issues. First, the Government has to be clear about those whom the initiative is aimed at. It cannot be aimed exclusively at those who are already in employment and in some form of learning environment, nor can it be concerned exclusively with those who are least likely to learn, or who are currently outwith the learning process. However, it is more likely that the Government will be successful with the initiative among those who are in employment, and who have a relationship to the learning environment at present. The committee said in its stage 1 report that the Government must establish a balance between the underpinnings of the legislation and the rolling out of the regulations, which guarantees that those who are least likely to learn are more likely to get some benefit from the initiative.

Secondly, paragraphs 20 and 21 of the committee's report make a number of suggestions to the Executive on how to capture the attention and interest of those who are least likely to learn. The committee appreciated the efforts of the Scottish Enterprise Grampian and Scottish Enterprise Fife pilot exercises, but it freely conceded that it was difficult to capture the attention of those who are persistently least likely to learn. The Executive has to give disproportionate emphasis to the way in which the policy is rolled out. The committee has suggested how that might be done in paragraphs 20 and 21.

My third point concerns delivery. Margaret Ewing asked the minister the question that we all wrestle with at times when someone comes to our constituency surgery and wants to know something: where is the best place to send them? In this initiative, there must be clarity among providers. It must be clear how individuals can access the system. The minister addressed those points in response to Margaret Ewing.

However, some of the evidence that the committee received, and which was touched on in our report on local economic development, showed that there is congestion and uncertainty in many areas. Mr Pignatelli from SUFI gave us some optimism that those issues are being tackled, that the confusion is being attacked and that clarity is being offered. We warmly support the

direction of his thinking, and look forward to those matters being developed.

The committee has undertaken limited but adequate consideration of the policy issues that are involved, and I hope that the minister can respond to some of the positive suggestions that have been made.

16:18

**Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab):** I will be brief, and continue the positive theme that was started by Fergus Ewing, albeit it is somewhat Kafkaesque, or certainly surreal.

Lifelong learning was a key component of the Scottish Labour party's manifesto for the 1999 Scottish election campaign. Integration of lifelong learning within the enterprise department was an early statement of the new partnership Executive's intent to promote our vision of stimulating a culture of lifelong learning in Scotland. That vision was referred to by Duncan McNeil and others.

Advancing basic literacy and numeracy skills through developing cutting-edge technology such as that at Cadence, and building a knowledge-based economy, are absolutely critical to Scotland's economic future. It is worth repeating the mantra that we cannot and should not be competing on the basis of having a low-wage and low-skill economy. The enlargement of the European Union to the east presents major challenges for Scotland's manufacturing base, the only response to which will be to have a high-skill and high-productivity economy that fosters the rewards of the accumulation of learning.

Scotland has suffered over the years from unemployment and skills shortages. There is no future for Scotland as a low-wage and low-skill economy. Individual learning accounts are therefore critical in addressing unemployment and skills shortages. Individual learning accounts empower people to take responsibility for their own intellectual development, through the gaining of transferable skills and portable qualifications in a lifetime of personal and career development. That process will contribute to a more modern and more productive economy and a better equipped work force.

However, that is not the sole objective. Empowering people to have a stake gives them greater control over their personal development, raises their horizons, and gives them the benefits of learning and increasing their own personal accumulation of knowledge and skills.

A knowledge-based economy is at the very heart of the new Labour project. I admit to Fergus Ewing that the bill is a very small part of that project. However, I believe that, whatever their

shade of opinion, all members of all parties—and they are all represented here—can embrace and share that philosophy. That can be done within the wider agenda of tax breaks for employers, contributions towards eligible learning on a UK-wide basis, and the myriad other initiatives at Westminster and in this Parliament that promote lifelong learning and the knowledge-based economy, to which we all aspire and on which Scotland's economic future will be highly dependent.

16:22

**Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):** The blank-sheet approach of the bill gives us an opportunity to tell the minister and the Scottish Executive of the many areas that the Parliament would like to be addressed in the forthcoming regulations. I take the blank-sheet approach as a positive sign that the minister is here to listen to the points that are raised. It is interesting to note that a common theme is beginning to appear. The barriers to access are a main cause of concern that must be addressed in the regulations.

In response to an intervention from Fergus Ewing on bank accounts, the minister said that it was not necessary to open a new bank account for an individual learning account. However, he implied that future developments of ILAs might lead to a need for bank accounts. I would like the minister to clarify that, because a problem in Scotland is that about 20 per cent of the population have no bank account. When we consider rurality and the increasing number of closures of bank branches, the issue of bank accounts will have to be addressed in both the short and the long term.

If we want to promote access to learning, we must ensure that that learning is provided throughout the country and is accessible to anybody who wants it. We cannot say that a person who lives near a big city will have access but that a person who lives near Fort William will have access to one college and one college only. We have to consider where the providers of lifelong learning are.

Duncan McNeil mentioned the time that is available for learning and the problems of shift workers. I know that it is a reserved issue, but we must address the fact that, in Scotland, we have the longest working hours in Europe. We have a 48-hour working week, unlike France, where there is a 35-hour working week. We should examine that. Lifelong learning is something that we need time for. We must open up the time that is available for people to obtain access to lifelong learning. Child care has been mentioned; the minister referred to the £8 million that was announced yesterday. I want an assurance from

him that the £8 million for child care costs, for those in further education, will be available to people undertaking other forms of lifelong learning, such as short courses that are available through other providers.

The Scottish Enterprise Grampian pilot identified only one group within the 2,000 learners whom the minister has spoken about as being given assistance. That was assistance with child care through their local authority and their union, Unison. We must address that enormous issue.

It has been mentioned already that the Scottish Enterprise Grampian pilot identified that the people who were most in need of lifelong learning were those least likely to follow up the individual learning accounts. We must see more clearly how the Executive will resolve that. If there is a 100,000 target in the first two years, we want those most in need of lifelong learning to be within that 100,000 in the first two years, so that they benefit from the £150 incentive rather than the discount.

Duncan McNeil has already picked up on the point that there are individuals to whom £25 will be an insurmountable barrier. We must examine ways of releasing funds from unions or voluntary organisations, perhaps, to allow those individuals to open their learning account.

I was at a special educational needs school this morning. That brought to mind the thought of where and how we will ensure that the special needs of adults with learning difficulties are accounted for. Their needs will always mean that education and training is more expensive for them or for the provider. Where will we ensure that that is resolved for them?

I will discuss my hobby horse of the plethora of initiatives, which we have heard about already. A key element of SUFI is that its learning providers will provide learner support, yet we read that that will be one of the key aims of the customer services provider, a private company. The Executive has set aside £6.5 million—25 per cent of the individual learning account budget—for the customer services provider. How much of that money is being duplicated by services that are already provided by SUFI? I would like to see some joined-up government.

We must ensure that we provide a solution to the problem in Scotland. The problem is how we turn Scotland into a knowledge nation. The solution is what the Parliament will look for in the forthcoming regulations.

16:27

**Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD):** I shall take up Duncan McNeil's point that this is a second

division debate, because George Lyon is in his constituency today, so I have been asked to fill in.

I have been impressed by the new politics approach to the debate. I can see the seamless movement of the new politics award from John Swinney and Henry McLeish to Duncan McNeil and Fergus Ewing. I can easily envisage them walking hand in hand up to the podium to collect that award next year.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the general approach of the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill; we have championed for some time the general principle of individual learning accounts. I welcome the Executive's commitment in the measures today to the promotion of lifelong learning and to help to overcome the financial barriers to learning that many individuals face.

I read with interest the evidence that ministers and witnesses gave to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. I will pursue a number of points on that. One of the more striking aspects is that there is some room for vision on issues such as this. On 10 May, in evidence to the committee, the minister correctly said that the measures focused on individuals and were aimed at empowering people to take greater responsibility for investing in their own learning.

That was important, as were the conclusions of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. In a section of the committee report called "The Principles of the Bill", it points out:

"The introduction of individual learning accounts has been welcomed by almost all organisations in the field, and has the potential to make a major contribution to the development of a culture of lifelong learning in Scotland."

The committee concluded:

"This willingness to learn from 'on the ground' experience and amend policy as a result is very much welcomed by the Committee."

Fergus Ewing, the minister and others have made that point.

I will address three issues. The first is the prescription of learning opportunities. A Liberal Democrat concern and one arising from evidence to the committee is that, to avoid prescription, local flexibility should be considered to ensure that local needs are taken into account. That is important. Instead of creating a list of acceptable learning, it would be much better to start from the position that all learning is equally acceptable and will receive support unless specified otherwise. I understand from the ministerial evidence to the committee that that is the direction in which the Executive is moving, which is very welcome.

A second brief point is on the need to address provision in rural areas and particularly the issue of travel costs. I noted that point from the

questions to the minister that Fergus Ewing pursued. Improvements in access to technology and flexible delivery are a key to rural opportunities. I was struck by Elaine Murray's questions on new technology networks, which are important for developing new technologies and linking into them. In my part of the world, there is the example of the objective 1—or son of objective 1—money that will be invested in information and communications technology developments, as long as we can convince the European Commission that that is the right way to spend the money. I believe that spending money on augmenting and improving the existing provision of soft infrastructure, thereby allowing companies and individuals to move forward, is important. The digital Scotland report, about which Pauline McNeill asked in question time, is pertinent in that regard.

There are concerns about geographical distance from teaching provision, which will be shared by any member who represents a rural area. I hope that the minister can give some reassurance on travel costs.

My final point is on the need to target the bill at non-learners and to reach unemployed people, and part-time and low-paid workers. The excluded and the potentially excluded could be the most difficult to recruit into the scheme. I hope that measures will be taken to ensure that that is not the case. In that spirit, should not there be targets for the most socially excluded groups? It would be right to target those groups, to ensure that those who are most in need of basic learning and training opportunities are not neglected. I support the proposals.

16:32

**Elaine Thomson (Aberdeen North) (Lab):** As a member of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, I am pleased to take part in the debate. I believe that the need to improve the skill levels of the Scottish work force has been widely recognised. Building a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy based on knowledge makes it essential that we develop a learning culture for everybody—young and old—and move away from the current position in which one in three people in the Scottish work force receives little or no employer-based training.

Individual learning accounts will give a major boost to the development of Scotland's learning culture. However well Scotland competes internationally in terms of graduates per head of population, it does not compare well internationally in on-going skills development and training while in employment. ILAs and the Scottish university for industry—learndirect Scotland, as it will be known—will be a cornerstone.

Individual learning accounts will allow people to take responsibility for their own learning, which is increasingly important, as people are now on average changing their job five times during their lifetime. They may not just be moving from one job to another; they may need reskilling from scratch. There are still some employers who do not understand the importance to their businesses of having highly skilled employees. As the initial 100,000 accounts are rolled out and the £150 is invested to match the first £25, I think that people all over Scotland will become involved in learning.

It became obvious from the evidence that the committee took that encouraging people who are not engaged in learning can be a slow process. Scottish Enterprise Grampian, which conducted one of the two pilot studies in Scotland, found that to be the case. As the pilot was rolled out and changed, Scottish Enterprise Grampian learned some of the difficulties in getting people who traditionally are not learners involved. There are specific issues, particularly for women, for whom access to child care is important. The extra £8 million for child care that was announced yesterday will undoubtedly go some way towards assisting them.

As has been said, the bill does not require people to open bank accounts, which were found to be a disincentive in the Grampian pilot both for people who did not have bank accounts—who, quite often, are the people whom the scheme targets—and those who did and did not want another one. The legislation will allow bank accounts at some point for those who want them. That is an instance of Westminster powers being devolved to Scotland for our consideration.

Employees from diverse industries in Grampian are involved in learning. Fish workers—a group that traditionally would not have been much involved in training or skills—are learning about health and safety. We also have offshore chef managers who are working towards a level 3 Scottish vocational qualification in management, using open learning materials during downtime offshore—one of the important things is for people to be able to access learning at any point. People from all sectors and all types of employers in Aberdeen are getting involved in learning accounts. I want that to happen all across Scotland.

16:36

**Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP):** The floodgates of memory opened when I heard Frank Pignatelli's name mentioned in the chamber, as he is a former boss of mine. I will try to ignore it and go on as if I had not heard.

A school handbook for staff once said that the

only constant in life is change and that our major function is to prepare people for change. That is what we are trying to do today. This is a mom-and-apple-pie debate. We all concur with the motives and the intent, even if the principles are legalistically vague and not all the details have been pencilled in.

I have great delight in mentioning this little extract from the SNP's 1999 manifesto, so that members know that we are all singing from roughly the same hymn sheet.

"We shall review the provision of lifelong learning opportunities and bring forward proposals for initiatives that are more closely targeted to real possibilities and potential than past government schemes, such as the little used and little known Individual Learning Accounts."

We were hoping to make individual learning accounts grow, had we had the opportunity to do so exclusively. Now we are doing it together and nobody can contest the sheer necessity to make education reach out and make people grow. That is the business of all educationalists.

I want to mention one or two points, which have probably been mentioned before. I am a little bit worried at the thought of customer service providers. I suppose that that is because I come from the old-fashioned state education system, which was a service. Anything that has intermediary bodies that take money as part of the function makes me marginally uneasy. I hope that the Scottish university for industry, the customer service provider, the LECs and the Executive will be able to get the lines of communication clear so that it is simple for people outside the system to get in and so that any danger of duplicating service provision is avoided.

I heard the minister speak enthusiastically about having learning centres throughout the country. When we think of learning centres around the country, libraries spring instantly to mind. We had a library in our village, in the other village that I represented and in the half of the other village that I represented as a councillor. They have gone. As a result, fewer people go to libraries—a mobile library is no substitute. Some structural things should be kept going, not as part of this budget or plan, to aid and assist the individual learning account system. Having libraries with terminals that people can access is valuable. If libraries are not there, access is a lot more difficult.

Schools must also address the question of adult literacy. The *Daily Record*—not a newspaper that has great credibility—had a figure of 1 million illiterate Scots. [*Interruption.*] I hear someone say "Brave man". Why not? I will say it again. It is not a paper that I always believe. Unless we can address illiteracy at the level of individuals, ILAs will never really get off the ground. We need a change in Scottish culture so that people

understand the value of education.

Finally, there is the vexed question of how to capture those who are the least likely to learn. If I say that for a long time I taught people who are least likely to learn, Kenny Gibson will be very angry with me, so I will not say that. I loathe the new name of the institution, learndirect, because it sounds like an insurance company. However, given that that is the name that it has been given, perhaps we can link learndirect to earn-direct, which may motivate some of the people who are least likely to want to learn.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to winding-up speeches. As we are almost five minutes over time, I will have to be particularly tight with timings.

16:40

**Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the stage 1 debate on the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill. We must never forget that part of the bill is about individuals and we must focus today's debate on individuals.

The bill's clear policy objective is to empower the Scottish Executive to pay grants to, or on behalf of, individuals towards the cost of their education and training. It is nothing more and nothing less than that. The introduction of individual learning accounts is one of several policies that are being introduced to tackle skills development. It does not stand alone, but is one of many ways in which we are tackling skills development. The Executive is committing £23 million over two years to individual learning accounts, with a target of 100,000 ILAs to be opened by 2002.

Individual learning accounts form a central part of the Executive's vision of stimulating a culture of lifelong learning, empowering individuals to take a greater responsibility for their own learning. That is very important. It is accepted that knowledge is increasingly the engine of growth in all sectors of business. Scotland must develop a truly knowledge-based and knowledge-driven economy. As Allan Wilson said, we must move beyond simple job creation to knowledge creation. Scotland should take the lead by creating and sustaining a competitive advantage through the knowledge, skills and innovation of our own people.

As I said, ILAs are one of several policies that are being introduced to tackle skills development. The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee has been considering the bill and has taken evidence from people involved in the pilot projects in Fife and Grampian. Many lessons can be learned from their experiences and will prove

invaluable when we flesh out the bill at stage 2.

My experience comes from the further and higher education sectors in Fife. I had first-hand experience of the Fife pilot and the work that was done. Barriers to learning and the question of those people who feel excluded from education and training are often spoken about. Like other speakers, for many years—16—I worked with people who felt excluded from education and training for various reasons. Child care, care of the elderly and caring responsibilities in general were some of the main issues. Travel is another issue, which was addressed by many speakers today.

An issue that we have not discussed is that of people's previous experience of school and education being a large barrier to returning to education. The importance of support and guidance should not be missed. People need support and guidance when they choose to come back into learning or to continue with learning. Many speakers have commented on the cost of administration. However, I would like to emphasise the cost of getting people who feel excluded back into education and training.

We must never lose sight of the fact that if we are going to get those people back into education and training it will cost us more money. I welcome the minister's announcement of £8 million for child care and the pilot that will assess the effectiveness of supported travel and child care. The difficulty of engaging those who feel excluded is recognised in the pilots from which we took evidence. Good practice must be considered and must be built upon.

In the area that I represent, Kirkcaldy, we have had pilots on new ways into work and we have set up a new opportunities shop. Opportunity shops within local areas or other models of opportunity centres offer joined-up policy at local level. Learndirect Scotland, which will be launched later this year, will have a key role in ensuring a strategic approach nationally. I was impressed by the evidence given by the Scottish university for industry on the way that that would harness and add focus to what has already taken place.

Scotland must develop a learning society, where everyone, regardless of background or prior educational achievement, expects to learn and to upgrade their skills throughout their lives.

16:45

**Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con):** In consideration of this debate, I was taken back to the words of Lewis Carroll in "Alice in Wonderland", where the debate was whether "I mean what I say" means the same as "I say what I mean". I am in no doubt that the minister means what he says, but in relation to the bill, neither he

nor anybody else can possibly know whether he is saying what he means. It is just not here.

I want to echo the remarks that have been made in the debate that the bill as it stands is so deficient as to be meaningless. For the purposes of the Parliament, this is a bad model of legislation. Were it not for the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, the stalwart efforts of its staff and the conscientious efforts of the members, the debate would be meaningless to most people present.

It is desirable that employers, employees and trade unionists are able to understand the bill, to know its content and to make submissions on it, to make qualified, authorised and, it is to be hoped, informed comment, and to improve on and expand the debate. We have all been working in the dark.

For that reason, I hope that, in their substance, the illustrative regulations that were produced for the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee and which gave us some kind of torch to look along the path, will reflect closely what the minister ends up with, as the ultimate appendage to the legislation. It is undesirable that those regulations will, effectively, be promulgated during the summer, when there will be no opportunity for scrutiny or review by the chamber or by the committee.

Having said that, on this side of the chamber there is enthusiasm for and a welcome of the proposals. They are extremely important. Going back to Marilyn Livingstone's question earlier, when she rightly inquired about Scots achieving a minimum level of literacy and numeracy, individual learning accounts have a particular relevance to the workplace and to the potential recipients of their benefits.

On clarity of operation, it is difficult to know, in the current context, whether it will exist. I hope that the minister can reassure us. In the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, we sought from Mr Pignatelli, who was there on behalf of the Scottish university for industry, some confirmation that there would not be confusion in the advisory element. As Mrs Ewing asked, who should people go to? Who should they phone? He sought to reassure the committee that he would endeavour to ensure that there was no confusion and no duplication of effort.

However, there are a number of players in the whole operation. There is the recipient, an employer, a provider, and there is, I presume, a facilitator, in the form of SUFI. It is critical, if the scheme is to have credibility, that everybody knows what their role is, that nobody is standing on toes and that the most important person, the recipient, is getting a clear steer as to the path they should follow to achieve whatever they seek

to acquire.

The scheme is good and I think it can expand. I hope the measure of its creation will be its ability to sell itself on its credibility. However, it should be monitored and its output should be measured. I hope that there are clear details from the minister on assessing how it operates once it gets under way.

We should not lose sight of the most important aspect of all: the recipients should be able to demonstrate that, by becoming recipients of ILAs, they have managed to improve themselves. Some form of accreditation is necessary to establish and demonstrate that to the wider world.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A perfect four minutes. Brian Adam, you have five minutes to wind up for the SNP.

16:49

**Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP):** We have heard some very interesting speeches this afternoon. In particular, I want to commend Allan Wilson for running through almost the complete new Labour lexicon. As I recall, he checked off "new Labour project", "stakeholder", "modernise" and "lifelong learning", and even managed to get in "knowledge-based economy". However, I am afraid that he did not mention "joined-up writing". I think it most appropriate that Allan Wilson made such a speech today in connection with this bill, because, like the bill, all of his terms have a rather ephemeral feel. There is not an awful lot that we can nail down in this legislation.

**Ian Jenkins:** Does Brian Adam realise how much fun Fergus Ewing will have in the Subordinate Legislation Committee dealing with the sparsity of detail in the bill?

**Brian Adam:** Absolutely. Ian Jenkins raises a serious point. What are we going to do with this bill at stage 2? How can we amend what we cannot see? Are we being asked to supply the detail? I hope that the minister will help by providing a little more substance when we get to stage 2.

At the start of the debate, Fergus Ewing made the very valid point, echoed by the Conservatives, that the fact that the bill does not contain any principles should be considered by the Procedures Committee. Moreover, will the minister assure us that he will use the super-affirmative procedure that was referred to in the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee's report on this bill, instead of the procedure that is suggested within the guidance?

**Nicol Stephen** *indicated disagreement.*

**Brian Adam:** How disappointing. He will not give us such an assurance. Although the minister



is a man whom I greatly trust, one cannot be confident that he will always be the minister, and others might come along in whom the Parliament might not wish to place its trust. I hope that he will reconsider that matter.

As for ILAs, Tavish Scott in particular talked a lot about new technology. However, there is a lot more to learning than knowing how to use computers or other new-fangled devices. The Grampian pilot scheme clearly showed that there were other issues to take into account than new technology. For example, butchers and caterers offshore might be made unemployed and need to upgrade their skills. I hope that, in the light of such practical examples, we can return to some of the more traditional skills that need to be upgraded.

No one would object to attempts to improve skills in our society, and ILAs are one way of achieving that aim. However, I am not convinced that the joined-up arrangements are in place for this scheme. I welcome the fact that the learning house concept is being rolled out—another new Labour phrase—all over Scotland. I am familiar with the concept as I was the councillor for the ward in which the first learning house was introduced by Grampian Enterprise Ltd. I note with great pleasure that advice from the pilot schemes has changed the Government's approach on this issue.

The minister has shown a willingness to listen to advice that has been given externally and by the Parliament. I hope that the minister will take that approach for other matters. Concern has been expressed today about barriers to access and I am sure that the minister will address those concerns, if not today, then before we get to the point of dealing with the detail of the bill, if there ever is any detail.

I am conscious that I must be close to my time limit.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** You have another minute and a half.

**Brian Adam:** Okay. Fine. Great.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Only if you wish, Mr Adam. I am not pushing you into it.

**Brian Adam:** It will be difficult to target the initiative at the groups that most need the help that it can provide and I hope that a lot of thought will be put into that. A survey showed that 90 per cent of people on the scheme in Glasgow thought that the idea that education should continue was a great idea, but only around 30 per cent said that they were prepared to continue doing it. That figure was only those who were prepared to do it, not those who actually did it.

I am concerned about the proportion of the

budget that appears to be going on things other than delivery of the services. I am concerned that 10 per cent is going to the customer service provider—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Order. There is too much noise off. We all know that the acoustics in this hall are not very good. It is almost impossible for me to hear the speaker.

You have 30 seconds, Mr Adam.

**Brian Adam:** It is difficult to justify the number of players. The customer service providers seem to be getting an inordinately high proportion of the funds. The £4 million for non-direct provision of services seems too high as well. It is important that we monitor the situation and I hope that we will have a lot more detail when we get to stage 2.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Although I am not happy about it, we will have to overrun. You have until 4 minutes past 5 to wind up for the Executive, minister.

16:56

**Nicol Stephen:** I will try to be brief.

Fergus Ewing, unusually for him, was gloomy and grudging about the £23 million of new investment in skills and training. The bill is short, but the proposals are clear and there is a lot of supplementary detail that has, as Fergus Ewing knows, been provided to the committee. As Nick Johnston pointed out, a full, glossy document about this is available and we have run schemes to pilot the initiative. I contrast Nick Johnston's comments with those of Fergus Ewing and I welcome the support of the Conservatives. I think that we have the support of the SNP, despite the bleak and, at times, Kafkaesque imagery that its members used. Lewis Carroll was brought in at one stage of the debate, although I thought that we ventured into the realm of Barbara Cartland when Tavish Scott raised the image of Duncan McNeil and Fergus Ewing walking up hand in hand to receive their award.

Nick Johnston asked a lot of good, detailed questions. I do not have time to answer them just now, but we will be able to deal with them at stage 2. Duncan McNeil brought us back to the positive, upbeat and dynamic approach that the debate needed. John Swinney's speech was also constructive. I realise that he is concerned about the tight time scale and I assure him that tight time scales are not liked by ministers either. He has written to Henry McLeish on the issue and we will respond in due course. John Swinney's main point was that we must target those who are least likely to learn. I agree, but I do not think that a quota system would be the right way to ensure that. We have got to do it through marketing and through

the involvement of the LECs.

Tavish Scott and others raised the concerns of rural communities over access to these new forms of learning. That is an issue that we are responding to. Barriers to access must be removed. We have got rid of the proposal to have new bank accounts as a compulsory requirement. That led to a huge growth in the number of learning accounts in the Grampian area. We have said that we will consider the issues of travel and child care, but let us be clear: those issues apply to all areas of learning. We want a more consistent and supportive approach to be taken towards those issues, in which regard the £8 million of new funding for further education colleges is welcome and positive news.

We want to enable ship workers to access training—something that Duncan McNeil highlighted. Individual learning accounts must allow access to workplace learning, online learning and other innovative ways of learning. Already there has been innovation in our colleges. For example, Cumbernauld College has launched learndirect Cumbernauld—the word was not liked by all, but the initiative is there.

It is clear that there is considerable support for the general principles of this bill. It will take us closer to the development of, in the words of Allan Wilson, the learning society here in Scotland, which I mentioned in my opening remarks. The grant-making powers in the bill will enable us to introduce learning accounts throughout Scotland, to help many people to overcome the financial barriers to learning. They will help new learners to start out on the road of lifelong learning, and will encourage existing learners to continue to develop their skills. That will be a major step in the dramatic change in attitudes to learning and skills that is vital to the success of Scotland's new knowledge economy.

Learning accounts will empower individuals to take greater responsibility for investing in their learning. They will encourage employers to increase their investment in training and will help smaller companies to invest seriously in their staff and develop their skills. They will help to increase the skill levels of our work force, and will increase motivation and develop potential.

This bill and the regulations in it will give Scottish ministers the powers to ensure that the UK framework of individual learning accounts can continue to evolve to reflect Scottish needs. There are already some key differences between the proposed framework for Scotland and that for the rest of the UK. We intend to monitor closely the introduction and effectiveness of individual learning accounts. If we are failing to reach the key target groups, we will be prepared to make changes. We will consult the main stakeholders

and listen to their views, and we will continue to consult the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee.

**Mr Swinney:** Will the minister give way?

**Nicol Stephen:** I am about to finish. I am on my final sentence. However, as I have two minutes left according to the clock, I will give way.

**Mr Swinney:** If the learning accounts are failing to reach those who are least likely to learn, at what stage will ministers be prepared to reconsider the plans that they have put forward? What mechanisms will be in place to prove to them that they have failed to reach those people?

**Nicol Stephen:** The simple and obvious answer is: as soon as possible. We want to monitor to ensure that local marketing reaches the target groups. As soon as we see problems, we will take action. The huge growth in the uptake of individual learning accounts that took place in the Grampian region—the figure was stuck at around 100, but has now reached more than 2,000—gives us considerable confidence for the future.

On that note, I shall finish. That is a positive, practical example from a pilot scheme. I invite all members, including Fergus Ewing, to support the motion agreeing to the general principles of the bill.

## **Education and Training (Scotland) Bill: Financial Resolution**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S1M-861, in the name of Mr Jack McConnell, on a financial resolution on the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill, agrees to the expenditure payable out of the Scottish Consolidated Fund of the expenses of the Scottish Ministers in consequence of the Act.—[*Henry McLeish.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There are no Parliamentary Bureau motions today, so we move straight to decision time.

## Decision Time

17:04

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** There are seven questions to be put. The first question is, that amendment S1M-887.1, in the name of Michael Matheson, which seeks to amend motion S1M-887, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

### FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

### AGAINST

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)

Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

### ABSTENTIONS

Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 28, Against 78, Abstentions 1.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The second question is, that motion S1M-887, in the name of

Jackie Baillie, on the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees the principles contained in the provisions of the Race Relations (Amendment) Bill including the power to impose duties on public authorities so far as those provisions relate to matters within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or confer functions on the Scottish Ministers.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The third question is, that amendment S1M-896.2 in the name of Alasdair Morgan, seeking to amend motion S1M-896, in the name of Ross Finnie, on "Rural Scotland: A New Approach", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members: No.**

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

**FOR**

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**AGAINST**

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
 Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)

Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 28, Against 78, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The fourth question is, that amendment S1M-896.1, in the

name of Alex Johnstone, seeking to amend motion S1M-896, in the name of Ross Finnie, on "Rural Scotland: A New Approach", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

**FOR**

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**AGAINST**

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)  
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
Mackay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)  
McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)

Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)  
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

**ABSTENTIONS**

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 15, Against 64, Abstentions 27.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The fifth question is, that motion S1M-896, in the name of Ross Finnie, on "Rural Scotland: A New Approach", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

I am having difficulty hearing, but I think that I hear a single "No". There will be a division.

**FOR**

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)  
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)

Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)  
 Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)  
 Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)  
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)  
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)  
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)  
 Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)  
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)  
 Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)  
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)  
 Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)  
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)  
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)  
 Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)  
 Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)  
 Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)  
 Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)  
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 MacKay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)  
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)  
 Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)  
 Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)  
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)  
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)  
 McGugan, Irene (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)  
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 McMahan, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)  
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
 Morgan, Alasdair (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (SNP)  
 Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)  
 Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)  
 Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)  
 Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)  
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)  
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)  
 Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)  
 Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)  
 Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)

Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)  
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)  
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)  
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)  
 Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)  
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)  
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)  
 Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)  
 White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)  
 Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

#### ABSTENTIONS

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)  
 Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)  
 Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnston, Nick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)  
 McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)  
 Young, John (West of Scotland) (Con)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 92, Against 0, Abstentions 15.

#### *Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament welcomes the publication by the Scottish Executive of the document *Rural Scotland: A New Approach*; notes the progress which the Executive has already made in placing rural Scots in the mainstream of its policies and activities, and endorses the vision for rural Scotland presented in the document and the approach which will be taken, working together with others, to put and keep rural Scotland at the heart of Scotland's future.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The sixth question is, that motion S1M-876, in the name of Henry McLeish, on the general principles of the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

#### *Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The seventh question is, that motion S1M-861, in the name of Jack McConnell, on the financial resolution on the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Education and Training (Scotland) Bill, agrees to the expenditure payable out of the Scottish Consolidated Fund of the expenses of the Scottish Ministers in consequence of the Act.

## Dyspraxia

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):** We now move on to members' business. I ask members who are not taking part in the debate to leave the chamber quickly and quietly.

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S1M-653, in the name of Duncan Hamilton, on dyspraxia. The debate will be concluded after 30 minutes without any question being put. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons as soon as possible.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the establishment of the first paid development worker within the field of dyspraxia in the UK, to be based in the Highlands and Islands; notes that the condition is estimated to affect up to ten per cent of the population; recognises that dyspraxia is often overlooked by GPs and is unknown to many in the teaching profession, and believes that greater recognition should be given to the condition by education and health professionals and that dyspraxia should be included in the current regime of pre-school screening.

17:11

**Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** First, let me put this debate in context. I am sure that some members will be unaware of the definition of dyspraxia and of what the motion tries to achieve. I am hugely grateful for the support that I have had from colleagues. Sixty-six members of Parliament have chosen to sign this motion, which I believe is the second highest number of signatories for any motion, with the exception of Mike Russell's motion on the Act of Settlement. That shows how seriously members are beginning to take dyspraxia. Support for the motion has come from all parties. There is no party or independent member in the Parliament who has not signed the motion and I therefore ask the Executive to see the debate not as a challenge or a threat, but in a spirit of co-operation, so that we are all pushing in the same direction.

It would be remiss of me not to thank the Dyspraxia Foundation for all its support and help in preparing for the debate. I do not want to emphasise the local angle of this debate too strongly, but it is a matter of great pride to me and to other members for the Highlands and Islands that the first paid development worker specifically devoted to dyspraxia will be in the Highlands and Islands.

This issue goes right to the heart of joined-up government. Although it is in some sense a health issue, which is why the Deputy Minister for Community Care is here to answer the debate, it also touches on aspects of education, social

inclusion and justice. It is good to see the Deputy Minister for Children and Education here too. I wonder where the others are; perhaps they will drop in later.

It is important to make clear to members who may not be acquainted with the condition that dyspraxia is defined by the Dyspraxia Foundation as an impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement. It is an immaturity of the brain resulting in messages not being properly transmitted to the body. It affects up to 10 per cent of the population in varying degrees and 70 per cent of those affected are male. It can cause a range of symptoms, including poor motor skills and co-ordination, clumsiness—which leads to the common misnomer “clumsy child syndrome”—awkward movement, limited concentration and poor listening skills. It can impact on the very self-esteem of those who suffer it.

Although the motion focuses on pre-school screening and that is the action point of the debate, dyspraxia is a lifelong condition and does not only affect children. Also, it cannot be cured. The best that can be offered is some radical improvement in the lives of sufferers if the condition is identified early and physiotherapy and other treatment is made available. It is important to note that dyspraxia often overlaps with other conditions such as dyslexia—with which members will, perhaps, be better acquainted.

Why have I lodged the motion? In a sense, this is merely the latest stage in a campaign to get greater recognition for dyspraxia, which has often been the forgotten condition. While awareness of dyslexia has moved ahead, dyspraxia has been shelved. The first point that I should make is that we must remove the stigma that still attaches to dyspraxia. It still attaches because many teachers and GPs are unaware of the condition. They do not know what to look for and they do not know what to do when they find it.

I see that Dr Richard Simpson is here. It would, perhaps, be useful to hear a GP's perspective on what we can do to raise awareness among GPs. It is not acceptable that some GPs—through no fault of their own—are not aware of a condition that affects up to 10 per cent of the population. There are hard-pressed teachers who have never been given appropriate training to deal with dyspraxia. It is most important that action is taken, specifically the introduction of pre-school screening for dyspraxia, as happens in respect of other conditions. I hope that the Executive will go down that route.

It is important to examine the effects of the condition within the spectrum of the social inclusion agenda. Members should note that the sketchy research that has been done on the condition suggests that up to 60 per cent of

sufferers develop psychiatric illness. That is an astonishing figure. The research also shows that a high proportion of those with criminal records suffer from dyspraxia. The link comes from the diminution of sufferers' self-esteem. There seems to be a correlation between the social exclusion caused by the disease and problems in later life. It is reckoned that about 50 per cent of adults in prison suffer from dyspraxia to a greater or lesser extent. It is astonishing to think what that means in a divided society.

We should examine the matter compassionately and we should attempt to move forward as a society. That might result in a saving to the Parliament and the Executive. If dyspraxia is diagnosed early and the mechanisms are in place to deal with it, there will be a real long-term saving, because social exclusion is astonishingly expensive.

It is wrong to say that little can be done. We do not know exactly what causes the condition; more research must be done on that. A study was done in 1998 on the effect of physiotherapy. It suggested that an eight-week intensive course resulted in an improvement of between 50 and 90 per cent in a set range of skills. There can be astonishing improvements if the resources and the will to provide physiotherapy exist. When people's self-esteem is encouraged to grow, we will truly be seeing a policy of social inclusion.

It would be wrong to suggest that nothing can be done for sufferers. Highlighting the problem is not enough—there must be positive action. I will speak briefly about the Government's action on dyspraxia so far. I have pursued the matter for some months, but had only a limited response from the Executive about what it has managed to achieve. Resources have not been made available and no commitment has been made to pre-school screening. I urge the minister to remember that the introduction of such screening has no cost. It has cross-party support and would build on the Government's current policy on special educational needs. It is not a threat—it is something to be embraced.

I hope that the Executive will accept the motion and join the bandwagon that will ensure that dyspraxia is never ignored again.

17:19

**Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD):** I thank Duncan Hamilton for raising this issue. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate, as I am one of the teachers mentioned in the motion: I taught for 35 years and did not know about dyspraxia for 30 of them. I still do not know much about it, because we do not have much information. That makes one



feel silly when people's difficulties are diagnosed.

The same is true of dyslexia—it has been in the public domain for a long time, but we are not yet dealing with it in the right way. If Duncan Hamilton will forgive me, I would like to consider dyspraxia and dyslexia together. ME is another condition that is difficult to diagnose; it is in the air, but people do not have a clear sense of what it is, what we should do about it or when we need to do it.

All the conditions that I have mentioned must be properly recognised and taken seriously by the authorities. Good practice must also be recognised, documented and promulgated to everybody involved—parents, local authorities, teachers and families. Those people need clear information and guidance. If this debate helps to draw people's attention to that need, it will have done a great service.

I hope that under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill, which provides for the inspection of local authorities, one of the issues that will be considered by inspectors is how screening for these conditions is conducted. I recognise that the division of responsibilities in this area between health and education is unclear, but I do not think that either service should wash its hands of the issue and say that it belongs to the other. As Duncan Hamilton said, this is about joined-up government. If the issue is dealt with properly, that will have a joined-up effect on the individuals concerned.

I call on ministers to take a genuinely purposeful overview of these conditions, which have been marginalised but seriously impair the life chances and opportunities available to youngsters. I urge them to put in place a strengthened and comprehensive screening system as soon as parliamentary time allows and at as early a stage in children's development as is feasible.

When we were debating individual learning accounts, we discussed literacy and numeracy. This issue gets to the heart of that. If we can identify conditions early—even if we cannot cure them—we can, as Duncan Hamilton says, develop strategies that allow people to have better lives.

17:22

**Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab):** I congratulate Duncan Hamilton not only on securing this debate but on the strong support that members have shown for it.

This aspect of disability, like many others, is undergoing a transformation in respect of recognition and management. We are beginning to understand some of the neurological bases of dysfunctions, although in the case of dyspraxia they are still extremely obscure. Duncan Hamilton

was right to say that the answer lies in management rather than curative treatment.

The first issue is early diagnosis. I am not convinced that at present the primary care teams are able to ensure that. However, the development of local health care co-operatives provides the opportunity for a degree of specialisation, which can be built on in individual primary care teams through health visitors, rather than general practitioners. I do not think that we will get general practitioners to recognise this condition easily.

As Duncan Hamilton has illustrated, the problem is that children suffering from dyspraxia are often excluded. Indeed, parents and teachers may punish them inadvertently for what is perceived as willing clumsiness but is in fact something they are unable to manage. Early recognition is important, as is appropriate management, to deal with the problem of subsequent exclusion and the consequences that that has for self-esteem.

I hope that health visitors will be given specific training in this area. That training should be carried out in a joined-up way. At present there is a major problem with the provision of cross-cutting, multidisciplinary training. We have paid lip service to that for many years, but here we have a condition that makes it possible for us to consider training teachers, nursery school teachers and health visitors in such a way as to give us a cross-cutting ability. I hope that the Executive will consider making that the subject of a pathfinder or pilot project.

17:24

**David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con):** I congratulate Duncan Hamilton not only on securing today's debate, but on the work that he has done in seeking to highlight dyspraxia, the issues it raises and the families it affects.

Until six years ago, my wife and I had no idea what dyspraxia was—quite simply, we had never heard of it. Our eldest son, Oliver, had grown up a happy and healthy boy and although we thought he was a bit clumsy and not good at catching a ball or anything that required manual dexterity, we did not think anything was wrong. That was until he started school, which for every parent is a milestone.

I vividly remember the first parents evening we went to for primary 1 pupils. Some suspicions that we had developed were confirmed. I noticed that around a classroom covered in pictures the children had made, there was not one by Oliver. The reason, as the teacher then told us, was that he never finished his work. It was not because he was not a bright boy; he simply did not have skills with pencils and paint brushes.

In retrospect, it is clear that we saw all the other symptoms that Duncan mentioned, but what could be done about it? We found ourselves in a continuing struggle over the next five years to get the support our child needed. We had a struggle to get him assessed by an educational psychologist, a struggle to get learning support, a struggle to get occupational therapy, and a struggle to keep the support once he had it.

We lived in East Ayrshire at that time. The council's position was that it had enough people with special needs and it certainly did not want any more. Oliver was a bright boy. The council thought he was coping. He was not the least-achieving pupil in the school. I remember trying again and again to get over the message that it was not good enough that Oliver could cope with the difficulties and that it was his right to achieve his full potential.

We continued to fight and, with the support of people such as Graham Robertson of the Dyspraxia Foundation—which I should have declared I am a member of—we were given access to pioneering work by people such as Madeline Portwood. We passed it to the school, to the hands of Mrs Rowley, who was Oliver's supportive learning support teacher, and to Alison Gemmell, who was the head teacher of Fenwick Primary.

The positive message that I want to add to this debate is that those measures all made a difference. Occupational therapy, the learning support teacher and the exercises we did endlessly at home made a difference. Oliver's ability to write has improved, his thought process has evolved, his motor skills are greatly improved and while he will never be his hero, David Beckham, he can participate in sports.

Minister, I do not want other parents to be in the situation that we were in. We were lucky. We were able to work the system. We had the time, resources and energy to phone the school and education department every five minutes to pursue people in authority, to take Oliver to Cardiff to the innovative Discovery Centre, and to find a behavioural optometrist in Scotland. Members may not know what that is, but there are few in Scotland and they are important to this condition. That is why pre-school assessment is so important: because, following Oliver's experience, we were able to get pre-school assessment for our younger son, Lewis. He got support and occupational therapy at nursery at age three. Because of that early intervention, he no longer needs support. He is now five and a half. We should be aiming for that for all children with this disorder.

To conclude, everyone in Scotland has a right to achieve their full potential. My sons are proof that

people with dyspraxia can do that if the help and support is available. The minister needs to make that happen for everyone.

17:28

**Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP):** The minister just has to take the example of Lewis and put it into practice for all children. That is what this debate is about.

In two weeks' time, when we consider stage 3 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Bill, we will be putting the presumption to mainstream into legislation. That makes it all the more important that we have in place the structures necessary to identify and support all children entering education in Scotland, no matter what condition they suffer.

We have heard what dyspraxia is, but I wish to draw the minister's attention to the research done by Mitchell and Wood—two physiotherapists—on a simple test to identify dyspraxia. The test is so simple that suitably qualified and trained pre-school staff could be in the front line of identifying young children with dyspraxia. It is so simple that it can be incorporated into the current pre-school screening that is done by health visitors, to which Dr Simpson referred.

We must ensure that, once we have identified the children, they have all the help they need. It is now readily available; as it was for Lewis, but not for Oliver. We have to ensure that teachers understand the situation and that all the appropriate therapists are available for the children where and when they are needed. Most often, that will be in school.

I visited a special needs school this morning. I make a plea that we ensure that children with special needs have access to facilities outwith school, so that they have equal access to leisure.

I heartily congratulate Duncan Hamilton on securing this debate. I would like to hear from the minister that the simple tests that have been identified by Mitchell and Wood will be incorporated into pre-school screening.

17:31

**The Deputy Minister for Community Care (Iain Gray):** I would like to join in the general congratulations for Duncan Hamilton on securing this debate today. It will help to raise the profile of dyspraxia in Scotland.

As we have heard, dyspraxia is a complex condition. It is not fully understood even among some medical professionals. It is not entirely neglected: 97 research projects on various aspects of dyspraxia are taking place in the UK today. Some are aimed at improving the condition

in adults; although most of the debate has focused on children, this is a lifelong condition, as Duncan Hamilton correctly said. There is also a much wider body of research into conditions such as dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which are associated with dyspraxia. In Scotland, the Royal Aberdeen children's hospital is doing research into dyspraxia and there are eight ADHD projects—one at Ninewells hospital in Dundee and seven at the Yorkhill hospital in this city.

Dyspraxia is not easy to diagnose, partly because it has so many symptoms that can be present in any combination. We have heard about many of the symptoms during the debate—general clumsiness, confusion between right and left, extreme sensitivity to touch, poor short-term memory and body awareness, and difficulty with learned tasks such as using a pencil or cutlery, or getting dressed. Dyspractic children can often have speech problems, which can be very severe. In spite of that, they are usually of average or above average intelligence. Many of the problems may appear at some point in the development of young children who are not dyspractic, which all adds to the difficulty of diagnosis.

There is no standard accepted treatment for dyspraxia and unfortunately no known cure. The main source of help for a dyspractic child is, as we have heard, in occupational therapy, physiotherapy and educational support, which can help the child to cope with his or her difficulties and to achieve his or her potential to a much greater degree.

I am not sure that we can say that the incidence of dyspraxia in Scotland is as high as 10 per cent. The Dyspraxia Foundation's website estimates that 2 per cent of families in the UK are affected by the condition. I make that point not to be critical, but to acknowledge further the difficulties of evidence-gathering on a condition that is not well understood.

**Mr Hamilton:** On the ground that very few people know what symptoms they are looking for, I would have thought it likely that the incidence of dyspraxia could be even higher.

**Iain Gray:** That is entirely possible. The condition is poorly understood.

The only statistics that are held centrally are for people who are discharged from hospital with a primary or secondary diagnosis of dyspraxia. A primary diagnosis means that dyspraxia was the reason for referral to the hospital; a secondary diagnosis means that the patient has been admitted for another reason but has been found to have dyspraxia too.

There were only 117 diagnoses of dyspraxia in 1999 and a further 25 diagnoses of specific

development disorder of motor function, which may include some with dyspraxia. In some ways those statistics have little value. For example, they do not include out-patients; conversely they may include more than one admission of the same person.

Whatever the incidence of dyspraxia, I can understand and sympathise with the desire of families affected by the condition to see it included in the pre-school screening programme. There is no doubt that the earlier any developmental difficulty is diagnosed, the earlier the child can be helped.

I will respond in a little detail to the proposal in the motion. The Executive is advised on screening programmes by the national screening committee, which has a children's sub-group. National in this context means the whole of the UK, to give a broader statistical base. This is an eminent committee of experts that has continued to operate since devolution last year. The Executive has representatives on the national screening committee and the sub-group and both have Scottish members appointed for their expertise in particular areas.

When the national screening committee and the children's sub-group consider new possibilities for screening programmes, they work to overall criteria that include requirements that there should be a diagnostic test that is simple, quick and easy to interpret and accurate and that there should be a recognised standard treatment for the condition. Neither of those factors is generally considered to apply to dyspraxia at present.

**Fiona McLeod:** I refer the minister to the research published at the end of 1999 by two physiotherapists, Mitchell and Wood, which identified what to me—as a layman—appears a very simple test for the detection of dyspraxia. Could that be brought to the national screening committee's attention?

**Iain Gray:** I would be very surprised if it was not aware of the research, but I will ensure that it is aware of it.

The children's sub-group of the national screening committee does not have any immediate plans to include dyspraxia in its programme of conditions that may be included in national screening programmes in the future. It would be dishonest to say anything different in this debate. That is not to say that it ignores developmental disorders. Its future programme includes dyslexia, speech and language delay and conduct disorders, which are—as we have heard—all conditions that are often closely linked to dyspraxia. If screening programmes for those conditions are introduced in time, children with dyspraxia may benefit indirectly.

There is some movement down the route that Duncan Hamilton asked for, although dyspraxia is a less immediate destination than the motion desires. I make the point that the map is a clinical one, not a political one. There is no standard accepted medical treatment to help dyspraxia, but educational support can help almost all children with dyspraxia; that has been graphically described during the debate. In schools, a learning support teacher is often involved. If necessary, referrals can be made to community child health and to educational psychology. A medical officer and a psychologist can see the child, meet the parents and decide what needs to be done. If it is felt that dyspraxia is the problem, an occupational therapist can be called in to advise the teacher on ways to help the child.

**David Mundell:** Does not Iain Gray accept the point that I made: that parents who have the time, energy and resources can drive through support for their children, but that parents who are not in that position—who are, as the Executive often says, excluded—are not able to do so and accept what the establishment, the school or the health board say? Is not the minister putting some children at a disadvantage?

**Iain Gray:** I take Mr Mundell's point. I make it clear that the situation that he described in his personal case is not acceptable. That level of difficulty in getting the required support is not acceptable.

Many of the possibilities of support arise through school. I will comment on what we can do to make that more effective for others in future. Children with dyspraxia will be among those who will benefit from the £12 million inclusion programme that was announced by Peter Peacock in the debate on special educational needs. Members who were in the chamber will recall that he recognised that in-service training for teachers was crucial for the early diagnosis of dyspraxia. That has been one of the points—although, I agree, not the central one—that has been raised in the debate. He pledged that resources would be made available to work towards increasing the effectiveness of in-service training. Today, Peter Peacock and I have agreed that he will refer the matter of dyspraxia to the national special educational needs advisory forum and seek its advice on how we can ensure that what we do is effective.

In conclusion, I congratulate Duncan Hamilton on bringing this little-understood condition to our attention today. Our debate and the number of signatories to the motion, as well as research, greater recognition among teachers and the work that is beginning in the Highlands and Islands, to which the motion refers, will move us a little way along the path of better understanding, which must underpin an improved response to dyspraxia in the future.

*Meeting closed at 17:40.*

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