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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 8 May 2024

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

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is rural affairs, land reform and islands. I invite members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

I advise members that we are extremely tight for time across the whole of the afternoon. There is quite a bit of interest in all three of the portfolios on which there will be questions. Therefore, the usual plea for brevity in questions and answers has added emphasis this afternoon.

Land Reform (Scotland) Bill (Urban Community Assets)

1. **Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to incorporate the ownership and management of community assets in urban areas into its Land Reform (Scotland) Bill. (S6O-03388)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill sets out ambitious proposals that will change for the better how land is owned and managed in our rural and island communities. I appreciate that one size and, indeed, one bill most definitely does not fit all. The Government recognises the need to continue to develop policies and programmes for land in urban areas that reflect local needs and priorities. That is why, in March, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands announced a review of the community rights to buy to look at how effective our current powers are in urban and rural areas.

Foyso Choudhury: In 2020, after the Heart of Newhaven primary school was closed, a community asset transfer brought the building into public ownership, allowing it to serve its area as a community hub. Local engagement is so important, yet the provisions on community engagement in the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill apply only to holdings that are thousands of hectares. Can the minister advise how the Scottish Government will ensure good use of areas of land that are smaller than those that are mentioned in the bill?

Jim Fairlie: I absolutely take on board the point that Foyso Choudhury raises. The regeneration investment programme is supporting communities to develop and take ownership of land and assets across Scotland. To date, over £265 million has been invested through the regeneration capital grant fund, supporting nearly 230 community-led projects, and almost £27 million has been invested through the vacant and derelict land investment programme. That programme has brought back into use just over 112 hectares of persistent vacant and derelict land.

We will continue to deliver the vacant and derelict land fund. Five eligible councils are currently receiving a share of £7.65 million in 2023-24, and a figure of £5 million is planned for 2024-25.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Although we want communities to benefit from land ownership, it must be done in a way that is fair and proportionate. How will the Scottish Government determine when the lotting of land is in the public interest? What steps will the minister take to ensure that the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill complies with existing property rights?

Jim Fairlie: The cabinet secretary is taking through the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, and I am answering on her behalf, so I apologise if I do not give a full answer.

My understanding at this stage is that the Government was looking at a figure of over 1,000 hectares—it might be 3,000. I cannot honestly give the right numbers for that, but I know that the cabinet secretary has been looking at the issue, so we can get a fuller answer to the member in writing.

Forestry and Land Scotland (Meetings)

2. **Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when the rural affairs secretary last met with Forestry and Land Scotland. (S6O-03389)

I note my entry in the register of members' interests regarding forestry and renewable energy.

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): As Alexander Burnett will be aware, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands regularly consults officials from Forestry and Land Scotland. I know that the member is aware that the cabinet secretary raised issues around flooding with Forestry and Land Scotland on his behalf. She regularly meets the organisation. The two most recent meetings, which were focused on finance, took place on 28 March and 1 May this year.

Alexander Burnett: New freedom of information figures show that, last year, more than a million trees on public land were felled to make way for wind farms. Constituents, such as those near Brown Hill forest at Craig Dorney, are reporting that forest roads that are owned by the Scottish Government are being improved to a higher specification than is required for simple timber extraction. That is clearly being done in expectation of wind farm developments that have yet to be consented, which makes a mockery of the approval process. Is the minister aware of such activity? Does he approve of it? Will those additional costs be met by wind farm developers, or are they just another cost being borne by the taxpayer?

Jim Fairlie: I reiterate the point that I made to your colleague Rachael Hamilton: this is not my bill or my area. I was not aware of the issue that you have raised, but I will get the cabinet secretary to write to you with the details.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, please.

A number of members have requested to ask supplementary questions, which will need to be brief.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): Forestry and Land Scotland is a key institution in relation to Scotland's land management. What role does the Government envisage that FLS will play in the next chapter of Scotland's land reform journey as we strive to ensure that our land benefits the country as a whole, not just a privileged few?

Jim Fairlie: Over the past five years, Forestry and Land Scotland has worked with community groups that want to be more involved in managing Scotland's national forests and land. The community asset transfer of national forests and land has been integral to the creation of businesses, tourism and recreational opportunities and to the establishment of affordable housing, woodland crofts and community renewable energy schemes, with 25 transfers having been completed to date.

Asset transfer has also empowered communities to address challenges with rural housing and to create new woodland crofts and affordable housing. Communities have benefited from renewable energy developments on national forests and land through community benefit payments from large-scale wind farm creation, for example, which has created substantial funds for local communities to draw on.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Under the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, will large FLS land holdings be required to produce publicly accessible land management

plans for consultation, thereby bringing much-needed scrutiny by communities and other stakeholders?

Jim Fairlie: I am not quite sure what Mark Ruskell is asking. As far as I am aware, Forestry and Land Scotland is already publicly accessible. If that is not a full enough answer, I ask Mark Ruskell to come back to me, and I will ask the cabinet secretary to write to him.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Government ministers have repeatedly said that we need to have the right trees in the right places, but farmland in my constituency has recently been bought for tree plantation even though it is useful for food production. Will the minister use any more controls to ensure that we truly get the right trees in the right places?

Jim Fairlie: As Willie Rennie said, I have consistently said that we should have the right trees in the right places, but I should point out that it is farmers who sell the land to plant trees in the first place. If we bring in controls at a later date, that will be done through the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, which is being taken forward by the cabinet secretary.

Forestry Grant Scheme

3. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether the forestry grant scheme is fit for purpose. (S6O-03390)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The forestry grant scheme has consistently delivered the positive outcomes that are set out in the Scottish rural development programme. Since 2015, 85,000 hectares of new woodland have been supported, including 40,000 hectares of native woodland and 8,000 hectares through natural regeneration. The forestry grant scheme also contributes to a broad range of other priorities, including public access to woodland, rainforest restoration, priority species conservation and rural development.

Under the Scottish rural development programme, a formal evaluation of the forestry grant scheme from 2015 to 2023 is under way, and the report will be published during 2024.

Richard Leonard: Three weeks ago, I wrote to the cabinet secretary about the revelation that the private global investment company abrdn was paid a public grant of £2.5 million from Scottish Forestry in August 2023 for planting trees in the Cairngorms, even though the company increased its shareholdings in coal and oil and gas corporations in the US by £234 million in the same year. Last week, I received a reply from the cabinet secretary in which she told me:

“Scottish Forestry does not restrict funding to companies based on their wider business interests.”

What is the moral justification for that? Does the minister think that that is right? Why is this Government so soft on corporations and so tough on everybody else?

Jim Fairlie: I am not entirely convinced that that is correct, but I will get a much fuller answer to Richard Leonard, and I am happy to meet him to talk about such issues.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Today, the issue is not so much whether the right tree is in the right place, but whether we have the right minister in the right place.

In February, the Minister for Energy and the Environment said that

“other sources of funding for tree planting”—[*Official Report*, 1 February 2024; c 9.]

would be increased to make up for the savage £32 million cut to the forestry grant scheme. What other sources of funding for new woodland creation does the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity expect to become available? Specifically, how many additional hectares does he believe that that funding will deliver in the coming financial year?

Jim Fairlie: The honest answer to that is that I do not know. I am answering questions on behalf of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, and I do not have the answer to that question, but we will write to the member with a suitable answer.

Rachael Hamilton (Etrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance. We are here for rural questions, but we have had not one answer other than the scripted ones. Could the cabinet secretary not have come to rural question time and then dealt with whatever she had to do following that, given that she has been seen on social media at Bute house?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Rachael Hamilton for her point. She will be aware that the content of ministerial responses and, indeed, whom the Government chooses to respond to questions are matters for the Government.

Forestry and Land Scotland (Economic Benefit)

4. **Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what Forestry and Land Scotland is doing to deliver economic benefit from the land that it manages, including through supporting mountain bike tourism. (S6O-03391)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): Forestry and Land Scotland is the

custodian of the nation’s forests and woodlands, and it recently marked the fifth anniversary since it was formed by this Government. The agency’s works in our forests and woodlands represent at least 40 per cent of the total forestry activity in Scotland and contribute some 10,347 full-time equivalent forestry jobs and £382 million in gross value added to Scotland’s economy.

We also host enough renewable energy infrastructure to produce more than 1 billion watts of energy, which is sufficient to power 600,000 homes.

FLS is a key partner in delivering the “Strategy for Scottish Mountain Biking 2023-2025”. Our forests and woodlands welcome 11 million visitors annually across Scotland, of whom 8 per cent are mountain bikers. In the Scottish Borders, that figure increases to 33 per cent.

The “Glentress Masterplan” resulted in a £6 million public investment in trails and car parks. Other master plans are either in development or have been developed for other sites. Those plans act as frameworks for investment; for example, they helped to inform the £5 million 7stanes redevelopment project in the Borderlands growth deal.

Forestry and Land Scotland is also actively working with the Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland project, trail associations and event organisers across Scotland to support mountain biking.

Craig Hoy: I recently met—unlike the minister, clearly—with businesses that represent mountain biking groups that use Glentress mountain biking trails, which are owned and operated by Forestry and Land Scotland. Following last year’s UCI championships, they are concerned that the positive outcomes that were promised from the event have so far failed to materialise or have not fully materialised. The trails at Glentress are partially closed, and the master plan has apparently stalled.

If the minister is still in post at the end of the day, will he join me in urging Forestry and Land Scotland to work with local stakeholders, including Scottish Borders Council, and with the local businesses and community groups that form community trail advocacy in the Tweed Valley, to ensure that they secure a positive economic, social and tourism benefit from last year’s championships.

Jim Fairlie: I see that Craig Hoy is clearly looking for the collegiate approach that we are trying to get across the chamber, but it is obviously not working.

Forestry and Land Scotland works with a number of partners on use of volunteers for

management of cross-mountain bike trails. I will always be happy to meet stakeholders to see how we can advance things.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Forestry and Land Scotland should be looking at providing health benefits as well as economic benefits. As the minister will know, many people like to walk and cycle in the forests, but Forestry and Land Scotland has imposed parking charges that are putting a lot of people off. Will he consider a review of that policy to ensure that everyone has equal access to our forests?

Jim Fairlie: The straight answer to that is yes. I will have a look at that and get back to Rhoda Grant.

Wild Bees (Welfare)

5. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what steps it is taking to protect the welfare of wild bees. (S6O-03392)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The Scottish Government is committed to halting and reversing the declines in wild bee populations. The "Pollinator Strategy for Scotland 2017-2027" sets out the actions that we are taking to address the pressures that are experienced by wild bees, including creating and restoring habitats for those species. We provide updates on those actions in the strategy's annual progress reports.

Through the nature restoration fund, we are supporting projects that restore and enhance habitats for our pollinators. That includes providing more than £200,000 for the Pentland to Portobello greening project, £140,000 for the Tweed project and £89,000 for the Irvine to Girvan nectar network.

Graham Simpson: I am sure that the minister will agree with me that species-rich grasslands are some of our most biodiverse habitats. They provide a lifeline for wild bees and offer multiple other benefits, including storing vast amounts of carbon. We have seen catastrophic losses of those habitats, however. If the Scottish Government values Scotland's grasslands as it values peatlands and woodlands, would it be willing to develop a national grasslands action plan?

Jim Fairlie: I absolutely take on board the point that the member makes about species-rich grass. I used to plant it for exactly the reasons that he has mentioned. There are areas of the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill, which is currently going through Finlay Carson's and Rachael Hamilton's hands, that will address environmentally friendly issues in order to help

pollinators. I am happy to discuss that further with Graham Simpson.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): What steps is the Scottish Government taking to deal with the threat that is posed to Scotland's bees by the parasitic Varroa mite?

Jim Fairlie: In 2022 we updated "The Honey Bee Health Strategy 2022-2032", which aims to address the challenges that are facing honey bees and beekeepers. The strategy is supported by an implementation plan that details a number of actions specifically aimed at minimising the spread of Varroa, under the auspices of the dedicated Varroa working group. Those include activities to protect the precious few remaining Varroa-free areas.

We are also providing funding for the apiculture specialists at Scotland's Rural College, who provide education and a support service for beekeepers, focused on disease prevention, good biosecurity and treatment for Varroa mites.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I declare an interest as a beekeeper, and I should also mention that I am the new species champion for the moss carder bee, which is one of Scotland's rarest bee species.

Too often, conservation funding is very time limited. What long-term support is available for conservation programmes to secure the future of rare pollinator species such as the moss carder bee?

Jim Fairlie: Clearly, I cannot give any commitments today. However, as I have said, the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill is going through stage 2 at the moment. The Scottish Government is clearly seeking to protect pollinators through all the pollinator strategies that we currently have.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 (Review)

7. Fergus Ewing: To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands has had with ministerial colleagues regarding undertaking an immediate review of the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011, in order to allow proactive watercourse management to assist farmers, crofters and land managers to protect agricultural land from flooding risks themselves. (S6O-03394)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): I continue to work with my Cabinet

colleagues to ensure that Scotland has a sustainable water resource for food production, energy and drinking water. I recently convened a water resource planning round table, which highlighted the need to manage both water excess and scarcity in the face of a changing climate.

While watercourse management can play a role, it is not always effective in reducing water levels, and it can have an impact on downstream populations. We are bringing environmental regulations, including the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011, into an integrated authorisation framework, and facilitating a clear process for applications.

Fergus Ewing: That sounded a bit like a “No”.

I will cite one farmer, who told me that

“Farmers and landowners must be allowed to clear riverbanks and in some cases dredge rivers. SEPA stops them at every turn.”

I have spoken to three other farmers who have identified an overly complex prescriptive system, and they say that they are rarely allowed to remove silt and only use bank protection such as gabion baskets for insufficient lengths of time to avoid resultant flooding. They say that damage is being done to public roads, for example the B740. In some cases, farmers are actually threatened by SEPA with withdrawal of their single farm payments, for infraction, so that many farmers are afraid to have sheep on their farm. Is not the system a complete failure?

Jim Fairlie: No, I do not believe that the system is a complete failure. There is a complete dichotomy between what farmers are asking SEPA to do and what SEPA believes should be done. SEPA does not ban dredging.

Land managers can undertake certain works without the need for SEPA authorisation, including clearing subsurface field drains and man-made ditches. Litter debris and in-stream vegetation can also be removed without SEPA authorisation. Regulatory controls are proportionate to the risk, and sediment removal in agricultural ditches and straightened rivers can be carried out under authorisation, which is subject to good practice.

There is absolutely no doubt that we are getting far heavier rainfall and far more surface water coming down. We have to find a way of holding that water back. Last week, I had a conversation with Martin Kennedy from NFU Scotland. The idea is to clear the rivers and get the water down more quickly. However, if the water comes down more quickly, it floods somebody else further down. We need a much more integrated approach to managing our water, in the longer term.

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): As has just been mentioned, that is simply not

enough. The minister might be aware that, in Moray, the communities of Garmouth and Kingston have suffered terrible flooding damage to agricultural fields, as well as to homes and businesses. Many locals can remember parents and grandparents entering the river to clear shingle banks, which helped to control the waters of the Spey in years gone by. Will the minister consider changing the regulations to ensure that such local knowledge can be used in the future?

Jim Fairlie: I will not give that commitment right now, but I can say to Tim Eagle—I am not saying this to dampen down the debate—that there is an issue with water. Between flooding and drought, we now have a far bigger problem with water; they are much more extreme than they have ever been in the past. Water is not held in the hills with snow, but the upland areas could catch a lot more water. If it can be held up there earlier, we will not get flooding downstream.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): The minister will be aware of the repeated flooding that residents in Angus have faced during the past nine months or so. What reassurances can he give them that effective watercourse and river-basin management will protect them from flooding in the coming months?

Jim Fairlie: The Government is very alive to the fact that those flooding events have taken place; we have put money into the Brechin area in particular. However, the Government is consistently looking at what we are going to do about water management, which is why we held a round-table meeting last week, or the week before.

Island Economies (Cross-Government Support)

8. **Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what cross-Government action it is taking to support Scotland’s islands and their economies. (S6O-03395)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): Scotland’s first national islands plan was published in 2019 to co-ordinate cross-Government actions aimed at improving outcomes for island communities. To date, delivery of the plan has been supported by more than £12 million for critical infrastructure. That is additional to our investments in regional growth deals and our carbon neutral islands project, which further benefit the islands. The islands cost crisis emergency fund, which has already distributed £2.4 million to help island households and businesses, will be worth £5 million in 2024-25. We will publish a second national islands plan next year in collaboration with island communities and local authorities.

Neil Bibby: During the past month, the Ardrossan to Brodick ferry route saw 57 cancellations in three days when no ferries sailed at all. The current condition of Ardrossan harbour has led CalMac to claim that it can no longer berth overnight because of the risk of damage to vessels, which means that it can no longer operate the first sailing of the day. That is having a significant impact on the local economy, deliveries and workers. CalMac and Peel Ports are pointing fingers at each other while the multimillion-pound upgrade that was approved six years ago has been paused. Will the Scottish Government use its influence to get all parties around the table to ensure that people travelling between Ardrossan and Brodick have a reliable ferry service?

Jim Fairlie: I fully take on board the member's point. I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands is keen to ensure that we get people around the table to find a solution so that this brilliant island community, which has so much resource going for it, gets a solution to get the ferries back on course.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I am pleased to say that there is an Ardrossan harbour task force meeting next week.

Arran's business community faces additional challenges this summer because of reduced ferry capacity and heightened disruption from the closure by Peel Ports of Ardrossan's Irish berth. However, despite the negative media caricatures of the island, Arran remains open for business. How can the Scottish Government and CalMac promote that message? What practical assistance is being offered to minimise the impact of disruption on the viability and sustainability of Arran's businesses?

Jim Fairlie: I take on board the point that Kenneth Simpson regularly makes for his constituents.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): Gibson.

Jim Fairlie: Kenneth Gibson. The Scottish Government is consistently looking to ensure that people understand that all our island communities are open and that they are brilliant destinations.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On 13 March, I asked the minister in this chamber whether a derogation to the North Sea cod avoidance plan in order to allow fishing for squid inside 12 nautical miles—which is extremely important for the Shetland fishing industry and its local economy—would be considered. The minister said that the matter was one for the cabinet secretary, and that he would ask her to respond to me directly. Nearly two months later, I have still not received a reply from the cabinet secretary. Is such a derogation being

considered? Has the idea been rejected, or has it been accepted?

Jim Fairlie: I will chase that up with the cabinet secretary and get back to the member.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): What engagement has the Scottish Government had with the United Kingdom Government about developing short subsea tunnels between some of Shetland's islands? May I request that, if the minister is unable to answer, he provides a response in writing?

Jim Fairlie: I will definitely provide a response in writing, but I can tell Beatrice Wishart that I have met the Shetland Islands community to talk about the issue, which she has raised previously with me. I will be happy to give her a response in writing.

National Health Service Recovery, Health and Social Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is NHS recovery, health and social care. I remind members that questions 2 and 7 are grouped together, so I will take any supplementaries on those questions after both have been answered. Anybody who wishes to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. Again, there is a lot of interest in supplementaries, so the questions and, indeed, the responses will need to be brief.

Specialist Alcohol Services

1. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what value it places on specialist alcohol services, such as the primary care alcohol nurse outreach service in Glasgow, in dealing with the reported public health crisis in relation to alcohol. (S6O-03396)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): The Scottish Government values all initiatives and actions that are taken to help to address the public health crisis in relation to alcohol. Specialist services play a key part in helping to address that emergency, and initiatives such as the primary care outreach nurse service help to deliver co-ordinated and person-centred assessment, advice and care for people who have been impacted by alcohol.

Jackie Baillie: Last week, the Glasgow alcohol and drug partnership decided to downgrade the alcohol nurse outreach service by transferring it to a more generic drugs and alcohol service. That was done as a result of Scottish National Party cuts to the primary care budget. Does the minister accept that there is a need to ensure parity of response for alcohol and drug addictions, and will

she ensure that the most vulnerable people with alcohol addiction in areas of the greatest deprivation in Glasgow are not let down by that decision?

Jenni Minto: As Jackie Baillie pointed out, the decision has been taken to amalgamate the alcohol nurse outreach service, which was a pilot that was set up by the health and social care partnership, into the alcohol and drugs recovery service. That will bolster an existing very successful service with nurses. That service is already accessed not only by people who have a drugs issue but by people who have an alcohol issue. According to the information that I have received, it is a good service that will absolutely support people who are in need of such holistic care.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Can the minister provide an update on what action the Scottish Government is taking to reduce health inequalities when it comes to alcohol-related harm?

Jenni Minto: The Scottish Government is determined to do all that it can to reduce alcohol-related harm. We continue to implement actions that are outlined in our alcohol framework, which have a strong focus on reducing health inequalities, protecting children and young people, and building on existing measures to change Scotland's relationship with alcohol. Those include our world-leading minimum unit pricing policy, which, the evidence suggests, has contributed to reducing health inequalities, as the largest estimated reductions in deaths attributable wholly to alcohol consumption have been in men and those who live in the 40 per cent most deprived areas. Alongside MUP, we continue to invest in treatment and a wide range of other measures, including funding for alcohol and drug partnerships, which rose to a record £112 million in 2023-24.

NHS Lothian Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

2. **Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support NHS Lothian in reducing the CAMHS waiting lists across the region. (S6O-03397)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): We continually monitor child and adolescent mental health services waiting times performance and engage with all health boards, including NHS Lothian, and direct tailored support to those with the longest waits, providing access to professional advice. We commissioned health boards to submit performance trajectories up to March 2025, which will be updated annually and used to continue targeted improvement work, ensuring that all

boards consistently meet the CAMHS standard. Boards were allocated £55.5 million in 2023-24 via the mental health outcomes framework to improve the quality and delivery of mental health services for all, in addition to the core funding that health boards receive.

Sue Webber: One of my constituents is only eight years old and has been on the neurodevelopmental waiting list for an assessment for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder for 96 weeks already. The frustration and the distress that the family is experiencing because of that wait are unacceptable. Despite the school being supportive and offering my constituent one-to-one adult support, he continues to have outbursts that the family is finding difficult to manage.

I have already raised that case with you, minister, and you advised me to contact NHS Lothian. I had already done so prior to contacting you, as had the family—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair.

Sue Webber: That is hardly a tailored response. The family has been waiting almost two years for only an assessment and contacted me as a last resort. What action should the family take next in the face of those unacceptable waiting times?

Maree Todd: We are working closely with national health service health boards and local authorities to improve services and support for children and young people and their families. We will continue to ensure that long waits are appropriately addressed.

We are supporting boards to implement the national neurodevelopmental specification. As part of that, we have provided more than £1 million to fund five pilots, which focus on implementing various aspects of the specification, including getting it right for every child and multi-agency working. We intend to revisit the neurodevelopmental specification to ensure that it continues to be relevant and meets the needs of children and their families. That will involve reviewing learning from those who are implementing the neurodevelopmental specification to date and understanding how we can better measure that. We will support health boards and local authorities to work together, in line with that specification, to ensure that the support is there for the children who need it, regardless of whether they have a diagnosis.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Waiting Times)

7. **Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what measures it is putting

in place to reduce waiting times for access to CAMHS. (S6O-03402)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): In my answer to Sue Webber, I set out how we monitor the performance of child and adolescent mental health services, engaging regularly with all health boards. The CAMHS specification was published in February 2020, setting out the level of service that children, young people and families can expect from CAMHS across Scotland.

It is really positive to see the significant and sustained improvement in CAMHS waiting times over the past year. Most notably, national performance against the 18-week CAMHS standard is the fourth highest since records began and the highest achieved since the quarter that ended in March 2016.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: So far, the Government has still failed to meet the target of 90 per cent of children and young people being seen by CAMHS in 18 weeks, and one in four are turned away, which not only impacts access to support for their mental health but has an impact on pupils having their needs met in schools, as evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee suggests.

Does the minister agree that delays to healthcare that impact education are unacceptable? What conversations has she had with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on improving joined-up working?

Maree Todd: Pam Duncan-Glancy will be aware that we operate the policy of getting it right for every child. It is not necessary to wait for a health diagnosis to put in place support in schools. A delay in accessing healthcare should not delay access to the support that is required to fulfil a child's right to education. That is really important for people to understand.

Pam Duncan-Glancy mentioned rejected referrals. That language is difficult for me to accept. It is important that we consider that many of those referrals are inappropriate and that people are redirected to more appropriate support for them rather than receiving an outright rejection. That is not a denial of the difficult situation that children are in; it is simply signposting towards more appropriate support than CAMHS, which is a specialist mental health service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a couple of supplementary questions. They will need to be brief, as will the responses.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Will the minister provide any further update regarding the latest assessment of

CAMHS waiting lists and how they compare with last year's?

Maree Todd: As I have said a number of times in the chamber, we are seeing positive signs of improvement across the waiting lists compared with last year. The statistics that were published on 5 March 2024 show that overall CAMHS waiting lists decreased by 27 per cent from the previous year, the number of children waiting for more than 18 weeks decreased by 53 per cent from the previous year and the number of children waiting for more than 52 weeks decreased by 74 per cent from the previous year. We remain committed to supporting all boards to meet the standard that 90 per cent of patients start treatment within 18 weeks of referral.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): NHS Scotland's waiting times stipulate that children and young people should only be removed from the CAMHS waiting list once they have attended an initial appointment and, where appropriate, when treatment has commenced. However, some health boards are removing people from the CAMHS waiting list simply when an appointment date is received. What is the Government doing to ensure that health boards are removing people from the CAMHS waiting list only once they have started treatment?

Maree Todd: Accuracy of data in the mental health system is absolutely crucial to understanding the countrywide situation that we face and the means by which we should tackle the challenges that we face. I would be more than happy to meet Paul Sweeney to discuss in more detail what exactly is happening not just with the CAMHS waiting list but with other waiting list targets to ensure that we are working on accurate data making accurate progress.

Ambulance Turnaround Times

3. Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what steps it is taking to improve ambulance turnaround times. (S6O-03398)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): The Scottish Ambulance Service continually engages with health boards while optimising services including flow navigation centres and the integrated clinical hub, which provide care for patients at or near home, thereby reducing pressures on accident and emergency departments. The call before you convey protocol is being used, and cohorting areas have been established at challenging sites, ensuring that ambulance crews are freed up during high-demand periods.

Tim Eagle: It is a matter of life and death that ambulances are ready and able to swiftly respond to emergency calls, so it is alarming that we regularly hear reports of ambulances stuck outside A and E departments. Average turnaround times regularly exceed 45 minutes, and we have reports from A and E staff, consultants and general practitioners that sick patients who need a hospital transfer are waiting hours and hours for an ambulance. Does the minister recognise that that is happening on the Scottish National Party's watch and that it is placing huge strain on our key national health service workers? Will she ensure—with all her energy—that hospitals have the beds, space and resources available to ensure quick turnaround times for our ambulances?

Jenni Minto: I thank Tim Eagle for his question and recognise that we have to ensure that ambulance turnarounds are as quick and safe as possible. We have many examples of where work on that is being done, and the Government has regular meetings with the health boards to discuss what they are doing and where there might be blockages. For example, NHS Grampian has established an area with six overspill beds, which has been robustly staffed over the past month and is available over a 24-hour period.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Figures that were obtained by Scottish Labour for my region show that the longest turnaround times for ambulances at Ayr hospital and Dumfries and Galloway royal infirmary were more than 24 hours. In addition, waits of well over an hour have been recorded for critical purple-code call-outs. Does the minister agree that, although our paramedics and NHS staff are working hard and are under pressure, this Government's mismanagement of the NHS is failing patients and staff? Will the minister explain what work—beyond holding meetings—it will do collaboratively across the NHS to address the pressures on ambulance services?

Jenni Minto: Patient safety remains our top priority, and I apologise to anyone who has experienced a wait for an ambulance team to reach them. The Scottish Ambulance Service is currently reviewing 2024-25 recruitment plans to reflect the expansion of innovative services such as flow navigation centres and the integrated clinical hub, which aim to provide as much care as possible for patients at home or close to home without conveying them to hospital. That is one action that we are taking.

It is important to understand where the pressures are and find the right solutions to them, and that is what the Scottish Government is committed to doing.

Social Care

4. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the work that is under way to support people to have more choice and involvement in how their social care is delivered. (S6O-03399)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): It is vital that people can make informed choices and that they have control over how their social care is delivered, through self-directed support. That is why, in April, as part of the self-directed support improvement plan, we relaunched the support in the right direction programme. Over three years, £9.9 million will provide independent support, advice and advocacy to help people to access the care that they want.

Also in April, we reopened the independent living fund to new applicants. An initial £9 million investment will help up to 1,000 additional disabled people with complex needs to arrange the care that they need to live more independently.

James Dornan: I welcome the additional investment of £9 million for the support in the right direction programme. Will the minister expand on how the programme enables organisations to deliver independent support and advocacy to help people to live independently and participate in all aspects of life?

Maree Todd: The programme was launched by the Scottish Government in 2018 with the aim of increasing the delivery of independent support to people who need social care. In 2023, we agreed to fund the multiyear programme from 2024 to 2027 with £3.3 million per year. The programme is delivered through partnership agreements with third sector organisations in local authority areas across Scotland. Currently, 33 organisations across all 32 local authority areas in Scotland are funded by the Scottish Government. Those organisations provide advocacy, brokerage, information and social care planning services to people who need them.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Testing for Adults) (NHS Ayrshire and Arran)

5. Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to NHS Ayrshire and Arran to improve access to ADHD testing for adults. (S6O-03400)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): The Scottish Government recognises that more needs to be done to support neurodivergent adults, including those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Although it is the responsibility of local areas to

provide support and services, we are taking a range of supportive actions.

We provided £650,000 for adult neurodevelopmental pathways pilots in 2022-23. Following the pilots, we are funding and working with the national autism implementation team—NAIT—to take forward the recommendations of its 2023 report. Support from NAIT is being given directly to health and social care partnerships to develop action plans, introduce adult neurodevelopmental pathways and provide professional learning workshops. We are funding a new neuro-affirming community of practice, which was launched in October 2023, and there has been positive engagement across health boards with that. We are publishing guidance on shared care and prescribing ADHD medication to adults following private sector diagnosis, and we are providing £1 million annually for the autistic adult support fund—AASF—which offers support that is not diagnosis dependent to people who have autism, many of who will also have ADHD.

Elena Whitham: As the constituency MSP for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, I have received many requests from adults who are looking for support to access ADHD testing. They recognise that the difficulties that they have faced throughout their entire adult life are symptoms of ADHD. Many have faced multiple challenges, including difficulty in maintaining employment or relationships, and periods of incarceration or self-medication. Given the advice that NHS Ayrshire and Arran has insufficient capacity in existing services to assess and treat in a timely manner, I would be grateful for the minister's advice and any information on what the Scottish Government can do to assess that health board and other health boards.

Maree Todd: I have made inquiries with NHS Ayrshire and Arran about the actions that it is taking to address waiting times, and we have offered support from the national autism implementation team. I understand that the chief officers received a report in February and are currently considering their next steps.

Nationally, we continue to look at how best to develop and support single neurodevelopmental pathways for adults, working with NAIT, local health and social care partnerships and NHS boards. Additionally, there is a NAIT facility and an adult neurodevelopmental professionals network, which I am aware that NHS Ayrshire and Arran is part of.

We are committed to working together to improve the position for individuals and their families and to ensure that people can access support when they need it.

National Health Service Consultants (Rural Areas and Islands Visits)

6. **Alasdair Allan:** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how the NHS supports the health of rural and islands communities through regular visits from consultants. (S6O-03401)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): The Government recognises the importance of ensuring equitable access to healthcare for patients in rural and island communities. Individual boards and integration authorities are responsible for planning and delivering services to meet the needs of their communities. That includes understanding the needs of their populations and designing services that can deliver high-quality care. It requires a variety of approaches, including local delivery where possible and, where more appropriate, supporting patients to access specialist facilities.

Alasdair Allan: My constituents in Uist are concerned that recent flight timetabling is understood to have prevented some visits by consultants from Raigmore hospital in Inverness. Can the minister indicate what can be done to ensure that the timetabling of transport links is harmonised, giving due consideration to the needs of island communities, to ensure that the level of healthcare to which islanders should be entitled is not detrimentally affected?

Jenni Minto: As an inhabitant of an island, I recognise the pressures that Alasdair Allan talks about. The Scottish Government recognises that more can be done to bring transport planning and health service planning together. However, the timetabling of commercial flights is a matter for the airlines involved.

In 2023, we prepared the draft transport to health plan and we have been working with regional transport partnerships and other partners to deliver the commitments. The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership recently convened a meeting of health boards in its area to discuss the establishment of a health and transport action plan, and this issue is exactly the type of thing that the action plan should be considering.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The question mentions rural healthcare, which allows me to ask about the campaign to reopen the Burghead and Hopeman surgeries. The minister sat through a debate that I held on 21 March and the Government gave commitments that the Evan Beswick review would be published imminently, but the review has still not been published. Jenni Minto promised to meet the save our surgeries campaigners, but they have still not been offered a meeting and have said today that they are being kept in the dark. When can we see

the Evan Beswick review and when will Jenni Minto meet the save our surgeries campaigners?

Jenni Minto: It was a pleasure to meet the member's constituents, who have been campaigning hard for the re-establishment of their general practitioner surgeries. I will check to find out when the Evan Beswick report will be published. I will also chase up my diary, if I remain in this role, and hopefully get the meeting booked as soon as possible, as I have connections to Moray.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I urge the minister to have that meeting as soon as possible, because the matter is urgent. Could I also ask her to have a meeting with Western Isles Council and the health board? Due to budget cuts, the council has changed its subsidised air service provider and the aircraft that is now being used to go from Uist to Stornoway to access consultants is not accessible to anyone with mobility issues, so our disabled people and elderly people are not able to see a consultant in Stornoway. Therefore, can I urge the minister to take that action?

Jenni Minto: I am concerned about what Rhoda Grant has reported with regard to access for elderly and less mobile constituents of hers. I would be happy to chase that up and respond to her in writing.

Dental Care (Older People in Care Settings)

8. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure good dental care provision for older people in care settings. (S6O-03403)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): Building on the recommendations of the 2018 oral health improvement plan, a bespoke training and mentoring programme was introduced in 2019 to establish a new programme of enhanced domiciliary dental care, supported by regulation changes. Under those arrangements, independent dentists are provided with specific training that allows them to be accredited to provide dental care to people who are living in care homes.

The overall aim of the programme is to ensure that the appropriate service providers—sorry. The overall aim is to ensure that the appropriate service provides the appropriate care in the appropriate setting—there were too many appropriates there—allowing the public dental service to concentrate on more complex domiciliary care and treatment.

Alexander Stewart: Under changes that were introduced late last year, elderly residents in care settings are seeing the frequency of dental check-ups halved and dentists who see multiple patients

on a single visit are being financially punished for their efficiency. Dental practitioners have contacted Scotland's chief dental officer outlining those concerns and proposing a fair solution. Will this Government embrace that fair solution?

Jenni Minto: After receiving feedback, we recently consulted the sector on the issue. As a result, last month we introduced an amendment to the statement on dental remuneration, which allows enhanced skilled practitioners to claim the regular domiciliary fee in addition to the item of service treatment payment and the enhanced skills care and treatment allowance. That means that enhanced skilled practitioners are now able to claim an additional £89.05 for every care home visit. I think that that example shows that the Scottish Government is listening to dentists.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): This week, the British Dental Association said:

"We just can't recruit. We have enough dentists but we don't have enough that want to work in the NHS."

Does the minister recognise that our new fee system is just not working? What is she going to do about it?

Jenni Minto: I disagree with the premise of Willie Rennie's question. The new fee system was introduced only in November, and we are still working through it. As the member will know, if all things remain equal, we will have a round-table meeting tomorrow in the Parliament to discuss dental services. It is important to recognise that the Scottish Government is also considering a range of workforce initiatives, including looking at how we can better utilise dental therapists to provide national health service care.

This is not just an issue that affects Scotland, so I have met my counterparts in other United Kingdom nations to discuss how we can improve the pipeline for overseas dentists to work in the UK. I am pleased that the Westminster Parliament is looking at the issue.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): There are 140 care homes in Glasgow. For many residents, domiciliary dental care is vital.

I visited Woodside dental practice, where 96 per cent of patients are receiving NHS treatment. The practice operates care-at-home services, with more than 1,000 residential patients, and its dentists have advanced training. It has said that the Scottish National Party is not listening to dentists. It finds that, under determination 1, the financials simply do not work. Payments have been cut by a third, and it will be forced to end the care-at-home service before the end of May.

Will the minister commit to tackling this latest crisis in NHS dentistry, or will the SNP let this vulnerable—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister.

Jenni Minto: I thank Sandesh Gulhane for his question. As I said in my response to his fellow Conservative MSP, Alexander Stewart, we have listened to feedback. We have consulted the sector and have changed the fee for dental remuneration.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Can the minister provide an update on what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the number of NHS dentists in Scotland and how that compares to elsewhere in the UK?

Jenni Minto: NHS Education for Scotland provides regular data on NHS dental workforce head count. The long-term trend is positive, with the number of high street NHS dentists increasing by almost a quarter from September 2007 to September 2023. We have maintained a strong track record in growing the NHS dental workforce in Scotland, with 57 dentists per 100,000 of the population, compared with 42 in England and 46 in Wales.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on NHS recovery, health and social care. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business, to allow front-bench teams to change position.

Social Justice

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is portfolio questions on social justice. Should a member wish to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or, if they are online, enter the letters RTS in the chat function during the relevant question.

Rural Affordable Homes for Key Workers Fund

1. **Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the rural affordable homes for key workers fund. (S6O-03404)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): I recognise the importance of good-quality affordable homes, including those for key workers, to attract and retain people for the benefit of our rural and island communities. I know that a number of local authorities are actively looking to bring forward proposals under the demand-led fund and that four affordable homes have already been approved in Orkney. I have written to all local authority chief executives to encourage collaborative working between authorities and relevant partners. I am engaging with local authorities and others, including business interests, to maximise uptake of the fund.

Liz Smith: I suppose that having four homes in Orkney is better than zero homes, which is the figure that my colleague Miles Briggs was given when he asked the same question about the £25 million fund six months ago. Does the minister accept that that situation is entirely unacceptable, given the pressure that the rural sector faces when it comes to attracting the workers that it needs? John Swinney highlighted that in his interview in *The Courier*, which was published this morning. In light of the collapse of the Bute house agreement, will the needs of our rural communities finally become a priority?

Paul McLennan: They are a priority. I have visited a number of local authority areas, including Orkney, as I mentioned, as well as Shetland and the Western Isles to talk about that. We have written to and contacted chief executives about the subject. It is important that local authorities take that forward and take a strategic overview. Mr Lochhead and I met key stakeholders in Perth just before Christmas, and I have a follow-up meeting.

As I said, the fund is demand led, and I am happy to meet Liz Smith to discuss the issue further. We have made a number of interventions with local authorities to ask them to ensure that they are working strategically with key partners to deliver the demand-led service.

Housing (Scotland) Bill

2. **Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact the ending of the Bute house agreement will have on the Housing (Scotland) Bill. (S6O-03405)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): The Housing (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 26 March 2024. If passed by Parliament, the bill will enable the delivery of our commitments for longer-term private sector rent controls; tenants' rights and other protections; duties aimed at the prevention of homelessness; and supporting social rented sector tenants who are experiencing domestic abuse.

I will continue to engage with stakeholders. Of course, Parliament will determine the timetable on which the bill will proceed. We will work constructively with all members to support the passage of the bill.

Willie Rennie: The ending has had no effect whatsoever—that is how I read that. I have repeatedly said that, if we are to take the significant step of introducing rent controls, we need evidence of the impact of the current and previous arrangements. There is a real danger that rent controls will create a rent floor rather than a rent ceiling. Is the minister absolutely confident that he has sufficient evidence before proceeding with the bill?

Paul McLennan: I am confident. As part of the bill process, we will be taking evidence. The bill will go through the committee stage, when there will be a call for evidence. I would have thought that that would result in stakeholder responses on the issue.

We are confident with what we have just now. As I said, part of the process is to continue to engage with stakeholders, but we will also go through the bill process, which involves calling for evidence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have some supplementaries.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): There is a lot of welcome in the bill, and we have welcomed many parts of it, but rent controls, which are part of the bill, are hugely damaging the market in Scotland. Rent controls have led to a decrease in supply. Some 17 per cent of landlords are saying that they will sell or consider selling their property. Rent controls are also driving up rents, and we have the highest increase in rents anywhere in the United Kingdom. I ask the minister a very simple question: now that the Bute house agreement has come to an end, will he agree to review the bill and work with parties that want to ensure that the bill will help renters in Scotland, not hinder them?

Paul McLennan: Mr Briggs and I have a close relationship when it comes to housing matters, and we meet regularly. When the bill was introduced, we discussed it. I engaged with him and said that we would continue to do that.

On rent controls, as I said, we will continue to listen to stakeholders to get the right balance between getting investment into the sector and protecting the most vulnerable. I am happy to meet Miles Briggs at any time to discuss the bill.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Will the minister outline how the Government plans to proceed with the bill and ensure that its critical measures on tackling homelessness are achieved?

Paul McLennan: If the bill is passed by Parliament, the homelessness duties will help to prevent homelessness before it occurs and ensure that households do not face the trauma and disruption of homelessness. We will work with stakeholders, including those in health and justice, to get the guidance and training right to support the duties and identify the best timing for implementation.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): In light of the historic decision by Reidvale Housing Association shareholders to reject a takeover by Places for People in recent months, will the minister consider making provision in the bill for enhanced protections for community-based registered social

landlords to ensure that they are not unnecessarily taken over, perhaps by raising the threshold for tenant ballots to two thirds, which is the same as that in the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014?

Paul McLennan: Mr Sweeney has raised the issue in the chamber a number of times, and we have had a couple of discussions about it. He will know that housing regulators are also involved in the process but, if I am still in post, I will be happy to meet him again to discuss the matter. As I said, there will be continuous engagement with members throughout the bill process, but I am happy to meet him to discuss it.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am pleased that the minister still supports the principle of rent controls, but he will be aware that some people are lobbying for the vested interests of landlords, not tenants, and are seeking to water down those proposals—for example, in relation to between-tenancy rent increases and automatic rent condition assessments. Will he assure us that he will oppose such measures, which, if taken forward, would be as useless as the old rent pressure zones, which have never been in effect anywhere in Scotland? [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I ask the minister to reply, I ask all members to show courtesy and respect to the member who has the floor—that was not any of the members who were seeking to make sedentary comments.

Paul McLennan: The key thing, as I mentioned in previous answers, is that we will continue to engage with stakeholders and other members. When Mr Harvie was in post, he and I met stakeholders, and I am happy to engage with him as we go through the bill process, to discuss the points that he has raised.

Mental Health (Welfare Benefits Changes)

3. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, regarding any potential impact on devolved benefits in Scotland, what representation it plans to make to the United Kingdom Government regarding its proposed changes to welfare benefits for people with mental health issues. (S6O-03406)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): Last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice sought urgent clarity from the Department for Work and Pensions that people who receive adult disability payment will continue to receive the reserved benefits that they rely on. She has also sought assurances that the UK Government will not seek to impose cuts to expenditure on the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government will never accept the cruel welfare reforms that are being pursued by

the DWP and which further stigmatise and impoverish disabled people. In contrast, in 2024-25, we are committing a record £6.3 billion to benefits expenditure, which is £1.1 billion more than we receive from the UK Government for social security.

Scotland's social security system is designed on the principles of dignity, fairness and respect. Those are the values of this Government and of the people of Scotland.

Rona Mackay: I welcome the minister's response. Does he agree that the UK Government should look to the Scottish Government model of Social Security Scotland and start treating people with dignity, fairness and respect by scrapping the proposed welfare cuts for people with mental health issues?

Paul McLennan: Yes—I agree with that. The UK Government's heartless approach to social security appears to be entirely focused on reducing the support to those who need it. Disabled people's organisations in Scotland have already warned that the UK Government's planned changes are "cruel, punitive and ineffective" in getting disabled people back into work.

Meanwhile, our compassionate and caring approach, which is fundamentally different from that of the DWP, has been backed by experts. The Scottish Government completely rejects the proposed changes, and I call on the UK Government to halt those plans, so that they can be properly scrutinised.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): The minister will recognise that the waiting times for benefits in Scotland are longer than those for DWP benefits. Will he take action so that people who are waiting to hear whether they are entitled to a claim are not left with the stress of waiting for months before they get a response from Social Security Scotland?

Paul McLennan: I know that the member has an interest in the area, and he has raised it with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice on a number of occasions. I will engage with her and feed the answer back to Mr Balfour.

Rent Control

4. Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to introduce long-term rent controls. (S6O-03407)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): I refer the member back to a couple of answers that I have already given. We will continue to engage with stakeholders on an on-going basis, and Parliament will set out the committee process.

As I mentioned, at the start of the process, I met Mr Briggs, Mr Griffin and Mr Rennie, and I am happy to meet Dr Gulhane to discuss any issues. The Parliament will set its own parliamentary process for that, including the committee stage.

Sandesh Gulhane: I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests: I own a property in Glasgow.

Rents for two-bedroom properties in greater Glasgow have increased by an average of 22.3 per cent from the year before, largely due to the Scottish National Party-Green rent cap.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Nonsense!

Sandesh Gulhane: Unlike Patrick Harvie, does the minister recognise that impact, or is the SNP still beholden to Green dogma?

Paul McLennan: As I said, I will continue to engage with stakeholders on an on-going basis in that regard and I will take all the evidence that we get from them. The committee stage will be incredibly important for that. We will be speaking to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee about homelessness and social justice, and I am happy to engage with the member on that. As I said, at the committee stage, there will be a call for evidence and I imagine that we will get evidence on the particular point that he mentioned. I am happy to meet him to discuss that further.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Having a fairer well-regulated private rented sector is in the interests of both tenants and responsible landlords. What lessons has the Scottish Government drawn from our European neighbours, where rent controls have been implemented successfully?

Paul McLennan: We have considered a wide range of information on evidence on rent controls, including a bespoke research briefing from the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, which included assessment of and references to earlier academic work on rent control systems in both Berlin and Ireland. We also met members of Ireland's Residential Tenancies Board. We continue to consider the experiences of other countries' rent control systems and to work closely with a range of stakeholders to understand their perspectives as we deliver a rent control system that is right for Scotland.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister provide a timetable for when a rent control system will be in operation, given that the system that was recently introduced by the now-departed Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights introduced a complicated system of transitional measures? Does the

minister envisage that those measures will be in operation until there are rent controls?

Paul McLennan: As I mentioned previously in the chamber, I will take the Housing (Scotland) Bill forward, if I am in the same post after today. When the new First Minister is in place and has a chance to discuss it, the matter and the process around it will be reviewed, although part of the process will be determined by the Parliament. I will be happy to come back to the member on that point.

Tackling Poverty and Inequalities in Clackmannanshire (Support)

5. Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to organisations in Clackmannanshire to tackle poverty and inequalities. (S6O-03408)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): The Scottish Government is supporting a range of work in Clackmannanshire to tackle poverty and inequality. About six months ago, I visited the Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice Bureau in Alloa to discuss the issues in that area. Our work includes collaboration with the local authority; the family wellbeing partnership, which is supporting improved local services and outcomes; the early adopter community project, which funds the local authority to build a system of childcare by developing services and supporting children and their families with childcare costs; and a range of third sector and grass-roots organisations through different funds that are intended to tackle poverty and inequality and improve outcomes for children, families, adult learners and communities.

Keith Brown: I am aware that there will be a ministerial visit to Clackmannanshire shortly to learn more about some of the innovative work that is taking place between the local authority, the third sector and communities in the family wellbeing partnership, which is delivering significant positive outcomes. What more can the Scottish Government do to support such early intervention and prevention initiatives, which help those who are experiencing the greatest disadvantage?

Paul McLennan: As the members says, the Scottish Government is a key partner alongside the local authority and the Clackmannanshire family wellbeing partnership. Officials regularly meet colleagues from the local authority to progress and support the partnership's aims to tackle poverty and inequality and to improve services. The partnership is, in turn, supporting wide-ranging engagement with local partners and stakeholders. Additionally, senior Scottish Government officials, including the permanent secretary, visited in March to learn about the work in Clackmannanshire, with the Deputy First

Minister and the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise visiting in August and October 2023 respectively.

Rent Cap Expiry

6. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members of entry in the register of members' interests, in that I rent out long-term family homes in Moray.

To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has carried out on any prospective rent rises following the expiry of the rent cap. (S6O-03409)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): Following expiry of the rent cap, we continue to closely monitor all available evidence on the private rented sector.

The regulations that came into force on 1 April to temporarily modify how rents in relation to most tenancies are determined on referral to rent service Scotland or the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland housing and property chamber—in order to smooth the transition out of the rent cap and to protect tenants from steep rent increases that could have been experienced if there was a sudden move back to open market rent levels—will provide important data to consider on rent increases going forward.

Edward Mountain: That is interesting. The missing point is that, since the removal of the rent cap, on average, rents have increased by 14 per cent. In addition, landlords held back on improving the fabric of their properties while the rent cap was in place. The rent cap has seen bigger than average increases, and climate targets have been threatened. Is the Government as proud as the Greens are of achieving those negatives?

Paul McLennan: There are a number of points there. As I said, we are learning from the process as we come out of it. There are different examples of rent increases in different parts of Scotland, and that is part of the evidence that we need to consider carefully as the bill progresses.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Will the minister outline how the new regulations that have come into force build on the existing protections that were in place for tenants prior to the emergency rent cap measures, and how they continue to ensure that the Scottish Government provides much greater protection for tenants than the protection that is provided anywhere else in the United Kingdom?

Paul McLennan: Even before the emergency measures, tenants in Scotland were able to refer rent increases to a rent officer, who had the power to vary the rent that was proposed by the landlord. The temporary modifications to rent adjudication mean that a rent officer will not set the rent higher

than what a landlord originally proposed and will maybe set rent at a lower value, in line with the tapered approach that is in place to support the transition away from the emergency measures. In England and Wales, the residential property tribunals will not set a disputed rent below the market value and tenants may be required to pay tribunal fees.

Homelessness in Ayrshire

7. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to tackle homelessness in Ayrshire. (S6O-03410)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): Local authorities have a legal duty to help people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. The three Ayrshire local authorities will receive almost £970 million in 2024-25 through the local government settlement, which is used to fund a range of services, including homelessness services. On top of that, the Scottish Government is providing £30.326 million in 2024-25 to the Ayrshire authorities to deliver more affordable homes and £611,000 to support them with the transition to rapid rehousing. The aim of rapid rehousing is to ensure that people have a settled home as quickly as possible.

Sharon Dowey: There is widespread concern about the Scottish Government's £200 million cut to housing. I recently visited Barnardo's Scotland's South Ayrshire services. During the visit, Shine, its women's mentoring service, highlighted concerns about housing provisions for women, which mean that women may leave prison and custody without knowing where they are to sleep that night. That can lead to barriers to accessing further support, as many social security applications require a home address. What action is the Scottish Government taking to tackle that on-going issue? Is the minister willing to meet me and this group to discuss the issue further?

Paul McLennan: There are a number of issues. I mentioned the homelessness prevention duties that will come on to local authorities, which I think will make a real difference. I am already discussing that with local authorities.

The member will be aware that an additional £80 million over two years was announced for the affordable housing supply programme, which will support the continuation of the previous national acquisition programme, which delivered more than 1,000 affordable homes. At the end of this month, I will meet all local authorities to discuss that acquisition plan. Of course, I will be happy to meet Sharon Dowey and colleagues to discuss the issues that she raised.

New Build Heat Standard

8. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Minister for Housing has had with ministerial colleagues regarding the potential impact of the new build heat standard on the completion of new homes. (S6O-03411)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): I regularly meet ministerial colleagues to discuss various associated portfolio interests, including the heat in buildings policy. The standard was scrutinised by the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee and approved without opposition. It is an essential part of our commitment to reach net zero and will have a positive impact on new housing. It was subject to full consultation in 2021 and in 2022, with both consultations showing strong support.

Obviously, we have heard the concerns that have been raised about the new build heat standard in rural and island communities and are taking those on board fully.

Liam Kerr: Since 1 April, the new build heat standard has banned direct emission heating systems, including those using bioenergy sources, such as wood-burning stoves. The consultation draft of the Scottish Government's bioenergy policy statement says:

"as a renewable, and potentially net zero, energy source bioenergy may represent the best option to help decarbonise some homes".

Will the minister listen to his Government colleagues and review the ban on wood-burning stoves in Scotland's homes, or are the Government's strings still being pulled by his former Green Party colleagues?

Paul McLennan: As I mentioned, we have heard the concerns about the reliance on wood-burning stoves in rural areas and are taking them fully on board. Just last week, I visited Eigg and discussed a number of issues up there. That issue was raised, and I said that I would come back to the people there on that particular point. Of course, the Scottish Government recognises that emergency use of heating, including wood-burning stoves, will sometimes be required. However, as I said, we will continue to engage fully with stakeholders and others in that regard. Again, I am happy to engage with Mr Kerr on that point.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on social justice. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business to allow the front-bench teams to change position, should they so wish.

Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People (Cass Review)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-13090, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, on implementing the Cass review in Scotland.

15:15

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): Yesterday, I attended the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's meeting to hear directly from Dr Hilary Cass following her review of gender care services for children and young people. I had hoped to ask a question but, despite emailing the committee on Friday, I was told that time had run out. Unfortunately, that was just the latest in a series of questions that I have raised on the topic that have been rejected or denied. The fact of the matter is that children, young people, parents and campaign groups deserve answers, which is why my party has brought a debate on the issue to the Parliament.

Talking about gender in Scotland has become toxic, but we need to be clear that the Cass review is not about ideology. It is a scientific evidence-based review of the medical care that we have been giving to vulnerable young children. It is a monumental and fearless piece of work. I say "fearless" because, even amid the toxicity of the gender debate, the crucial report did not shy away from its difficult findings—namely, that we have been letting down a generation of vulnerable and distressed children.

One would think that the publication of a damning report on the medical care of children would jump straight to the top of any Government's in-tray and that politicians of all stripes would be united in wanting to ensure that mistakes and poor practices were stopped immediately and that the required improvements were put in place. However, the response from the Scottish National Party Government could not have been more lacklustre.

From the moment that the Cass review was commissioned four years ago, the SNP Government sought to dismiss it as being irrelevant to Scotland, even though the medical approaches that were being reviewed were almost identical to those that were being used here. The Government disregarded the interim report, which cast doubt on the safety of puberty blockers for children, and, when the final report was published last month, it dithered, delayed and obfuscated until clinicians took the decision out of its hands by

announcing that NHS Scotland would pause the use of puberty blockers for under-18s.

Although the use of puberty blockers is undoubtedly one of the key aspects of the Cass review, the nearly 400-page document makes a total of 32 recommendations to improve gender care for young people in Scotland. The recommendations include offering children fertility counselling before they proceed down a medical pathway; assigning a child a medical practitioner to take charge of their care and ensure that they get the personalised help that they need; support for parents, carers or siblings if needed; and a requirement to keep a national data set on gender services in order to continually update best practices.

The SNP has continued to be deafeningly silent on those and a host of other reasonable, commonsense recommendations. I made a promise to families who have been failed by gender care services in Scotland, and I intend to keep raising the issue until the Scottish Government implements all 32 recommendations of the Cass review without delay.

The Cass report should fundamentally change how we look at gender care in Scotland. It should be approached with caution and care, and it should be given holistically, viewing a child as a rounded individual and tailoring the approach to their unique needs. Yes, the report concludes that there is little evidence to support use of puberty-suppressing hormones, but it also details that children and young people might not be offered the right psychological support and assessments when experiencing gender distress. Medical intervention is not always required, but that has been common practice for many individuals. Meanwhile, children's mental health has been left to deteriorate.

Although the Sandyford clinic has finally paused its use of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones for those who are under the age of 18, gender care services need a complete overhaul. The Scottish Government needs to make that a priority because, as things stand, the waiting times for children and young people to see a clinician at a gender clinic can be over four years. Child and adolescent mental health services waiting times are through the roof, and the SNP has remodelled the funding of gender care services, which has resulted in a cut to the budget of those services.

I say to members, regardless of their opinion on the Cass review or on gender care services, that the Scottish Government is failing young people.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Does Meghan Gallacher believe that there is no excuse for the SNP not to implement the recommendations of the Cass

review now that it has broken up its tragic coalition with the Greens?

Meghan Gallacher: Absolutely. This is an opportunity to reset, refocus and actually prioritise young people who need the Government's support.

The Cass review is a four-year-long, near-400-page report on the care that we give to some of our country's most vulnerable children. The fact that we have been failing them for so long is bad enough, and we should all reflect on that. However, to ignore the scientific evidence-based report for the sake of dogma and ideology would be unforgivable. This is about the health, safety and wellbeing of our young people. There are no other national health service services that we would allow to continue unchanged after such a report had been brought forward and had shown that they were failing, and this service should be no different.

Next week, I will hold an event in Parliament with Marion Scott from the *Sunday Post*. That will be an opportunity for MSPs, ministers and cabinet secretaries to speak with families who are affected by gender care and to hear how they have been failed by the processes that are in place in Scotland. I urge all MSPs, regardless of their persuasion or political party, to speak to the families who have bravely stepped forward to tell their stories.

It is clear that we need to implement all 32 recommendations of the Cass review, as our motion says. That is simple, but it will show that we in this Parliament care about young people who are experiencing gender distress. The message that I have for MSPs is that, if they do not back our motion today to implement the full recommendations of the Cass review, they will need to explain to the families why they have not done so, because those families are the ones who have been impacted by the Scottish Government's lack of decision making and action.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Gallacher, I ask you to move the motion, please.

Meghan Gallacher: I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the report submitted by Dr Hilary Cass on gender identity services for children and young people; recognises the report as a valid scientific document, and calls on the Scottish Government to implement the recommendations of the report that are applicable to NHS services in Scotland.

15:22

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): Just over two weeks ago, I stood in the chamber to emphasise what is undeniably a fact: that young people who are questioning their gender or accessing gender

identity healthcare, and their families and those who love them, must be at the centre of all our discussions about the delivery of that care. I hope that we will all keep them in our hearts and minds during the rest of the debate and, in doing so, remain compassionate, understanding and respectful.

As I said in my statement,

"it is vitally important that the recommendations"

in the Cass review's final report, which was published in April,

"are carefully considered".—[*Official Report*, 23 April 2024; c 14.]

The Scottish Government has consistently welcomed the report's publication. The review itself was chaired by a past president of the United Kingdom's Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health—a senior and well-respected clinician. Many of us will have heard her helpful and clear evidence at the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee meeting yesterday, and I recognise the Cass review's final report as a scientific, evidence-based document.

When Dr Cass was asked yesterday for her key conclusions from the review, she said two things: first, that the evidence base in this specialist field of medicine is weak, and we need to work as collaboratively and broadly as we can to improve that evidence base, and secondly, that children and young people need a broad multidisciplinary approach to their care. I think that all of us in the chamber would agree with those two points.

The Scottish Government has already provided grant funding to the University of Glasgow to carry out research into the long-term health outcomes of people who access gender identity healthcare. That will play a part in improving the evidence base. Person-centred and holistic multidisciplinary care has been at the heart of our chief medical officer's realistic medicine approach for many years, and our clinicians know how important it is to see the whole person whom they care for.

The final report is detailed and wide ranging. It is important that its recommendations are carefully considered in the context of how services are delivered in NHS Scotland, and to consider what further steps may need to be taken.

Rachael Hamilton: Will the minister take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I am going to make progress.

As I made clear in my statement, a senior multidisciplinary clinical team within the chief medical officer's directorate in the Scottish Government, which includes paediatric, pharmacy and scientific expertise, is carrying out that careful consideration. As Parliament would expect, that

work is already under way. The chief medical officer will provide a written update to Parliament on the outcome of that clinical consideration process before the summer recess.

I will take Rachael Hamilton's intervention now.

Rachael Hamilton: Thank you, minister.

In her statement, the minister said that discussions between clinical stakeholders on what further involvement may be appropriate were ongoing, and that the chief scientist office was involved. How long will that take? Can the minister put a timeline on those discussions, please?

Jenni Minto: The chief medical officer will provide a written update to Parliament on the outcome of that clinical consideration process before the summer recess. I am sure that colleagues across the chamber will welcome that assessment and will understand, just as NHS England has stated, that, given the comprehensiveness of the report, that will take some time.

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): The minister has just set out that the CMO will seek to provide a written statement to the Parliament on the progress that is being made, but I ask the Government to consider that it might be advisable for the CMO to appear in Parliament to aid that scrutiny.

Jenni Minto: Currently, the CMO is going to provide a written statement, and that is the way that I think the update should be delivered to Parliament.

I know that colleagues across the chamber would not want a knee-jerk reaction to a 400-page report that did not properly consider how services in Scotland are delivered or what work on training or on standards is already under way.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the minister give way on that point?

Jenni Minto: I need to make progress.

As part of our work, the Scottish Government is clear that there needs to be transparency. We therefore agree that the CMO will write to the Parliament, as I have said, reporting in full all of the clinical findings of the senior multidisciplinary clinical team, and to prepare a progress report on the existing strategy for reducing long waits for children and young people to access specialist gender services. On that basis, and to find consensus, we will accept the Labour Party's amendment.

I hope that all of us can agree that that consensus will be helpful for the young people involved, their families, clinicians and health professionals who deliver gender identity healthcare.

It did not take the publication of the report for the Scottish Government to start a broad programme of work to improve gender identity healthcare. It is important to note that, in Scotland, we are already making progress on several of the aspects of gender identity healthcare that are highlighted in the Cass review.

Dr Cass reminded us in her report that

"A compassionate and kind society remembers that there are real children, young people, families, carers and clinicians behind the headlines."

I hope that that sentiment is one that we can all keep in mind in today's debate and as we progress.

I move amendment S6M-13090.4, to leave out from "implement" to end and insert:

"thoroughly examine the recommendations of the NHS England commissioned report, and its applicability to NHS Scotland services, and to update the Parliament on the outcome before the summer recess."

15:28

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The Cass review is a considered, evidence-based report that was drawn up by experts. It was led by Dr Hilary Cass, former president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, and it involved clinicians and young people themselves. We must not ignore Dr Cass's conclusions, no matter how difficult they may be, as failure to implement all those that apply to the NHS in Scotland would let down both staff and a generation of young people and their families.

Let me turn first to the Scottish Government's response. The pretence that the Government knew nothing about the review and needed lots of time to consider the report does not hold water, frankly. Meetings took place with Dr Cass, senior clinicians and the Scottish Government well before publication of the final report. Just to be clear, the deputy chief medical officer was there, along with a host of senior Government officials. Let us not forget that there was also an interim report, which set out the direction of travel quite clearly.

The lack of leadership from the SNP Government has been woeful. The unseemly backwards and forwards between the Scottish Government and health boards about who would make the announcement about the pause in puberty blockers was, I thought, quite disgraceful. Instead of taking ownership, the minister chose to leave the burden to the same clinicians who have expressed concerns about the toxicity of the conversation on gender services that is leaving them vulnerable and exposed. It is no wonder that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has struggled to recruit consultants at the Sandyford clinic. Staff at

the Sandyford clinic do an incredible job, but they are not adequately supported to do so.

The Scottish Government published the NHS gender identity services strategic action framework in 2021, and we welcomed it. The national gender identity healthcare reference group was set up in March 2022 to oversee implementation of the framework, and I note that the deputy chief medical officer co-chairs the group. The reference group's latest minutes report that the negative impact of the on-going polarised public discussion has taken a toll on the recruitment of staff in gender services. Dr Cass echoed those concerns in her report, stating that there are

“few other areas of healthcare where professionals are so afraid to openly discuss their views, where people are vilified on social media, and where name-calling echoes the worst bullying behaviour. This must stop.”

The Government must take leadership in that area.

However, the framework also impacts on recruitment and it has a knock-on effect on waiting lists. I remember that, when the framework was published, waiting lists were sitting at about four years. They are now sitting at about four and a half years for young people and five and a half years for adults. That is unthinkable. Why is the minister bypassing the already established national gender identity healthcare reference group? Why is the new group being set up when there is one with all that expertise sitting round the table? How is it intended to link the two, or will they exist in splendid isolation from each another?

I understand that National Services Scotland is in the middle of commissioning gender services. Will that include the use of puberty blockers and hormone treatments? If so, from what age? Those are critical questions.

Let me deal briefly with the Labour amendment.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: I am about to close.

We have asked for openness and transparency, with the new working group publishing papers and minutes. I understand that the Government will partially agree to that, which is welcome. After all, it is a Government-established working group and the matter is of such importance that we cannot have secrecy at the heart of Government.

We are also asking for a report on the progress of the framework and the difference that is being made to gender identity services. We believe that that is urgently required. We cannot allow waiting times to spiral out of control, so we need to seriously address recruitment. That requires leadership from the very top.

I recognise that I need to close. What we are doing here is critical for the young people who are experiencing gender dysphoria. It is too important for us to get it wrong.

I move amendment S6M-13090.2, to insert at end:

“, and further calls on the Scottish Government to publish all papers relating to the multi-disciplinary clinical team work in assessing Dr Cass's recommendations, and to urgently prepare a progress report on the existing strategy for reducing long waits for children and young people to access specialist gender services.”

15:32

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): It is undeniable that homophobia and transphobia are on the rise, and that is absolutely true when it comes to the weaponisation of the Cass review. The debate today is premature at best. It is absolutely right that the Government takes its time to assess the implications of the report, if there are any, for the Scottish NHS. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members, please show some courtesy and respect to the speaker who has the floor.

Gillian Mackay: We have to be aware that the Cass review was a review of services and treatment pathways in NHS England that differ from those in Scotland. As many members have said in the chamber previously, not all the recommendations will be applicable to Scotland and some might be irrelevant, given that the analysis was of a different health service. That is why I believe that the debate is premature at best. For those recommendations that might be relevant, there are choices to be made about whether they require action. Any changes that are made should also include input from trans young people who have been through the service, those who are on waiting lists and their families.

Many have hailed the report as the end of gender-affirming care, but Dr Cass confirmed at the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee yesterday that puberty blockers and hormones are the correct way forward for some children and young people who are seeking gender identity care. It is important that, in providing gender-affirming care, we are clear that medical transition might not be the correct course of action for everyone and that timeframes for transition differ between people. We absolutely have to ensure that services are improved, both in terms of the pathways and the current models of care, and by tackling long waits.

Paul Sweeney: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Gillian Mackay: I will.

Paul Sweeney: Does the member agree that a key risk that was raised at this week's meeting of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee was the fact that the long waits—the average wait is four and a half years—lead to a lot of young people self-medicating, which itself introduces a lot of risks for young people?

Gillian Mackay: Yes—absolutely. The other thing that was highlighted at committee was the on-going distress and mental health issues for those young people who experience long waits.

From listening to the debate so far, many could believe that people's experience of gender identity services is overwhelmingly negative. For some, their most negative experience is to do with waiting times and not getting the care that they should receive. Although many have said that receiving the gender-affirming care that they needed was life saving and that it brought joy and allowed them to be their true selves, that does not mean that services do not need to be improved.

In addition to waiting times, clinicians' confidence in providing care is a very current and live issue. In the briefing that Scottish Trans provided ahead of the debate, it notes that, at the moment, far too few healthcare practitioners feel confident about supporting children and young people who are exploring or feeling distressed about their gender identity. Scottish Trans frequently hears from young people who seek support for non-gender-related distress such as depression or anxiety, who are referred on to specialist gender identity services if they also disclose that they are feeling uncertain about their gender identity or that they are trans. That means that they are put on extremely long waiting lists, sometimes for years, and they receive no support in the meantime, which is totally unacceptable. It is vital that, in general, children and young people's mental health services and wider health services are able to provide support to all young people who fall within their area of expertise. That clearly highlights the need for more training.

One of the commitments in the Scottish strategic action framework for the improvement of gender identity services is the development of a transgender care knowledge and skills framework, which could result in the upskilling of healthcare practitioners across the NHS on the provision of care for trans people. I would be grateful if the minister could provide an update on work on that when she sums up.

I remain concerned about what the on-going debate here and on social media is doing for those young people who are only trying to access the care that they need and who have been thrust into an increasingly heated and partisan political storm. That very small group of young people need our support, not our judgment.

15:37

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western)

(LD): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak for the Liberal Democrats in this important debate. Although it is a sensitive matter, it is important that we debate such a substantial clinical review. Given that sensitivity, we should approach the issue with a sense of understanding, compassion and tolerance, which Dr Hilary Cass rightly pointed out as being profoundly absent from so much of the debate in our community. Each of us has a duty to model and uphold the values on which this Parliament was founded and, as parliamentarians, we have a duty to consider such matters soberly and to rely on reason underpinned by evidence. However, in undertaking that consideration, we must always remember the people—especially the young people—at the heart of the debate.

In her report, Dr Cass rightly underscores the impact of delays—I thank Paul Sweeney for his intervention on that—and she reiterated that point at committee. Delays can have a profound impact on mental health and can even lead to self-medication and self-harm. In addition, the stigma and toxicity of the debate can, as Dr Cass noted, have an impact on already vulnerable lives. We must heed her words and consider her review without the intolerance and invective that characterise so much of the debate in our communities.

Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that our focus should always be on ensuring children's and young people's wellbeing and preventing harm, that every young person should have as much agency as their age and capacity allow, and that their voice should be at the centre of every decision that impacts them. It is also essential that there is a scientific basis for everything that we do.

Scottish Liberal Democrats accept the clinical validity of the review. It is a substantial piece of work, and it is right that we take time to consider its findings and work through how each of the 32 recommendations might best apply to care pathways in Scotland. Ultimately, we think that it is right that decisions about the safety and efficacy of treatments are always made by clinicians and not by politicians. I say with respect to Meghan Gallacher that I do not believe that such a decision should ever have rested with Government ministers. It should always rest with people such as those who work at the Sandyford clinic.

In response to the recommendations of the Cass review—

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am afraid that I do not have time; I have only four minutes.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has paused the use of puberty blockers at that clinic to allow relevant clinicians to review all necessary evidence and allow more to be obtained. However, that reality is not without its challenges. The decision will represent a massive setback for those young people—who, although they are very small in numbers, nevertheless exist—who have already waited far too long, were already in profound distress and thought themselves on the threshold of that care pathway, only to find that that intervention is now closed off to them. They deserve heightened levels of support around the impact that that decision will undoubtedly have on their mental health. When a young person or their family raises questions about the suspension of that approach, it is right that health boards and clinicians engage, are clear about what the decision means and ensure that there is still access to high-quality healthcare and support.

Dr Cass has recommended the suspension of such interventions because of the lack of a clear, evidential basis to support their use. That is perhaps the biggest challenge of the report, and it is one that Liberal Democrats will not shy away from. No decision in human history has not been improved by the addition of a firm evidential footing. We now owe it to the young people who are at the very heart of the matter to establish that scientific basis with the utmost care and with all possible speed so that they and their clinicians can make the most informed decisions that are possible about their on-going care.

Trans healthcare has always been a poor relation to our consideration of public health of any kind in this place, but it matters. Above all, we need to ensure that any consideration of such issues is conducted in cognisance of the challenge at the very heart of the Cass review, which is to move forward with compassion, with evidence and, above all, without toxicity.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I advise members that we have no time in hand and that back-bench speeches are up to four minutes maximum.

15:41

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Sinéad Watson is one of the bravest people whom I have ever met. Sinéad is a detransitioner and someone whom I first heard speak in the Parliament four years ago, at an event hosted by the then SNP MSP Joan McAlpine. Today, Sinéad is 33. Ten years ago, she transitioned to become a man, having had a history of being a victim of sexual assault by men.

She came to believe that her problems would be cured if she underwent gender reassignment

treatment and, having presented as gender dysphoric at the Sandyford gender clinic in Glasgow, went down the route of transition. She had years of testosterone injections and a double mastectomy. Today, Sinéad is in permanent pain and discomfort and bears the physical and mental scars of that transition. She now realises that she made a terrible mistake, but the treatment that she underwent means that there is no going back to the body that she once had.

Sinéad is angry that clinicians who should have recognised that what she needed was therapy encouraged her down the route of gender transition; she is angry that the consequences of what she was doing were not fully laid out to her; and she is angry that the prospect that she might at some point in the future want to detransition was never set out to her.

Sinéad, like many detransitioners, wants the Sandyford clinic closed, because of the damage that is being done. She has said:

“I will do what I can to stop this terrible mistreatment of vulnerable young people.”

Sinéad is, rightly, angry with politicians who encouraged transitions for children and young people with troubled backgrounds and a history of mental illness.

The Cass report is a welcome step towards changing our perspective on the treatment of young people with gender issues. We should not be prepared to tolerate any young person going through what Sinéad Watson had to suffer. That is why the rapid implementation of the recommendations of the Cass report is so important, as Meghan Gallacher set out.

Rachael Hamilton: Hilary Cass said at the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee that the issue of puberty blockers has become “almost totemic” and that it has prevented us from looking at the issues that young people are having around coping with their distress. That is an important point.

Murdo Fraser: I agree with that; there is much more in the Cass review to which we must give our attention. I believe that children and young people in Scotland should not be left behind while children in England are given the protections that are required.

Our new First Minister, John Swinney, has spoken a lot in the past few days about the need for a new approach for his Government. I hope that we will see that, because the comments about the Cass review that we have heard from some Green Party members are simply disgraceful, with one MSP sharing on social media a comment that it was transphobic. It is a rich irony that the party that demands that we follow the science when it

comes to climate issues rejects the science when that does not support its political prejudices.

If the First Minister is serious about a new approach and is reaching out to other parties, this is his opportunity to reject the Greens, embrace the Cass review and show kindness, compassion and care for children and young people in Scotland. We should not be permitting the mutilation of young bodies in the name of an anti-science ideology. Those who committed those atrocities, and those in the Parliament and elsewhere who stood by and let it happen—or, worse still, actively encouraged it—should not be forgiven.

Let me say one more thing as I come to a close. Members might recall that, some years ago, in a debate on the SNP's programme for government, when I referred to the fact that I had met women outside this Parliament who were protesting against the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, I was heckled by the former First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, from a sedentary position, with the words, "Shame on you". Well, Presiding Officer, I feel no shame whatsoever for speaking up for the rights of women and girls. Any shame that falls to be apportioned should be laid firmly at the door of the former First Minister, her ministers and all in the chamber who allowed this abuse to occur in furtherance of a toxic ideology. I hope that, in time, they will have the good grace to apologise for the damage that they have done to Sinéad and others. It is the very least that they should do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that we have no time in hand.

15:46

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I was very grateful yesterday to have the opportunity to question Dr Cass at the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. The landmark Cass review into gender identity services in England is a serious and substantial piece of work that should be considered carefully by everyone with an interest in or responsibility for children's health.

Understanding that the review did not examine services in Scotland, there are a number of principles that Scotland can learn from. For me, the key thing is that the report calls for services for children and young people with gender dysphoria to

"operate to the same standards as other services seeing children and young people with complex presentations and/or additional risk factors."

I hope that everyone can get behind that principle.

The review report states that children and young people who are referred to NHS gender services must receive

"a holistic assessment of their needs to inform an individualised care plan. This should include screening for neurodevelopmental conditions, including autism spectrum disorder, and a mental health assessment."

It also states:

"Standard evidence based psychological and psychopharmacological treatment approaches should be used to support the management of the associated distress"

from gender incongruence and co-occurring conditions, which

"should include support for parents/carers and siblings as appropriate."

Everything that we know about children and young people points to better outcomes with parental, carer and guardian support. I know that many parents will be reassured by the fact that they are mentioned and included in much of the report.

The report talks about how services should establish a separate pathway for the families of pre-pubertal children, ensuring that they are prioritised for early discussion about how parents can best support their child in a balanced and non-judgmental way. It also states:

"When families/carers are making decisions about social transition of pre-pubertal children, services should ensure that they can be seen as early as possible by a clinical professional with relevant experience."

I note concerns about the implications of private healthcare on any future requests to the NHS for treatment.

Back in 2022, I hosted a meeting for colleagues that gave them the chance to hear directly from people who had detransitioned, and I take this opportunity to thank Sinéad Watson and Ritchie Herron. They spoke candidly and, at times, emotionally about their experiences, and colleagues from across the chamber who attended valued their courage and generosity in doing so. I am pleased that the review report states that there is a need for

"provision for people considering detransition, recognising that they may not wish to re-engage with the services they were previously under."

I have thought a lot about Sinéad Watson and Ritchie Herron during the past few years. I hope that improvements to services can help to prevent other people from going through the pain and distress that they have gone through.

In the report, and in committee, there was some discussion about conversion therapy. No formal science-based training in psychotherapy, psychology or psychiatry teaches or advocates conversion therapy. It is important that, if we

legislate in the Parliament, we do not restrict the ability of therapists to go about their jobs and explore with people the issues that they are having.

As I said, it is a serious and substantial scientific report, and it needs serious consideration. I will support the Government's amendment and Labour's amendment on that.

15:50

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): We should be indebted to Dr Hilary Cass for the sensitive way that she has approached the issue. The fact that she has taken the time to come to Scotland to answer detailed questions is to her credit. It is a watershed moment.

However, Dr Cass has highlighted the Government's lack of urgency in acting on the report. The methodical and thorough way in which she has examined the issues around gender identity services will serve not only to protect more young people from harm but to demonstrate that there are many different pathways for young people who are distressed about different aspects of their lives that are related to gender identity.

I agree that waiting times for gender healthcare are unacceptably long. However, I do not believe that there is any excuse not to implement the report's recommendations in full. As Jackie Baillie said in her opening speech, Government ministers have behaved as though the findings have just arrived, but anyone who has been following the review in the press over the past two or three years will have been fully aware of the whistleblowing around the Tavistock clinic and the follow-on report by Dr Cass, so it should have come as no surprise to the Government.

The review report highlights the lack of evidence and raises concerns about the potential harm of treatments—particularly puberty blockers and hormone therapies. Others have pointed out that those are major and life-altering interventions. The report states:

“we have no good evidence on the long-term outcomes of interventions to manage gender-related distress.”

It is deeply worrying that this was allowed to happen in our NHS, which offered experimental treatment to vulnerable children without having proper evidence for its safety. When giving evidence to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee yesterday, Dr Cass said that the issue of puberty blockers has become “almost totemic” and that it has prevented us from looking at other ways of managing young people's distress, which is important.

Other leading figures share Dr Cass's view. The editor-in-chief of *The BMJ*, Kamran Abbasi, noted:

“A spiralling interventionist approach, in the context of an evidence void, amounted to overmedicalising care for vulnerable young people.”

I am pleased that Dr Cass has flagged up the issue of children being socially transitioned in schools without parental involvement. As she has said, it is not helpful to young people to create an adversarial system.

We need to look at the bigger picture. Almost two thirds of referrals to the gender identity development service in London in recent years have been for teenage girls, so more questions need to be asked about why a higher portion of girls is presenting with gender dysphoria. Based on Dr Cass's recommendations, we should not make any assumptions about the complex picture until we know the facts.

The Cass review is robust, independent research, which, importantly, is informed by the views of people with lived experience. Gender medicine is built on “shaky foundations”, and it is deeply worrying for child welfare. I urge the Government to get on with implementing the Cass recommendations now.

15:54

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): It is fair to say that the gender rights debate and legislation have been the most contentious that the Parliament has had to deal with during my time as an MSP. I remember well the stage 2 amendments that I was involved with in committee and the stage 3 amendments in the chamber. My amendments were all about ensuring safe healthcare for the trans community and about how we deal with the fair inclusion of the trans community in the sports arena. In both those areas, the obvious importance of biology is evident. In fact, the impact of biology on those issues is as irrefutable as gravity.

However, during that debate, in which we tried so hard to be as constructive and as sensitive as we possibly could, all those facts were discarded. Of all the conversations that I have had about gender recognition reform legislation, the most grounded and sensible conversations have been with the trans community itself, and not with those who pretend to represent it in this place.

To roll forward to the Cass review, this is where some MSPs' opinions drift into the realms of dangerous ideology over patient safety. The Cass review noted that the long-term effects of treatment such as puberty blockers were as yet unknown and that they could be causing irreversible harm. If that were any other medical treatment, there would be no question but that it would need to be paused for adults, let alone for

vulnerable prepubescent teenagers. The report also highlights the need for

“a holistic assessment ... to include screening for neurodevelopmental conditions, including autism spectrum disorder, and a mental health assessment.”

Healthcare professionals have a duty of care to offer the appropriate healthcare, not what some MSPs in the chamber think is appropriate. Dr Cass warned that the risk of starting the transition at a point when someone is still in the process of development is that treatment will be given to the wrong person. She went on to say that the reason that there is a negative outcome is that medical transition does not come without cost in terms of sexual function, fertility, knowns and unknowns about long-term bone health risks and the limitations of surgery. All those costs are well worth while if someone has a long-term stable trans identity, but it is a high cost to pay in the long term if they do not.

We should not forget that, according to the Scottish Government’s justice legislation, a young person’s neurological pathways are not fully developed until they are 25, so how on earth can we expect a child in their teens, who is in the midst of dealing with hormones that are associated with puberty, to make such monumental, life-changing decisions?

I always try not to stray into questioning personal actions. However, given that the Scottish Government at least recognises the Cass review as a credible piece of scientific work—although the Government has yet to adopt its recommendations—I find it absolutely disgraceful that Patrick Harvie, who was at that point a Government minister, went on national television to try to discredit the review and say that there were so-called experts who questioned it; on that basis, he was perfectly happy to continue as though the review had never been published. He ignored the potential harm to these children and the harm to the trans community.

I say to Patrick Harvie that there are also so-called experts who say that there is no such thing as climate change. I presume that, given his attitude to Cass, he will be listening to those alternative experts. No—Mr Harvie does not get to choose his experts and deny others just to fit his ideology, especially when our children’s health is at stake.

Those of us with children and grandchildren recognise the turmoil of their journey through puberty towards adulthood. They certainly do not need the dangerous views of people such as Patrick Harvie being foisted on them. He should never have been allowed anywhere near a decision when it comes to our children’s welfare and the welfare of the trans community—that is the crux of it. The Greens’ proposed amendment

would risk the long-term health of our children at the early stages of their lives, when they are already at an unstable point in their development.

The Scottish Government can see sense now that it is not shackled to the Greens, and it can implement the recommendations of the Cass review that apply to NHS services in Scotland. I urge members to support the motion in the name of my colleague Meghan Gallacher.

15:58

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of members’ interests—I hold a bank nurse contract with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

The publication of the Cass report has probably produced more column inches in newspapers, more social media posts and more worry and anxiety in the patient group that it relates to than any other report that I can remember. This important inquiry into gender identity services in NHS England, under the direction of Dr Hilary Cass, should be treated with the utmost respect.

A point that should be emphasised is that the report is about NHS England services, and we must take the time to cross-reference it accurately and thoroughly to our own services here in Scotland. There should be measured consideration of its many recommendations, and their applicability to services in Scotland should be properly assessed. I welcome the decisions by clinicians in NHS Lothian and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to pause prescribing some pharmacological treatments. It is vitally important that clinical decisions are made by clinicians.

Although we all recognise that this can be a polarising topic, we cannot lose sight of the children and young people, and of course their families, who seek help with gender identity issues. The past few weeks will have been a difficult time for those children and young people who have been affected by the recent changes to clinical pathways. It will have been a time of uncertainty about their current treatment and about what treatment options will be available to them.

One of my young constituents contacted me last night. Her words were:

“I’m 13 and I have been on the waiting list for the gender clinic since I was 11. I’m a girl. I don’t want to be forced to develop as a male. I just want to be happy for the rest of my childhood. But now the gender clinic won’t help me.”

I have previously asked the Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health what support is being put in place while there has been a pause in the prescription of puberty blockers, and while clinicians assess the best treatment options and

care pathways in the light of the Cass report's recommendations. I welcome her reassurances that NHS teams and third sector organisations are working to provide additional support to those young people. I am also pleased to see in the Government's amendment that it will

"thoroughly examine the recommendations"

of the Cass report

"and its applicability to NHS Scotland services"

and that it will

"update the Parliament on the outcome before the summer recess."

Children and young people such as my constituent need that certainty.

Of course, it did not take the publication of the Cass report for the Government to start a broad programme of work to improve gender identity healthcare, and it is absolutely committed to that aim. Importantly, throughout its work, the Government has engaged with trans and non-binary people across Scotland who have lived experience of accessing, or waiting to access, gender identity services. To build on that, I know that it will continue to engage directly with young people and the stakeholders who represent them. I hope that, in the heat and light of the debate and discourse, that will offer them reassurance that their voices will be represented and that their experiences will be centred in any work that is designed to improve their healthcare.

16:02

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): I thank the Conservatives for securing the debate and Dr Hilary Cass for giving evidence to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee yesterday. However, one hour is not enough to fully engage with Dr Cass's recommendations. Drastic change is urgently needed to safeguard Scottish children from what I believe is a medical scandal.

The Government must urgently understand the striking difference in patients who are presenting for gender identity services. It has changed from a few young boys to a large and rapidly increasing number of teenage girls, with complex presentation. Often, they are young lesbians or autistic girls, many of whom have serious mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and eating disorders, and who may be self-harming. Those issues are often caused by abuse or neglect. We must investigate the reason for the change in patient profile. Increasingly, girls are opting out of womanhood, and we cannot just shrug that off. We need to look at the issue and address it.

The treatment protocol for gender identity with affirmation and being funnelled towards a medical pathway overshadows the other problems that I have highlighted and neglects, to those girls' detriment, alternative psychological treatment options. Clinicians tried to raise the alarm from the inside that those girls were being harmed by an approach that was developed for boys. From whistleblowers such as Dr David Bell and safeguarding lead Sonia Appleby, we know what happened to clinicians—they were ignored at best and silenced at worst. In the end, many of them left.

In Cass's words,

"puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones and even surgery may be a suitable treatment for some. We just do not know which ones."

Given the severe health risks of the treatment, we need a service model that considers the child's right to an open future and offers appropriate therapeutic care to each patient.

Detransitioners say that many do not understand the risks of testosterone, such as fertility loss, vaginal atrophy, clitoral growth and pain affecting sexual function. Cass recommends that gender services should learn from and understand detransitioners. That is difficult to do when, understandably, many refuse to return to the service that has failed them.

We must ensure that legislation, education and health services are Cass compliant. The school guidance is inappropriate and should be withdrawn. Are we sending the message that homophobia is unacceptable and that loving acceptance of our body is important? The evidence would suggest otherwise.

The Cass report is a watershed moment. Vulnerable children are at its heart. The Government's amendment shows that it does not understand the severity of the problem or the urgency that is required to fix it. What does the Government imagine that the outcome of a thorough examination of the most comprehensive, recent and meticulous review of the global body of research will be?

The Scottish Government can prevaricate to placate lobby groups, or it can remove its ideological blinkers and focus on the urgent clinical need to improve how we provide care to support distressed children. There is no excuse for any further delay. Maya Angelou famously said:

"Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:05

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): It is not often that I have a lump in my throat speaking in Parliament after I have been doing it for so long. However, with this debate, after so long of this Parliament having a strong and proud track record of supporting LGBT people's equality and human rights, I feel deeply anxious that that is about to change.

A number of members have spoken about the toxicity of the debate. It has been recognised that Hilary Cass has said the same; even Meghan Gallacher agrees. However, I have to question whether the debate will have improved that or made it worse. I am not sure whether Meghan Gallacher even once in her speech mentioned transgender people as transgender people. In fact, few people who spoke in today's debate did. Clare Haughey was the most notable exception, and I thank her for her contribution.

I want to mention one constituent who emailed me a few days ago. I will not give any personal details, but it was a young transgender person who wrote:

"I am writing this because I'm scared. I'm writing this because I'm desperate. I'm writing this because I need transgender voices to be heard and to matter when the discussion of our identities and rights are being brought into question."

Objectively, this debate should be about access to healthcare, waiting times and the need for a clinical pathway with better follow-up and support. Nobody would object to that. Certainly, transgender people who are angry about the poor and inadequate quality of the healthcare that they can access would not object to a debate about that kind of improvement. Gillian Mackay was one of a number of members who recognised that waiting times are entirely unacceptable currently.

However, context matters. It is not just a debate on healthcare improvement that is needed. The context is a wave of transphobia, with marginalised people's views rarely heard but their lives politicised, their rights weaponised and their very existence refuted. This debate should not ideally be about ideology, but even Dr Cass has recognised that she was probably naive in not acknowledging the prevalence of homophobia and transphobia in our society.

To be clear, most people in our society do not support homophobia and transphobia. Most people support trans people's equality, and that support is higher among young people, women and lesbian, gay and bisexual people. However, that prejudice is all too prevalent in media and in politics, and it is being stirred up quite deliberately at the very top of the UK Government. We have a Prime Minister who made a cheap transphobic gag at Prime Minister's questions while Brianna

Ghey's grieving mother was sitting in the gallery, and the Minister for Women and Equalities has called on the public to report organisations for not discriminating against transgender people and put pressure on schools to out young people to their parents even when they do not feel safe. Here in the Scottish Parliament, we have a Tory party that is now targeting LGBT Youth Scotland, which is an organisation that we should all be proud of.

Some of the speeches here today have been just as deplorable, including from those who have voted against LGBT people's human rights at every opportunity and who have even supported restrictions on reproductive rights and freedoms as well.

What all this generates outside of politics is a wave of hostility and prejudice the likes of which I have never experienced in my many years working and campaigning on LGBT people's human rights. I regret that the only amendment that reflected on that political context was not selected for debate today.

The Greens will support the Scottish Government amendment. We believe that it is something of an improvement on the motion and feel the same about the Labour amendment, but neither will be enough to make the amended motion supportable. We will oppose it, just as we will try as best we can, even if we are left alone in Scottish politics, to summon up the courage to oppose the toxic culture war that has started elsewhere and which I fear might be coming to Scotland.

16:10

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to close the debate for Scottish Labour and I thank members across the chamber for their contributions.

On the whole, across the Parliament, we believe that the Cass report is a considered scientific paper and that that message should go out from the Parliament. If members get the opportunity to watch the evidence from Dr Hilary Cass yesterday, they will see that the report has been pulled together by a clinician with an extremely caring side, and that shows throughout the whole hour.

There can be no doubt that this is a subject that a lot of people feel very strongly about. It is also an issue that has become needlessly complex when, in reality, what we want is for the best and the right care to be available for all those people who need it.

It would not do to pretend that the only people who are concerned about the issue are people who we deem to be out of touch. It is a big issue for a lot of people. They are discussing the issue

and contacting their MSPs, so we have a responsibility to take leadership in this area.

There are legitimate concerns that must be addressed in how the Government responds to the Cass report. Fortunately, Dr Cass has provided some clarity for us, and we need to heed that clarity. I will make a short mention of my colleague Claire Baker, who as early as 2022 was asking the Parliament to look at the interim report and to show support for the clinicians who we know were left feeling vulnerable. That is why this Parliament and Government should be involved in the decisions around the Cass review.

The findings of the Cass review should be implemented without delay. There are many children and young people with gender dysphoria who need some certainty, and we are in a position to provide them with that. Pausing the use of puberty blockers was the right first step in providing that certainty. My party welcomes that decision, but now we need to move forward and ensure that quick and responsive services are available to those young people, as was discussed by many members—in particular, Pauline McNeill and Ruth Maguire. I also add my thanks to people who have shared their stories, so that we can get it right for future generations.

Unfortunately, we recently had a Government tripping over itself on messaging and substance, and that trend caused confusion. The confusion has affected people's lives, and that is not acceptable. As my colleague Jackie Baillie indicated, we need some leadership, and we hope that we will get that now.

The SNP now has new leadership. With that comes the opportunity to accept that there were mistakes and that we should look at more sensible approaches. It is our position that we will make every effort to do that with the Government, as members will see from our amendment, and we thank the Government for supporting it.

Our message is that we do not need another working group, because the work has been done. Dr Cass and her team are widely respected, and there is no doubt that the evidence in the report is good. Dr Cass confirmed to us that she has been discussing her work with the minister since 2022, so there is nothing unexpected in the report. The Government knew what was coming, and the evidence session yesterday at the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee confirmed that we could be moving on. The longer we delay, the more young people will experience seemingly endless waits, and no one wants that.

I will finish my remarks there, because I know that we are tight for time. Again, I thank all the members who have contributed to the debate.

16:14

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): Presiding Officer and colleagues across the chamber, I start by reflecting on the words of Dr Hilary Cass. She described the public discourse around gender identity and gender identity healthcare as an

“increasingly toxic, ideological and polarised public debate”.

I think that we can all recognise that description, and I think that we can all recognise that the nature of how we talk about those issues, including here in the chamber of the Scottish Parliament, really matters. It matters because toxic and polarised discourse does nothing to serve young people who are questioning their gender, nor those young people who are accessing gender identity healthcare, nor their families, nor the NHS staff who are working hard to care for them. I also make a plea for a more temperate debate, with less heat and more compassion.

There is much that I think we can agree on across the chamber. We agree that children and young people and their wellbeing are at the heart of all our concern here. That is why we welcome the Cass report and recognise its significance. That is why a senior clinical team in the office of the chief medical officer in the Scottish Government is already giving careful consideration to each recommendation in the context of how NHS services in Scotland work. We agree that evidence matters. That is why we are already engaged with NHS England on the planned clinical study on puberty blockers and why the Scottish Government has already awarded funding to the University of Glasgow to establish a programme of research on long-term health outcomes for people who access gender identity healthcare in Scotland.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): Which of the 32 recommendations do not apply to Scotland?

Maree Todd: It is absolutely clear to everyone in the chamber that NHS Scotland is different from NHS England. We have different structures and it is simply not possible to adopt all 32 recommendations. Recommendation 5 of the report refers to a statutory instrument that applies only to England. Recommendation 9 refers to NHS England national provider collaborative, which recommendation 12 suggests is not yet established. Recommendation 11 covers commissioning and potential subcontracting by NHS England services, and recommendation 30 covers NHS England contract management. I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever that the recommendations and the full report provide evidence that we can learn from in NHS Scotland, but it is simply wrong to suggest that we can adopt all 32 recommendations wholesale.

We agree that high-quality healthcare standards matter and that we all want people to have safe, evidence-based and holistic healthcare. That is why we commissioned Healthcare Improvement Scotland to produce national standards for gender identity healthcare. We all agree, as the Cass review recommends, and as Dr Hilary Cass highlighted when she gave evidence yesterday at the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, that healthcare professionals who work in this specialist field and beyond need good training and support. That is why we commissioned NHS Education for Scotland to develop a transgender healthcare knowledge and skills framework and to explore resources and opportunities for training for NHS Scotland staff.

We all agree—I hope—that this is not an issue to treat as a political football. The Cass review is a serious report that requires serious consideration. Many of its recommendations are already in train or have been delivered in Scotland as part of the work to implement the strategic action framework for NHS gender identity healthcare services. There will be more that we can learn.

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The minister must conclude.

Maree Todd: I am afraid that I am in my closing moments.

That is why, through the work of the senior multidisciplinary team of Scottish Government clinical advisers, we are already thoroughly examining the recommendations of the NHS England-commissioned report and its applicability to NHS Scotland services. We will update Parliament on the outcome before summer recess.

16:19

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I draw members' attention to my registered interest as a practising NHS general practitioner.

The Cass review was commissioned by NHS England four years ago, with the Scottish Government getting updates from 2022. It is an authoritative body of work. Researchers met an extensive range of stakeholders, including professionals, their respected governing organisations and people with lived experience, both directly and through the support of advocacy groups.

The Cass review made 32 recommendations. It concluded that children are being let down by a lack of research and by weak evidence on medical interventions in gender care. In the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee yesterday, Dr Cass set the record straight on the claims of critics of the

review, such as Patrick Harvie and Ross Greer, who relied on significant misinformation to push their agenda. The claim that Dr Cass disregarded 98 per cent of papers presented to researchers is false. We believe that the Cass review is a valid scientific document, and that the science does not change just because you cross the River Tweed.

Meghan Gallacher was absolutely correct in pointing out that the SNP-Green Government dithered and delayed in responding and making a decision about the final version of the Cass review. Thank God that clinicians were brave enough to stop the use of puberty blockers. Ash Regan's intervention, in which she asked for the CMO to appear before Parliament, was important. Why can we not get at least an interim statement and get the CMO to answer questions?

Jenni Minto stated that the Government was not waiting for the Cass report, but it is clear that the SNP Government did not pause the use of puberty blockers. As Jackie Baillie reminded us, the SNP Government has had meetings with Dr Cass throughout. Gillian Mackay seemed to leave out the fact that Dr Cass said that there was poor evidence for puberty blockers and that there must be a multidisciplinary team approach to ensure that mental health and other issues are addressed.

Stigma has no place in society, as Alex Cole-Hamilton said, but I disagree with Alex Cole-Hamilton about where decisions can be taken. For example, the use of mesh was ceased by this Parliament, not by clinicians. When the interim report was produced, it was possible for the Government to pause the use of puberty blockers and take time to discuss the issue with clinicians to make sure that we got the right decisions.

Murdo Fraser brought up the brave story of Sinéad Watson. Dr Cass addressed that issue by saying that irreversible medication must not be given quickly to children but that that should be done via an MDT approach, addressing any other issues that they have. We must apologise to Sinéad Watson, Ritchie Herron and others who were let down by the gender service that they received.

Nobody here denies that trans people exist and nobody here denies trans people's rights, but nobody's rights trump other people's rights—we must all live together. Dr Hilary Cass gave evidence to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee yesterday and was very generous with her time. We heard that children are gender fluid, not fixed. Puberty blockers are irreversible.

Significant time and effort went into finding all the research in the area. Most importantly, the evidence is simply not there to continue giving these irreversible drugs. Why must the

Government insist that children are labelled? Let children be children. Let children experience life. Let children learn. We should never forget that children are vulnerable and that it is our job to protect them. Scottish children will be forever and irreversibly harmed.

The Green amendment that was rejected shows that the Green Party members are science deniers and that the party cares only about dogma and ideology. The same party describes Scots who do not agree with its views as reactionaries and bigots. That was the position of the SNP as well.

We must base our approach on evidence. It is not transphobic to question or review current pathways. Ideology and dogma have no place in medical treatment. We must protect patients who are vulnerable. We must protect our children. It is right that doctors have paused services at the Sandyford clinic, but we need an urgent response to the Cass report from the Government. We must implement the report's recommendations in full, or will the SNP bow down to Green dogma and remain beholden to that party?

Colleges (Support)

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-13091, in the name of Liam Kerr, on supporting Scotland's colleges.

16:26

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):

Scotland's colleges are the linchpin on which the future of Scotland depends. That is perhaps a bold statement, but it is backed up by a Fraser of Allander Institute report from 2023 that states, inter alia, that Scotland's colleges generate additional value worth £20 billion for the Scottish economy. Each graduate delivers an additional £55,000 boost to productivity over their working life. The total public sector cost of investing in those learners is roughly a third of the cumulative tax revenues that are generated. Scotland's colleges also directly employ about 11,000 staff, providing local economic boosts.

That means that colleges add huge value—much more than they cost—to the national economy and local economies. However, evidence shows that they also deliver faster sustainable economic growth by, for example, supplying employers with a skilled workforce. They provide better employment prospects, with increased earning potential; they result in a lower likelihood of unemployment; and they have a positive effect on health and wellbeing, leading to better physical health outcomes, longer life expectancy and improved social mobility.

How does the Scottish National Party Government recognise, to quote a line from its manifesto,

“the vital role of Scotland's colleges”?

Well, there have been years of flat cash settlements, and there has been a cut to the net college resource budget of almost £59 million. There is a reported nearly £0.5 billion funding gap over three years—although the minister disputed that last week but could not say what he thinks the figure is—and the figure might well be higher due to capital costs.

That has led to Audit Scotland warning that

“Risks to the college sector's financial sustainability have increased”

and to the Scottish Funding Council identifying three colleges with significant cash-flow issues—although, as the Public Audit Committee heard, the number is actually four. According to the SFC, that puts 21 per cent of the college workforce at risk by 2026 and, according to College Employers Scotland, it is

“directly impacting resource allocation to teaching and learning and thereby impacting learners and their educational experience.”

It is an appalling situation, but what colleges, students and employers fear the most is epitomised by the Government’s amendment, because, despite all the reports and all the warm words and praise, the Government is missing in action.

Last week, in a topical question about the state of Scotland’s colleges under the SNP, I asked how the Government’s priorities might need to change. Richard Leonard asked whether the most marginalised bear the brunt of the situation, and Pam Duncan-Glancy asked whether the Government would intervene in a dispute. In response to each question, the minister, diligently reading from a pre-prepared script, talked about Opposition parties demanding more money in the budget, but we did not.

During last night’s debate on colleges, the minister blamed Opposition parties, Brexit and the Tories, but he failed to acknowledge that the blame lies entirely with the occupants of the Government benches. My authority for that statement is the Education, Children and Young People Committee, which, in its “College regionalisation inquiry” report of March 2023, reported that it was

“concerned that colleges are currently making decisions to respond to the challenging financial climate without clear overarching strategic direction from the Scottish Government as to their purpose and what they must prioritise”.

Those colleges are still waiting.

In 2020, the Cumberford-Little report made a number of recommendations that might have begun to address the situation, and which were not based on funding. Four years on, however, there is no substantive implementation or action, except perhaps that the Government, instead of expanding the flexible workforce development fund, has abandoned it.

The Withers review reported about a year ago and made 15 recommendations to reform the post-school learning and skills landscape, but we still do not know what the Government will do or when. The national bargaining system, which is imbued with a

“debilitatingly low level of trust”,

was the subject of the Strathesk Resolutions “Lessons Learned” report, which was commissioned by the Scottish Government. Recommendations were submitted to the Scottish Government in March 2022. What has happened at Government level since? Absolutely nothing.

Under the current funding model, under which colleges cannot borrow to, for example, renew digital infrastructure in estates or retain end-of-year surpluses to mitigate the next crisis, there exists, according to the Education, Children and Young People Committee,

“a general lack of flexibility to be able to respond to economic and societal needs and priorities.”

That is why the committee recommended

“that the Scottish Government ... give colleges as many financial and operational flexibilities as possible”.

It noted that that

“could include, but not be limited to: flexibility for year end, flexibility on SFC outcomes and flexibility in terms of access to additional funds.”

That was last year. Has it happened? No.

Four years ago, the Scottish Funding Council said—

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Liam Kerr: If I have time, I will. Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer: We have no extra time.

Liam Kerr: If we have no extra time, I will, regrettably, not take Michelle Thomson’s intervention.

Four years ago, the SFC said that because of

“tensions in governance and accountability structures, contested costs and funding authority and unclear outcome gains for students and taxpayers”,

the current structure of the governance in multi-college regions was “not tenable”. Four years on, has the “not tenable” structure been dealt with? No, it has not.

I will take a very quick intervention from Michelle Thomson, if she is ready.

Michelle Thomson: Oh, I am sorry—I did not see that the member was allowing me to intervene. I greatly appreciate it.

I was merely going to make the point that I, too, am greatly in favour of fiscal flexibility, in particular around capital expenditure, end-year flexibility and consulting heavily with the Scottish Fiscal Commission. Why does the member want that for colleges and not for his own Government?

Liam Kerr: I think that we need to stay on the point, in particular when time is constrained. The fact is that colleges and their talented students and staff are crucial to the future of Scotland and all its people, yet this Government surveys the damage to which its failure to lead from the front has led and fails to come up with any vision, strategy or meaningful action. Instead, it lodges

amendments that represent an utter abdication of ministerial responsibilities.

The Government must act now to address the present and future of our colleges. Otherwise, in a hollowed-out sector, who does the minister think will step up to tackle economic downturns, upskill and reskill, mitigate the skills gap and support lifetime learning? If this minister and this Government will not go beyond warm words on colleges to saving them, they should stand aside and let in someone who will, before it is too late.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Government's approach to funding and resourcing Scotland's colleges must change in response to the existential threat that its previous approach has created; notes the role that colleges play in powering the regional and national economy, while operating without the necessary flexibility and support that they need, and recognises that colleges are vital to Scotland's economy and play a crucial role in supporting learners, creating flexible routes into employment, developing a skilled workforce and delivering sustainable economic growth.

16:33

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): The First Minister has been clear that the Government that he leads will be committed to attempting to engage constructively with other parties in the chamber and finding areas of agreement where that is possible.

That sets a clear expectation of the approach to be adopted not only by ministers, but by Opposition parties. In a Parliament where no party has a majority, there is a duty on us all to work, if not together, in a considered and reasonable way, treating issues on merit. In this new environment, Government cannot impose its will on Parliament. Equally, the other parties need to decide whether they will oppose simply for the sake of it, set out wish lists with no identified path to delivering or look to engage constructively.

In responding to the Conservative motion, I seek to rise to the challenge that the First Minister has set those of us on the SNP side of the chamber. The motion talks about inadequate funding of colleges and calls for us to at least look at how we could improve matters.

Let me acknowledge that the budgetary settlement for colleges is not what I would want it to be—although, in the interests of balance, it is worth noting that, over the past 10 years, we have increased the college resource budget by more than £121 million in cash terms.

I do not want to get into a to-ing and fro-ing here, however. There are lots of things that I could

throw back at Liam Kerr, but we have rehearsed those arguments before.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Graeme Dey: Apologies. I am not going to, because I have only five minutes.

I want to focus on the substance of the issue for colleges: the challenges and opportunities for them. Last week, I acknowledged that there are challenges facing colleges—of course there are. I also accept that there is a gap in relation to what the colleges would have had at their disposal now if funding had risen in line with inflation over the past few years.

If the Conservatives believe that we ought to have been raising the funding in line with inflation, they must presumably take serious issue with the fact that, despite the Chancellor of the Exchequer pointing to real-terms growth in public spending, the core block grant is still less in real terms in 2024-25 compared with 2022-23 by around £500 million. That is the gap that has arisen in just one year, and it exceeds the alleged shortfall in college funding that has been claimed. The Conservatives must be even more troubled by forecasts that suggest that our block grant for capital is expected to reduce in real terms by almost 9 per cent by 2027-28. They cannot, on the one hand, insist that funding by the Scottish Government must rise by inflation and, on the other, accept that the funding of it should fall.

Liam Kerr: I am afraid that the minister is rather missing the point. I specifically did not talk about funding; I talked about all the reports giving alternative solutions. If the Office for National Statistics classification were reviewed, colleges might build reserves. What is the minister's view about that?

Graeme Dey: The point, as Liam Kerr well knows, is that we are bringing to a head a lot of the outcomes and suggestions from the reports. I will try to cover that in this opening speech but also in closing. I think that Mr Kerr knows that that is the case.

We must find a way forward, taking account of some of the reports, ensuring that colleges are on a sustainable long-term footing. That is simply not going to be available from an injection of public cash that is not available to us. The reform programme that we are embarking on, which is driven by the reports, will place colleges at the heart of post-16 skills delivery.

We are acting on what the reviews have told us about the need for change to ensure that our learning and education system is fit for the future. For example, the Government will take a central role in the delivery of skills planning at a national

level, recognising its central role in shaping the skills need. In so doing, we will work with the public, private and third sectors to ensure that the offer is fit for purpose. Colleges will be central to that, and we are working directly with them on it already. The development of a colleges first principle for certain apprenticeship areas, which Glasgow Clyde College principal Jon Vincent is leading on, is a good example of what I am talking about. We have college representatives in the room as we work with employers on identifying skills shortages and how colleges' offer can be better aligned to the needs of employers and the economy.

It is important that decisions to fund Scotland's college sector are made facing forwards, looking towards what we need both now and in the future, so that decisions are not reactive, and that they take account of the reviews. That will require thoughtful leadership from across the sector and beyond—it is important that we are up front about that. I can assure the Parliament that the Scottish Government is working extremely hard with stakeholders such as the Scottish Funding Council and Colleges Scotland to work through this period together. I was due to sit down with Colleges Scotland and college chairs in Stirling this afternoon as part of that on-going engagement. The scheduling of this debate forced the cancellation of those sessions, but they will be rearranged.

Regardless of who holds this post following the ministerial reshuffle that is under way, I know that the Scottish Government will remain committed to that close working, which I believe will lead to the shaping of a college sector that can deliver local and national priorities.

I move amendment S6M-13091.3, to leave out from “agrees” to end and insert:

“recognises that colleges are vital to Scotland's economy and play a crucial role in supporting learners, creating flexible routes into employment, developing a skilled workforce and delivering sustainable economic growth; understands that the process of post-school education reform provides opportunities to further enhance the role that Scotland's colleges play in the economy and society, including enhancing their role in developing the green skills that Scotland needs for the just transition, and agrees that any proposals for changes to funding must be clear from where else in the Scottish Government's budget the resource would be taken, particularly in the context of 14 years of UK Government austerity.”

16:38

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Just yesterday, we had the opportunity to debate colleges in Scotland, and I am pleased that we have the same chance to do so again today. In my role I have had the privilege of meeting college staff and principals who are going above and

beyond for their college. I have heard lecturers and support staff up and down the country share with passion stories about the subjects they teach and the students they empower. I have heard about the ways in which colleges serve their communities and build our workforce of the future.

Incredible college staff and talented students work day in, day out, to do all that, but they are doing so in the face of a Government that has, for 17 years and several education secretaries—including John Swinney—let them down.

Members will have read the recent articles in *The Herald* that show just how bad it is, and I would like to take a moment to put on the record my thanks to *The Herald* and James McEnaney and his team for shining a light on it. The reports highlight what trade unions, staff, colleges and students have been warning for years: Scotland's colleges face an eye-watering funding shortfall and the funding gap has real-life consequences, not least of which is the drop of more than 125,000 students attending college since 2008-09.

Let us remind ourselves who those students are. More than 40 per cent are over 25, a third come from the most deprived areas, 15 per cent are disabled, 17,000 are black and minority ethnic and 3,000 are care experienced. Colleges lift the glass, class and step ceilings that are in the way of opportunity, and we should support them, but they can do that only with the support of their Government.

Colleges cannot afford another day of inaction from the Government or lack of leadership from the minister. The situation has been called a burning platform. Audit Scotland has warned that colleges cannot deliver the same for less and Colleges Scotland has said that colleges have impossible choices ahead.

Here is what some of those impossible choices look like in reality. Staff in one college are saying that books are being taken out of the library and that student support, careers advisers and personal academic tutors are being cut. Courses are being cut in another college where senior-phase pupils go to study advanced highers in areas that we need people to be skilled in. There are campuses that are facing closure and students with fewer options.

Across Scotland, jobs are under threat. College Employers Scotland is saying that its members do not have the resource to negotiate the existing pay offer and industrial relations are hanging by a thread. Most worrying of all, the Public Audit Committee was told that four Scottish colleges might not survive the year.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Last night, Pam Duncan-Glancy's colleague Richard Leonard made the interesting suggestion that the

money that is currently being allocated by enterprise agencies in Scotland to arms dealers such as BAE Systems could be reallocated to Scotland's colleges. That would generate a couple of million pounds a year. Is that the Labour Party's official position? If so, it would certainly have the support of the Greens.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I thank the member for that intervention and note that he voted for the budget that has delivered savage cuts to colleges across Scotland, so I will take no lessons or suggestions from him on that.

I ask the minister today whether he is prepared for this to happen on his watch, or whether he is willing to step up. On funding, can he set out a timeline on the development and delivery of a new funding model for colleges, and will he deliver an emergency funding package to help voluntary redundancy schemes in the meantime? On buildings, will he reintroduce a buildings conditions survey to inform investment plans and to help colleges to deal with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete? On delivery, will he support colleges and principals to test ways of meeting their needs for the future? Will he provide direction on pay and say whether he accepts calls for pay to be in line with public sector pay and accepts that colleges need help to deliver that? Finally, on industrial relations, will he fix the flawed national machinery that is meant to govern it? Will he ensure that everyone involved gets facility and support time to engage properly? Will he get around the table with colleges and trade unions before the summer recess to facilitate a solution that will end the industrial dispute?

Those are questions that people in the sector need answers to. Yesterday, someone in the chamber said that they would not envy the position of the minister.

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Ms Duncan-Glancy.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I would envy the position of the minister, because I would relish the opportunity to serve in government and make the changes that need to happen. Scottish Labour is ready to do that, even where the Government is not.

16:43

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I will start with an admission that much of what I am about to say is exactly the same as what I said last night, when we covered similar issues.

The Scottish Greens and I believe that colleges have a critical role to play in building a fairer, greener Scotland and in delivering on the key missions on which we all agree, whether that is

the climate action that is required to hit net zero or tackling child poverty. Education is a social and individual good. It can be genuinely transformational, but we should not pretend that a good education will remove all the structural inequalities that people face in society. It is a key ingredient to a successful society, but by success, I am not just talking about gross domestic product or even average incomes, although the latter are clearly important. A successful society is one in which we are collectively able to meet everybody's needs and to give every individual the opportunity of a happy, healthy life.

The ability of our colleges to play their role in that has been hugely held back by a decade of chronic problems in industrial relations, in particular. It is an example of class inequality in this country that those problems have gone on for so long with so little attention, whether from political figures or the media, compared with far less frequent industrial action in schools or in the university sector.

What would the Scottish Greens do differently? For a start, I will not join in with the hypocrisy of those members who voted against raising more money for public services via progressive taxation or who did not propose any other alternative savings options but are somehow demanding more money. We have just seen an example of one Labour member making a proposal to reallocate money and that being slapped down by the Labour front bench.

There are other options that we can take. For a start, on fair work conditionality, the Scottish Funding Council should absolutely make it a condition that, for colleges to receive funding, they should eliminate zero-hours contracts and implement pay ratios and other fair work conditions. That would demonstrate to the lowest-paid staff in particular that they were valued.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Ross Greer: I am afraid that I have only four minutes, so I will not be able to.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Will Ross Greer give way?

Ross Greer: I will, given that Ms Duncan-Glancy took an intervention from me.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Ross Greer mentioned fair work and ending zero-hours contracts, so does he support Labour's new deal for working people?

Ross Greer: I do not know whether Ms Duncan-Glancy has seen the news today, but her party has just watered down its new deal for working people, to the point that Unite the union has, I believe, described it as a grotesque betrayal.

Therefore, she should take that up with her party leader this afternoon.

What we need to see is far more enforcement by the Scottish Funding Council of national fair work conditionality and of fair work conditions that are agreed at local level between individual colleges and unions. As far as I can tell, the outcome agreements that are supposed to include that are barely scrutinised by the Funding Council. There needs to be far more robust scrutiny.

I am proud of the fact that college boards must now include at least two trade union representatives—that policy was delivered by the Scottish Greens in our time in government. However, college governance overall needs to be strengthened to a far greater degree. I urge the minister to consider proposals to include local elected councillors on college boards, to ensure that colleges are rooted in their local community and that there is a connection between colleges and councils as two key drivers of local economies.

We need to consider the issues that have arisen in specific colleges such as City of Glasgow College, where the board has been unable or unwilling to provide the effective scrutiny of senior management that is required. It was only when the local industrial dispute was taken out of that local setting and addressed at a regional level that progress was made. I think that the proximity of board members to senior management was a key contributing factor in how protracted and distasteful that dispute became.

There are far more proposals that we could go through. We should move college principals into the chief executive pay framework element of the public sector pay policy. It is not right that a number of college principals in this country are paid more than the First Minister. We need to address the recommendations that were made in the Strathesk Resolutions report, which will require both sides to move out of their comfort zones.

There is so much more that we can do. As a Parliament of minorities, we now have the opportunity to come together on points of agreement and do that. I hope that we will seize that opportunity.

16:48

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): If only Ross Greer and his party had been in government for the past two and a half years, we might have seen a bit of a difference.

The Government's policy on colleges has lacked coherence for some time. Let me provide a few examples. It created national pay bargaining and raised expectations of pay rises but failed to

provide the funds for colleges to deliver that. In adopting a policy of no compulsory redundancies, it hinted that that policy applied to colleges, before excluding them from it. It proclaimed that colleges were a characteristically Scottish route to a degree, but it has cut their funds over the past 17 years. It has talked about skilling and reskilling, but it has cut student places. When Government funds were in short supply, it merged colleges and brought them closer to Government, while limiting their freedom to raise funds themselves.

The minister is trying his best to change that through his work on skills and apprenticeships, but he must recognise the weaknesses of the legacy that he has been handed. Colleges can be responsible for greater social mobility, for improving life chances, for economic growth and for meeting the skills needs of our transformed economy, but for that to be a success, there needs to be a change of Government priorities.

For the record, my party has repeatedly included colleges in our costed budget proposals, but those proposals have been rejected by successive finance secretaries. In that context, it would have been helpful if Ross Greer had used his previous influence in the Government to halt the £26 million cut to colleges instead of pretending today that the college cut had nothing to do with him and the Greens.

Although, technically, ministers have no direct role in pay negotiations, the intervention of the education secretary in the teachers' pay dispute, which resulted in a cut to the colleges budget to pay for a pay rise for teachers, rubbed salt in the wound for college staff. The minister therefore has a duty to seek a resolution to the industrial disputes that have bedevilled the sector for a decade.

It is not all about money and industrial relations, however. I want to see the college school partnership grow to spread the use of qualifications such as foundation apprenticeships. I want to see greater skills and education intelligence so that we can meet the needs of employers today and future skills needs, and flexibility to meet that intelligence with support from qualification bodies, with co-ordination between colleges to ensure that specialist provision is maintained.

In my last minute, I want to raise concerns about changes at Scotland's Rural College's Elmwood campus in Cupar, in my constituency. Although most animal care courses have been saved from closure and the SRUC leadership tell me that they are committed to a future for Elmwood, I am concerned about the slow progress towards the new facilities that are planned to accommodate the provision. I have relayed my concerns to the principal, but it would be helpful if the minister

could intervene too. I hope that he will be willing to do so and to perhaps comment on that point in his summing up. I want a thriving Elmwood campus as do staff, students and the wider community, and we have a lot of work to do to ensure that that happens.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

16:51

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I have always been impressed by the work that is being done in our colleges. Those institutions are critical to the economic and social wellbeing of our country—for the development of a skilled workforce that is able to respond to new requirements and new opportunities in industries; for opportunities for people of all abilities to develop skills for life; and for successfully widening access to opportunities, including higher education.

As James Withers said,

“Scotland has all the ingredients of a world class education and skills system. And no ingredient is more important than our colleges ... It has never been more important to unlock the full potential of all our people.”

One third of our college students come from Scotland’s most deprived communities, which, put simply, means that colleges deliver education and skills development to parts of Scotland that other institutions just do not reach—that sounds like an advert. Their role as a catalyst for economic development is underplayed, too.

The SNP’s chronic underfunding of Scotland’s colleges has forced them into a precarious financial position, which impacts their ability to support learners and grow the economy.

Earlier this year, colleges, businesses and trade unions joined together to call on the Scottish Government to reinstate a vital training fund before it was deleted from the 2024-25 budget. The flexible workforce development fund has previously provided businesses with access to training and upskilling for staff, delivered through colleges and other partners. We heard in February that, if the £10 million fund is not reinstated, potentially more than 2,000 employers and 45,450 learners will miss out on training opportunities—what a tragedy.

I want to raise an issue about modern apprenticeships as a whole. Based on the SSVQ’s calculations, those people who are studying for a modern apprenticeship qualification in Scotland receive considerably less funding per head than those who do so in England. A barbering apprentice receives only £2,700, compared to £9,000 south of the border; a hospitality apprentice receives only half of what their

counterpart in England receives. I understand that budgets are tight, but I hope that the minister can reiterate in his closing remarks why such a disparity in funding exists. Where on earth is Scotland’s apprenticeship levy money going?

The Education, Children and Young People Committee’s report on college regionalisation noted concern over a lack of overarching strategic direction from the Scottish Government. The report states:

“The Committee is concerned that colleges are currently making decisions to respond to the challenging financial climate without clear overarching strategic direction from the Scottish Government as to their purpose and what they must prioritise ... As such, colleges are being asked to take decisions for the future, uncertain as to whether those decisions will be compatible with the Scottish Government’s vision.”

There were many other recommendations in the report, and I am very aware that the minister is aware of those recommendations, given that he was a member of the committee and helped to draft them, and given that the report was agreed unanimously.

Although I recognise the financial constraints that the Scottish Government is working within, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council must acknowledge the significant needs of the college sector and urgently take action to ensure that more capital investment can be levered into the sector.

Graeme Dey: If I can contradict what I said at the start of my contribution, I ask where, if the member wants more money for the flexible workforce development fund and more money for colleges and apprenticeships, she suggests that we find it.

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, Ms Webber.

Sue Webber: I have a list of £55.5 million of opportunities if the minister wishes to hear it. We would not spend money on mobile phones for prisoners. We would not spend £46 million in the next year alone on the botched national care service. We would not spend £9 million on foreign embassies, and we would not spend £14,000 on trips for Air Miles Angus.

I gather from my sources that the previous First Minister instructed his Cabinet to get out and visit the colleges in their regions and constituencies, meet the students and staff and see at first hand the impact that colleges have on communities across the country. I would go further and ask every member of this Parliament to do so and to get behind and support the work of our colleges, which are the unsung heroes of our education sector.

16:56

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I start by declaring an interest in that, a few years ago, I was part of a research study that contributed towards the eventual creation of UHI Shetland.

From the outset of being an MSP, I forged a close relationship with Forth Valley College. I have also spoken at events at City of Glasgow College. I can see that the huge investment in both colleges in recent years has enabled them to create world-standard learning environments, and they are not alone in that in Scotland.

Like many members in the chamber, I wish that the financial situation was different and that we could simply turn on a tap to invest more in Scotland's colleges. However, thanks to the Tories, our capital budget has been cut, and we have to acknowledge that Brexit, among other Tory insanities, has created real problems for the education sector.

Let me consider Forth Valley College. It is Scotland's first regional college, with state-of-the-art campuses across the central belt in Alloa, Falkirk and Stirling. It would not have had those state-of-the-art facilities without the support of the SNP Government. It welcomes 13,500 students per academic session, with 94 per cent of its learners progressing to further studies or employment. Critically, college funding nowadays is based on establishing outcome agreements with the Scottish Funding Council. Again, that is thanks to SNP Government reforms. It supports identification of the real economic and skills needs of the region that it serves and contributes to the college's strategic, education, training and lifelong learning work.

Liam Kerr: Does the member think that moving to a single funding pot, rather than having different funding pots with different reporting, rules and bureaucracies, is the way to go?

Michelle Thomson: I am not against looking at means of funding. I will look at efficiencies in funding and how we can do things better, but I suspect that the answer is more complex than a simple political line.

I will return to what I was talking about. The latest version of the strategic direction for Forth Valley College was published in February this year. Reiterating my point about outcomes, I always welcome that approach. Colleges throughout Scotland do a remarkable job in addressing our economic needs and providing opportunities for all, particularly our young people. They are a safe and welcoming learning environment for people with disabilities and for older students who are continuing their lifelong learning journey. They have areas of expertise that attract students from beyond the region,

including from overseas, and they have strong articulation links with universities.

Our college teaching staff are the best paid in the United Kingdom, and that reflects the priority that we give to investing in colleges. They will be a key player as we transition to a net zero economy, and, as the constituency MSP for Falkirk East, I note that Forth Valley college will have a particularly important role in supporting Grangemouth to meet the challenges of the future.

Of course, there are challenges to be faced, not least in funding but in other areas, too. The world is changing so fast that the most successful economies are fleet of foot and are able to keep pace with technology and innovation. Furthermore, individuals are best equipped to cope with change where they have been able to maximise their development opportunities.

On a point of agreement, I have spoken in the past of the Cumberford-Little report, which advocated a move from a focus on competence to one on excellence to meet the needs of modern economies. I continue to agree strongly with that, and I consider it an area where further progress can be made.

I welcome today's debate on colleges, but it is a somewhat lazy motion presented by the Tories, who seem blind to all the problems that Tory policies in the UK have created in recent years.

Let us support our colleges and ditch the Tories.

17:01

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): Yesterday afternoon, the Minister for Veterans and Further and Higher Education came along to Parliament to try to tell us that Government intervention in the long-running pay dispute in our colleges—which is about to escalate—would

“fundamentally alter the nature of the voluntary national bargaining process”.—[*Official Report*, 07 May 2024; c61.]

I ask him gently this afternoon: did Government intervention in the junior doctors dispute fundamentally alter the nature of the bargaining process? Did Government intervention in the agenda for change NHS workers dispute fundamentally alter the nature of the bargaining process? What about our teachers and local government workers—did Government intervention there fundamentally alter the nature of the voluntary national bargaining process?

In the same speech yesterday, the minister accused Opposition politicians of sitting on their hands. You couldn't make it up. He was speaking on a motion that I—an Opposition politician—had lodged, and today we are debating a motion that was lodged by the Conservatives—an Opposition party. The only people who are sitting on their

hands in this Parliament are this minister and this Government. [*Applause.*] So, I say to him again that there is nothing more corrupting in politics than remaining inactive and feigning impotence. What the Government is doing to resolve the Educational Institute of Scotland dispute is not even second rate; it is non-existent.

I have to put on the record, as well, that the very first speech by an SNP minister in the Swinney era was the most anti-trade union Government speech I have heard in Parliament in a long time. The Minister for Further and Higher Education said that colleges were

“within their rights”

to cut the pay of lecturers who are simply working to contract—that it was perfectly legal. What about the Government’s commitment to fair work? What about the promotion of good industrial relations? What about the morality of it?

This debate is about what kind of society and what kind of economy we need. If there is to be a just transition as we decarbonise the economy, it will require the reskilling of many workers, and most of them will get that not from a university degree but from active vocational training. And there will be a continuous need for reskilling, over and over again; for lifelong learning, to which our further education colleges will be pivotal.

Let me finish with the words of the great American socialist Eugene Debs, who said:

“When I rise, it will be with the ranks, not from the ranks. Full opportunity for full development is the unalienable right of all.”

That is what this debate on further education is about: whether people get the opportunity or not, whether our colleges expand or contract and whether working-class communities have opportunities that expand or contract, and it is about whether we value the people who make those opportunities possible.

Colleges are crucial to our economic wellbeing, but they are critical to our social progress, too, so it is the minister who needs to be realistic. He needs to end his obstinacy and complacency and find—from somewhere—some vigour and ingenuity. Above all, if values drive budget choices, this Government should re-evaluate our further education colleges, starting by properly investing in the people who work in them. If where the money goes is a reflection of the Government’s values, it should start valuing further education.

17:05

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow Richard Leonard. In fact, I have worn my only red tie as tribute to that

privilege. I do not like to disagree with Pam Duncan-Glancy, but I do not envy the minister, who, frankly, I have a personal regard for. He has come to the chamber to defend the SNP Government’s stewardship of Scotland’s colleges and that is pretty much mission impossible, because he knows the impact of his Government’s 17-year programme of cuts—including some really brutal cuts in the college sector—and he knows that that pattern of the past 17 years is continuing in the current financial year to the tune of £26 million.

Those cuts have had a significant impact on the sector’s capability to upskill Scotland’s workforce at the very moment in our economic journey when we need those skills. The description that has been given of the college sector by various speakers in the debate, on both the Conservative side of the chamber and the Labour side, paints a dismal picture of what the SNP has done to Scotland’s colleges.

Make no mistake about it—here I find common cause with Richard Leonard—the college sector is a key driver of equality of opportunity and it is an engine for economic growth. The cuts of the past 17 years and the cuts of the current financial year must be reversed. I know that the minister will stand up at any moment and recite his famous and favourite lines, “Where are you going to find the money from? What are you going to cut in order to reverse those cuts?” However, it is the job of a Scottish minister to set policy priorities, and if the Government has lost the will to set political priorities and has lost the ambition to put Scotland’s economy and its people first, it should move aside to let in a different Government of Scotland—one that has that ambition for our country and its people. If he uses those well-worn lines, which are so carefully crafted and consistently repeated by the Scottish ministers about spending, that is almost a tacit admission that the SNP has failed to properly prioritise education and skills.

As the minister himself said, this is not where he wants the college sector to be. I say amen to that. Let us change it. If we want to tackle intergenerational poverty and worklessness, improve national productivity and create greater equality of opportunity, we should not cut education and skills but invest in them. Therefore, I have four things to ask the minister, if he would be so kind as to respond to them. I think that all of them are positive.

First, will the minister commit to driving momentum on the delivery of the recommendations in the Withers review? I hear voices in the college sector and elsewhere in the skills sector saying that there has been a loss of momentum around the recommended reforms

and, as has already been said, we are coming up to the first anniversary of the publication of the Withers review. Reform is needed more today than ever before.

Secondly, will the minister recognise that we need to have an open and honest conversation about what is being delivered for £3.2 billion in the education and skills budget? There is no point in talking about the size of budgets without talking about what is being delivered. The Withers review makes a good start at having that dialogue—that open, transparent and accountable discussion about what is being delivered. It is not enough just to talk about sums of money—it is about what is actually coming out at the other end.

Thirdly, I ask the minister whether, in his heart of hearts, he knows that the current system of funding colleges is overly complicated, bureaucratic and wasteful—because it is. There are too many pots, too much needless reporting and too much micromanagement. By all means, agree to deliverable outcomes with the colleges, but let us leave it to the colleges to deliver them.

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Mr Kerr.

Stephen Kerr: My fourth and last point is about the colleges' estate. The fact is that the situation has gone on for years; it is not about one year's capital budget, but about several accumulated years of underfunding.

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Mr Kerr.

Stephen Kerr: I will conclude by saying this. How is the minister going to deal with the seven colleges that have RAAC on their campuses? What is he going to do about the state of those colleges' estates?

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Kerr. I call Ruth Maguire, who is the final speaker in the open debate.

17:10

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Colleges are institutions that deliver on multiple critical fronts, providing opportunities that allow our people to develop skills and to live more independently, and that allow others to take their first steps back into formal education, which helps some who are furthest away from the job market. They are places of lifelong learning and development, providing a platform where people can improve their skills or develop new interests at any point in their life. In delivering high-quality, highly respected advanced vocational qualifications and professional training, colleges, with their strong links to industry, play a pivotal role in upskilling the workforce in new technologies

for new industries, making them absolutely critical to the growth of our economy. Even with all the challenges that the education sector is facing, we have to be proud that our colleges and universities are among the best in the world and we must acknowledge the achievement of their learners.

I recognise, as does the Scottish Government, the range of financial challenges that colleges and universities are managing. Although the 2024-25 budget has tried to minimise the impact on allocations, teaching and student support, fiscal constraints felt by the UK Government's real-terms cuts have left Scotland facing catastrophic underinvestment for our public sector. Barnett consequentials have fallen in real terms. Those cuts are not insignificant—taking into account the gross domestic product inflator, they equate to an 8.4 per cent reduction over a two-year period. I therefore welcome the £2 billion investment by the Scottish Government in Scotland's colleges and universities. I also welcome the commitment to protect the right to free tuition and the continuation of widening access for all in a challenging financial climate.

The reckless Tory Brexit has also taken a toll on our education sector—[*Interruption.*] Conservative members are groaning. We are groaning about Brexit most of the time. The UK is no longer able to take part in the Erasmus exchange programme. Scottish colleges have long-established relationships across the European Union and many, such as City of Glasgow College and West College Scotland, have taken part in Erasmus-funded projects or have been awarded the Erasmus charter for higher education.

Professor Sarah Prescott from the Royal Society of Edinburgh concluded that the impact of Brexit on the student experience was multifaceted, from the

“withdrawal of Erasmus funding to the concurrent decline in student mobility, equal opportunity and recruitment of students from the European Union.”

Liam Kerr: Can the member help us to understand what impact a £24 million cut to lifelong learning will have on the student experience?

Ruth Maguire: I think that we are operating in really difficult times.

By contrast, colleges and universities secured 56 per cent less funding from the Turing scheme than they received through Erasmus, which is equivalent to a cut of more than £7 million. It is clear to see which Government is creating the challenges for colleges and universities.

The Scottish Funding Council reported that, during the academic year 2021-22, while negotiating the cost of living crisis and public health measures during the pandemic, 86 per cent

of college leavers found positive destinations within six months of graduating.

Colleges are vital to Scotland's economic success. We have to prioritise opportunities to develop knowledge, skills, values and attributes that enable Scotland's students to fulfil their potential.

The Presiding Officer: We move to winding-up speeches.

17:12

Ross Greer: I start with an apology to the convener of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, Sue Webber, for not taking her intervention. Believe it or not, I was enjoying her contribution to the debate, because she included specific proposals for areas that the Conservatives would cut from the budget and reallocate to colleges. I do not think that I agreed with any of them, but I really like the fact that this Parliament is—I hope—moving towards being a place in which we are putting forward substantial and credible ideas.

It was suggested that the £9 million budget for Scotland's overseas embassy network be cut, which I found surprising, given that that was a creation not of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Executive but of John Major under the previous UK Conservative Government. It is odd that John Major's position on Scotland's role in the world is now apparently closer to mine than that of the Scottish Conservative group here in the Scottish Parliament.

I also agreed with Liam Kerr's contribution on the fragmentation of funding for colleges. Many of us, over many years, have made that point, which has also been made in many independent reviews and reports. There is sometimes a need for discrete funding pots for specific purposes, but we have clearly reached the point at which the skills funding landscape is so fragmented that it is creating huge inefficiencies and substantial amounts of money are being wasted simply on administration.

I also agree that there has been a profound lack of strategic direction for further education in Scotland. However, that is beginning to be addressed. We saw that in the publication of the purpose and principles document last year. It did not go into quite as much detail as I would have wanted, particularly in relation to other strategies, such as the national strategy for economic transformation, but it was a start and colleges welcomed it. We need to acknowledge that that direction is now forthcoming.

Earlier, I mentioned a long-time Green proposal to move the pay and conditions of college

principals into the chief executive pay framework element of the public sector pay strategy. I want to build on that a little bit. It was not mentioned today, but the comparison between the pay offer being made to college lecturers this year and the public sector pay strategy was mentioned in the members' business debate last night. I would caution those who support college lecturers against making that comparison. The fact that college lecturers' negotiating structure has been independent for so many years has allowed them to secure far better pay and conditions year on year than those that have been in the public sector pay strategy. As much as chief executives should be bound by that, because they are not part of any collective bargaining arrangements, we should respect the independence of the collective bargaining arrangements that are secured by college staff.

On the point about the Strathesk Resolutions report that I mentioned in my opening speech, one area on which both sides would need to come out of their comfort zone is the appointment of either an independent chair for the National Joint Negotiation Committee, which would be my preference, or at least an independent observer. Even doing that as a temporary measure would allow us to make some progress. Many of the issues that we have seen over the years have taken place when both sides thought that they had reached agreement in the room, but, when they left the room, it turned out that they had very different interpretations of what had been agreed.

On Willie Rennie's point about the £26 million, if he had been here in the debate last night, he would know that I am not distancing myself or my party from that. We were proud to have secured that money for colleges in the budget, but we were then involved in the decision to reallocate it to fulfil the teacher pay deal. I was in those negotiations with the teachers' unions, and it was made very clear to them that, as much as they had every right to demand what they were demanding, the money would need to come from somewhere within the education budget.

That was the decision that was made. I want that £26 million go back in, but I am proud of the fact that we reached a transformative pay agreement with Scotland's teachers and ended the strike action in that sector.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Ross Greer: I think that I have only 10 seconds left, unless there is time in hand, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: You have 10 seconds, Mr Greer.

Ross Greer: In that case, I apologise to Mr Lumsden.

The solution is to have far more funding for our colleges, particularly directly from the private sector, as well as more democratic governance, more respect for workers, stricter conditions and better accountability. Collectively, that will deliver the better future for Scotland's colleges and, critically, for our college students. I think that we can all reach consensus on that.

17:18

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It has been a fascinating discussion. Perhaps unusually, I must apologise on behalf of the Conservative Opposition to Mr Dey for his having to cancel his meeting today. However, experience here teaches that the Opposition has brought the question of colleges and education to the chamber, and, to be fair, we have known about the date of the Conservative Opposition day for some while now. Therefore, a guess that the debate would be on education today would have been a good one to make.

Having that debate is right, because when we listen to—[*Interruption.*] Does the minister want to intervene? No, he does not.

It is right that we have this debate today, because it is clear from listening to the contributions that there is agreement on the fundamental importance of colleges to our society as a whole—particularly to those who are older and outside formal schooling and to those who are challenged by schooling and are trying to find a way back into education—and as a way to help us to address the skills gap. That seems to have had agreement across the chamber today and, indeed, in the very interesting members' business debate last night.

That brings us to the question of what the challenge is. We have to face the reality that, over 17 years, there has been a lack of priority with regard to colleges, which have suffered year after year in the face of other demands on the budget. As Ross Greer rightly pointed out, taking money out of colleges solved the teacher salary challenge. That was a choice that the Scottish Government and the Greens made. Those choices are important because that is the responsibility of the Government, but with that comes the ability for people to ask, rightly, what the Government's priorities are. We can see what its priorities are by where it spends the money.

The cuts to education, in relation to the colleges, are about something as simplistic but devastating as removing books from a library. They cut student learning support. That support comes from individuals who work with our young people, our older people and people who find it challenging to stay in college. They say to them, "You can do

this, and this is how we can help you." Careers advisers help to plot out choices for people who choose to go to college, and personal academic tutors sit down with individuals to help them with the smaller and more difficult problems. Student support team members are now threatened by redundancy.

I welcomed many of the speeches, particularly that from Michelle Thomson, who talked about Forth Valley College and rightly pointed out all of the good things about it. However, I remind her that, a year ago, it went into a 30-day consultation process, with the aim of cutting courses and the jobs of 13 members of staff, in order

"to ensure the college remains financially sustainable."

It is unfair to say that any college is in a positive and strong economic position. They are all challenged. That is summed up by Colleges Scotland's very own quote. It said:

"The college sector finds itself on a burning platform, with the combination of real term cuts over several years with increased costs related to workforce, inflation and energy ... This has left a sector, which has the potential to provide so much to learners, communities, and the economy, in a situation where colleges are cutting staff, reducing courses and having to remove much needed support services from the students who need them most."

What is this Government's priority?

17:22

Graeme Dey: I want to use the limited time that is allotted for my closing speech to focus on specific things that we are doing with the colleges to help to address their current financial challenges and to establish a more direct, effective and constructive way of working, because that is an essential part of the way forward.

A number of colleagues will be familiar with the collaborative tripartite alignment group, which we set up to find ways of easing the financial pressures that the sector faces. That has brought forward complex and difficult matters that take time to fully consider—longer than I perhaps anticipated or would want. However, we have established confidence in the process, and that is starting to pay dividends.

Let me offer an example of that. Following advice from the sector on the assets that are likely to become available for disposal, the cabinet secretary announced at the recent Colleges Scotland annual conference that we will embed changes so that colleges can retain a significant proportion of the value of any sale to invest locally. That is an example of the merits of the approach. There is a lot more that we can do to develop that approach and look at greater flexibility. Liam Kerr touched on that.

It is in the interests of all of us to ensure that our colleges thrive, despite the immensely difficult financial climate. There is little doubt that those challenges sharpen the focus on what lies ahead and make the reform of the lifelong education and skills system even more critical.

Liam Kerr: Will the minister take an intervention?

Graeme Dey: I have very little time, so I apologise to Mr Kerr for not taking his intervention.

We know, for example, that demand for apprenticeships is greater than the number of new starts that we are able to fund. This year—2024-2025—we have managed to retain funding for modern and foundation apprenticeships at the same level as last year, which means 25,500 modern apprenticeships and up to 2,500 foundation apprenticeships, despite a very challenging budget settlement. As Mr Kerr knows, we are looking to develop the foundation apprenticeship model.

The fact that that level of investment has been confirmed, in light of a worst-case scenario for Scotland's budget—handed down by the UK Government—is evidence of the Scottish Government's commitment to apprenticeships. However, there are issues with the current contracting system, and I make no apologies for looking to tackle them.

For example, I do not believe that it is right that managing agents receive up to £8,700 per apprentice and, in some instances, pass on only a fraction of that sum to the colleges that provide the training. In certain circumstances, there is a strong argument for colleges coming together to create their own managing agent structure and accessing more of that public funding. That is being actively explored.

The Scottish Government has set out its intention to strengthen regional skills planning with local partners. That will involve colleges having a critical role in the process, as they better align their offering with the needs of those local economies.

To assist that process, the college sector has created two short-life working groups that will contribute to our thinking. One group is looking into current good practice in skills planning across Scotland's eight regional economies; the second is looking at models across the other UK nations and internationally. The objective of both groups is to arrive at a set of principles that the Government can look to take forward. The working groups will report next month.

Graham Simpson: The minister will be aware that the Public Audit Committee was told in January that four Scottish colleges are in dire

straits. Is that still the position? If so, what is the minister doing about it?

Graeme Dey: To give a brief answer, the Scottish Funding Council works closely with all colleges that have challenging financial circumstances. That work is on-going.

I have been clear previously that we plan to simplify the post-school funding body landscape, including by considering the options for a single funding body, which Liam Kerr touched on. As a first step, the intention is to bring together funding for student support into one place and funding for apprenticeship provision into another. There is no question in my mind but that simplification of the funding body landscape is one of the key enablers of reform and improvement across a range of priority areas. I believe that that simplification in the apprenticeship space will be of benefit to the colleges, as will reducing the number of funding pots, which we will be doing.

The real opportunity here is perhaps that provided by the upskilling and reskilling agenda whereby, on a commercial basis, employers can commission our colleges to provide short, sharp courses for their workforce.

I genuinely thank Liam Kerr for securing this debate. As the reform agenda progresses, the Government looks forward to further opportunities to get into the detail. I understand, as we have heard today, that we are not necessarily articulating publicly the enormous amount of work that is being done to progress the agenda. I also think that there is a genuine desire among members to see our colleges flourish, and among many of them, there is at least a realism and a willingness to contribute constructively to making that happen.

I agree with many of the points that Stephen Kerr raised earlier. I find that quite troubling on one level, but he was right in much of what he said. I offer to engage with those members who want to contribute constructively beyond the debate, and to meet Willie Rennie on the issue of the SRUC.

17:27

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to be able to close the debate on supporting Scotland's colleges. Every child should have the same chance to succeed, regardless of where they are from, what school they went to or what their parents did. Education can be the single greatest leveller in our society, and it is a leveller that can spread aspiration across the whole country. It is a tried and tested, and some would say the most effective, route out of poverty. That is a key principle on which, I think, we in the

chamber can all agree. We have heard that from all parties this afternoon.

Education, especially the college sector, also has the potential to transform the economy by creating flexible routes into employment and developing a skilled workforce, thereby delivering sustainable economic growth and reducing poverty, here in Scotland. In my Mid Scotland and Fife region we are blessed with several fantastic colleges—Forth Valley College, Fife College, UHI Perth and the SRUC, which Willie Rennie mentioned. I agree with him regarding concerns about the Elmwood campus.

Working in partnership with employers across the region, the college sector is crucial in addressing some of the most daunting challenges that we face as a country—a stubborn productivity gap, an ageing population and low economic growth being just some of the challenges. There is also the challenge of enabling new generations of Scottish entrepreneurs to create the businesses and jobs of tomorrow.

Our primary duty is to create an education and skills landscape that is fit not only for the present but for the needs of the future. I am sorry to say that successive SNP education secretaries, including the new leader John Swinney, have consistently passed down cuts to the sector and have not moved forward on suggested reforms. The Withers reforms that were so eloquently mentioned by Stephen Kerr and Liam Kerr highlight that point. Those decisions are now coming—

Graeme Dey: Will the member take an intervention?

Roz McCall: I will, if it is a very short one, because I do not have a lot of time.

Graeme Dey: It will give the member a chance to have a drink of water.

Roz McCall: Thank you.

Graeme Dey: I offer Roz McCall the reassurance that we are absolutely committed to taking forward the overwhelming majority of the Withers recommendations.

Roz McCall: I guess that my response to that should be to ask when, but I accept the intervention and appreciate the point.

Previous decisions are, unfortunately, coming home to roost, for the SNP Government. I want to take the time to cite, from my region, one example, which is the plight of UHI Perth, where documents that have been sent out to staff lay out the college's financial position. It is saying that it must increase income or reduce costs by £4 million by 31 July 2025. The proposals include £3 million in staff-cost savings, which does not include an

estimated £1 million for voluntary severance pay and £1 million of savings in non-staff costs.

The savings will include the removal of “unviable” courses, cutting the higher education personal academic tutor role and removing programmes in which school students can attend part-time learning.

In addition, the current library will be turned into “a more versatile study space”

that will contain only a

“limited book collection”

and will be open for only one evening a week. The library assistant role will be axed and the on-site nursery will close.

The Social Justice and Social Security Committee, of which I am a member, has heard compelling evidence that increasing of parental employment is an integral part of reducing child poverty in Scotland, but there is a triple whammy of obstacles that have to be overcome to realise that goal: transport, upskilling and childcare. When cuts to college funding that reduce the number of courses and close childcare facilities directly hit two of those, that raises the question whether the Scottish Government truly wants to eradicate child poverty. If it does, the forthcoming changes at UHI Perth should ring serious alarm bells.

As I mentioned, we have heard all the platitudes from the SNP about the importance of education and the role that our colleges play. However, ministers simply cannot pretend that they agree with the need to change outcomes then consistently undercut the delivery of those outcomes. The financial strain that colleges such as UHI Perth are under is bad enough, but the SNP Government is failing colleges on many fronts. That point was made very eloquently earlier by my colleague Liam Kerr.

The Scottish Government is actively shunning much-needed reform in the sector and seems to have completely ignored the recommendations of the Education, Children and Young People Committee report on college regionalisation, which was mentioned by Sue Webber and Liam Kerr. That report stated:

“The Committee is concerned that colleges are currently making decisions to respond to the challenging financial climate without clear overarching strategic direction from the Scottish Government as to their purpose and what they must prioritise”.

It went on:

“As such, colleges are being asked to take decisions for the future, uncertain as to whether those decisions will be compatible with the Scottish Government's vision.”

The Government is shunning much-needed reforms, and has not created the environment in

which colleges can be flexible or show more innovation.

In conclusion—I have got there, Presiding Officer—I note that the potential and, indeed, the existing outputs of Scotland's colleges are incredible. They are led by brilliant staff and they have talented and committed students, but they are being let down by the SNP Government. Colleges need help to boost our economy and deliver a workforce for the future. The Scottish Government must listen to the calls from Conservative members and the sector. Otherwise, colleges will only continue to suffer.

Business Motions

17:33

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-13139, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a change to business. Any member who wishes to speak on the motion should press their request-to-speak button now.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 9 May 2024—

delete

2.00 pm Appointment of Scottish Ministers

and insert

2.00 pm Appointment of Scottish Ministers and Junior Scottish Ministers—[George Adam]

The Presiding Officer: I note that Pauline McNeill has asked to speak on the motion.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Apologies, Presiding Officer—I do not want to speak at the moment.

The Presiding Officer: No member has asked to speak. Therefore, the question is, that motion S6M-13139 be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-13122, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 14 May 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 15 May 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, External Affairs and
Culture;
Justice and Home Affairs

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 16 May 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Education and Skills

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Aggregates Tax and
Devolved Taxes Administration
(Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Aggregates Tax
and Devolved Taxes Administration
(Scotland) Bill

followed by Appointment of the Chair of the Scottish
Commission for Human Rights

followed by Appointment of Member of the Scottish
Commission for Public Audit

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 21 May 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Post Office (Horizon
System) Offences (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 22 May 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Stage 2 Proceedings: Post Office

(Horizon System) Offences (Scotland)
Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 23 May 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Transport

followed by Public Audit Committee Debate: Audit
Scotland Report, Adult Mental Health

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 13 May 2024, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

17:35

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

This is now the third time that I have sought to make a change to the business that the Scottish Government has proposed. I am proposing that the Parliament should hear from the Lord Advocate, with members staying back for just 30 minutes tomorrow. The Scottish National Party and the Greens refused such a proposal last week and, again, yesterday. I hope that the Parliament can now unite and agree to members staying behind for just 30 minutes tomorrow to hear from the Lord Advocate.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business will rightly say that, at the heart of this—those we have to be concerned about—are the sub-postmasters who were wrongly convicted because of the Horizon scandal. I agree whole-heartedly with what George Adam has said in that regard, but they are not being served at all if we are still unclear about the Lord Advocate's position.

We know that nothing has changed as a result of the reshuffle today. Not a single front-bench portfolio has changed—the people are still there, and they are doing exactly the same jobs—so we know that Angela Constance will take through the Horizon bill in the coming weeks. What we do not know is what the head of the Crown Office and

Procurator Fiscal Service in Scotland thinks about the issue, and we do not know what she thinks as a member of the Scottish Government's Cabinet. The minister has said repeatedly that there is no need for any further clarity, but there is.

A lot of SNP and Green members are in the chamber. I am happy to give way to any SNP or Green member who can tell me whether the Lord Advocate still believes that it would be wrong to have a process to enable mass exoneration for sub-postmasters.

Pauline McNeill: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Douglas Ross: Can any SNP or Green member who might be about to vote against getting the Lord Advocate into the chamber outline the Lord Advocate's position?

They cannot.

Pauline McNeill: I will.

Douglas Ross: I will come to Pauline McNeill in a minute.

I cannot fathom how democratically elected members who are sent to the chamber to represent their constituents can vote down a proposal for the Parliament to sit for just 30 extra minutes to get that vital answer from the Lord Advocate. SNP and Green members are all looking at their desks or their phones; the answer is not there. If we do not know the Lord Advocate's position, I genuinely urge SNP and Green members to vote for this slight change to business tomorrow in order to get the Lord Advocate here.

If SNP and Green members are not willing to contribute, I will happily give way to Pauline McNeill.

Pauline McNeill: Scottish Labour will support the amendment to the business motion, because we believe that there should be a statement from the Lord Advocate, and I want to say why. There is emerging evidence that the Crown Office knew or ought to have known that the Horizon system was questionable, and we still do not have answers on that.

We obviously need to see the details of the bill, but we will support any attempts to overturn convictions. However, it will not be enough for victims simply to have their convictions overturned. In fact, in the Sheriff Appeal Court this week, there were six cases in which it was deemed that the Horizon evidence was not corroboration, so those cases were overturned. Victims will want accountability for the full timeline in relation to who took decisions and why better decisions were not made, because what happened resulted in the prosecutions in the first place. I think that victims would want a statement followed by detailed questions and answers.

Douglas Ross: I agree whole-heartedly with Pauline McNeill. As I said yesterday, she will ask the First Minister a question on the subject tomorrow, but it would probably be more suitable for that question to go to the Lord Advocate, so that we could hear her position on that point and many others.

As I sum up, I am left wondering why SNP and Green MSPs will not support the change to business. Is the Lord Advocate comfortable with that? Is she sat in her chambers saying, "Don't allow time for me to come to the Scottish Parliament to explain my position like I did in January this year"? Or is the Scottish Government now blocking the opportunity for her to come to the chamber? That is her right, and it is our right, as MSPs, to ask her here.

I simply ask the minister this question. If none of his SNP and Green colleagues could intervene and tell me this, perhaps he can. Does Scotland's Lord Advocate, who sits round the Scottish Government Cabinet table, still believe that it would be wrong to have a mass exoneration of sub-postmasters in Scotland?

I move amendment S6M-13122.1, to insert after "the following programme of business—":

"Thursday 9 May 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business — S6M-12342
Collette Stevenson: Shining a Light on Domestic Abuse in LGBT+ History Month

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Appointment of Scottish Ministers

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Data Protection and Digital Information Bill - UK Legislation

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Welfare of Dogs (Scotland) Bill

followed by Statement by the Lord Advocate on Post Office Horizon Prosecutions

followed by Appointments of the Chair and Commissioners of the Poverty and Inequality Commission

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time".

17:40

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): Let us at least talk about the positives. We now all agree that those who were involved in the Post Office scandal, and who

suffered as a result, are actually the ones whom we should be thinking of. Mr Ross said that, too. They are the most important ones. Those are families and individuals, who have—as I said yesterday, and last week as well—had to deal with this on-going problem for decades.

To put everyone's mind at ease, I reiterate that lead responsibility for developing and delivering the Post Office Horizon legislation lies with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, and it would be inappropriate for the Lord Advocate to provide a statement on the bill. That is the important point that we are talking about. All these individuals whom we have agreed we want to help are the important ones at this stage.

Douglas Ross: Will the minister give way?

George Adam: As I explained yesterday, all members will get the opportunity to scrutinise the Scottish Government bill as it progresses through Parliament in the usual manner. I have nothing else to add at this point.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-13122.1, in the name of Douglas Ross, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13122, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

17:42

Meeting suspended.

17:43

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S6M-13122.1, in the name of Douglas Ross. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My device would not connect—I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Wells. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I think that my vote was recorded, but my screen is not refreshing. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote was recorded, Ms Duncan-Glancy. Thank you.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-13122.1, in the name of Douglas Ross, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13122, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, is: For 52, Against 68, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-13122, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 14 May 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 15 May 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Constitution, External Affairs and Culture;
 Justice and Home Affairs

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (If required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 16 May 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Education and Skills

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Aggregates Tax and Devolved Taxes Administration (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Aggregates Tax and Devolved Taxes Administration (Scotland) Bill

followed by Appointment of the Chair of the Scottish Commission for Human Rights

followed by Appointment of Member of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 21 May 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 22 May 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy;
 Finance, Deputy First Minister Responsibilities and Parliamentary Business
followed by Stage 2 Proceedings: Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 23 May 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Transport
followed by Public Audit Committee Debate: Audit Scotland Report, Adult Mental Health
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 13 May 2024, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:46

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-13123, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and S6M-13124, on committee meeting times.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Registration of Social Workers and Social Service Workers in Care Services (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament following the Appointment of Scottish Ministers on Thursday 9 May 2024.—[George Adam]

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

Decision Time

17:46

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-13090.4, in the name of Neil Gray, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13090, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, on implementing the Cass review in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)

McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)

Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) Proxy vote
 cast by Richard Leonard
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-13090.4, in the name of Neil Gray, is: For 71, Against 30, Abstentions 20.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is that amendment S6M-13090.2, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13090, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, on implementing the Cass review in Scotland, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-13090, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, on implementing the Cass review in Scotland, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)

Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and
 Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
 (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)
 (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)
 (SNP)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)

Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-13090, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, as amended is: For 113, Against 7, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the report submitted by Dr Hilary Cass on gender identity services for children and young people; recognises the report as a valid scientific document; calls on the Scottish Government to thoroughly examine the recommendations of the NHS England commissioned report, and its applicability to NHS Scotland services, and to update the Parliament on the outcome before the summer recess, and further calls on the Scottish Government to publish all papers relating to the multi-disciplinary clinical team work in assessing Dr Cass's recommendations, and to urgently prepare a progress report on the existing strategy for reducing long waits for children and young people to access specialist gender services.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-13091.3, in the name of Graeme Dey, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13091, in the name of Liam Kerr, on supporting Scotland's colleges, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My device would not connect. I would have voted no.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)

Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)

Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-13091.3, in the name of Graeme Dey, is: For 61, Against 58, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-13091.1, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13091, in the name of Liam Kerr, on supporting Scotland's colleges, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)

Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-13091.1, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, is: For 60, Against 61, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-13091, in the name of Liam Kerr, on supporting Scotland's colleges, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-13091, in the name of Liam Kerr, as amended, is: For 62, Against 59, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that colleges are vital to Scotland’s economy and play a crucial role in supporting learners, creating flexible routes into employment, developing a skilled workforce and delivering sustainable economic growth; understands that the process of post-school education reform provides opportunities to further enhance the role that Scotland’s colleges play in the economy and society, including enhancing their role in developing the green skills that Scotland needs for the just transition, and agrees that any proposals for changes to funding must be clear from where else in the Scottish Government’s budget the resource would be taken,

particularly in the context of 14 years of UK Government austerity.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions. Does any member object?

As no member objects, the final question is, that motions S6M-13123, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and S6M-13124, on committee meeting times, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Registration of Social Workers and Social Service Workers in Care Services (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament following the Appointment of Scottish Ministers on Thursday 9 May 2024.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

World Asthma Day 2024

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-12707, in the name of Emma Harper, on world asthma day 2024. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes World Asthma Day 2024, which will take place on 7 May 2024; recognises that the Global Initiative for Asthma, supported by the World Health Organization, will this year mark the theme of "Asthma Education Empowers"; understands that around 360,000 people, including 72,000 children, have an asthma diagnosis in Scotland; further understands that asthma is one of the most common chronic non-communicable diseases that affects over 260 million people globally, and is responsible for over 450,000 deaths each year worldwide, most of which are preventable, and that, according to the Global Initiative for Asthma, one of the key universal issues for which education is required is the under-diagnosis or inaccurate diagnosis, including of people with severe asthma, underuse of anti-inflammatory inhaled corticosteroid inhalers, overuse and over-reliance on short-acting beta2-agonist (SABA) inhalers, and poor recognition of patients requiring specialist assessment and further asthma care management; notes the reported difference in severe asthma compared with unstable asthma, and understands that poorly controlled severe asthma can take a toll on health and wellbeing; welcomes the Scottish Government's Respiratory Care Action Plan, which aims to improve prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and self-management of asthma and lung conditions; notes the calls on the Scottish Government to provide an update on the effectiveness of the plan in helping to improve outcomes for people living with asthma; welcomes the work of Asthma + Lung UK Scotland to improve asthma care in Scotland and to support people who receive an asthma diagnosis and their families; further welcomes the creation of the International Coalition of Respiratory Nurses (ICRN) in 2023, which brings together nurses and allied health professionals from across the globe to advance the care and treatment of patients with respiratory conditions, including asthma, and notes the view that better asthma care at all levels of healthcare can lead to better outcomes and lives for people living with asthma.

17:59

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to lead this important debate to recognise world asthma day 2024, which took place yesterday, 7 May, with the theme "Asthma Education Empowers". I thank members who have supported my motion, allowing the debate to go ahead today. I also thank Asthma and Lung UK Scotland for its briefing and for all that it does in respect of research, advice and support for persons with an asthma diagnosis and their families.

Gareth Brown from Asthma and Lung UK Scotland serves as the secretariat for the cross-party group on lung health, which I co-convene with my colleague Alexander Stewart. Gareth does

a great job, and I thank him for all his work. The CPG has done work relating to asthma previously, and the input from clinicians, asthma support groups and those who are living with asthma is welcome. My thanks go to the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health for her active engagement with our cross-party group. One of our CPG members, Olivia Fulton, chairs a group that focuses on severe asthma, which meets online—I will say a wee bit more about Olivia later in my speech.

As my motion indicates, world asthma day is organised by the Global Initiative for Asthma, which is a World Health Organization collaborative that was founded in 1993. There is a lot of great info on the GINA website, which I encourage people to visit to find out more.

Asthma is a very common long-term lung health condition. In the United Kingdom, 5.4 million people have an asthma diagnosis—that is one in every 12 adults and one in every 11 children. In Scotland, 368,000 adults and about 71,000 children live with an asthma diagnosis. People with asthma might have sensitive, inflamed and irritated airways. Asthma symptoms can come and go; sometimes people might not have symptoms for weeks or months at a time. However, asthma needs to be treated every day, even if someone feels well, in order to lower the risks of their symptoms being exacerbated and of having an asthma attack.

The most common symptoms of asthma are coughing, wheezing—which is a whistling sound when you breathe—breathlessness and chest tightness. Experiencing one or more of those symptoms could mean that you have asthma. It is more likely to be asthma if your symptoms keep coming back, if they are worse at night or if they occur when you react to a trigger such as exercise, weather or an allergy such as pet hair or pollen. Anyone who experiences those symptoms should speak to their general practitioner as soon as possible.

The seriousness of asthma varies from person to person. There are different types of asthma—indeed, there is an important difference between severe asthma and uncontrolled asthma. Uncontrolled asthma improves with treatment changes such as steroid inhalers and good inhaler technique, but someone with severe asthma, which affects about 5 per cent of people with asthma, can have symptoms most of the time and can find them very hard to control.

Poorly controlled severe asthma takes a toll on people's physical and mental health, leading to an average of four asthma attacks per year. Among people who live with severe asthma, 55 per cent report depression, 66 per cent report anxiety and 68 per cent say that it impacts their work and

education. Where people live also has a bearing on outcomes, as those in the poorest areas of Scotland are, on average, three times as likely to be admitted to hospital as a result of their asthma.

There is a huge financial cost. In Scotland, the cost of treating respiratory disease is estimated to be £500 million each year, and asthma care represents £97.5 million of that spend. Flare-ups of severe asthma can result in patients presenting in the costliest part of the healthcare system: accident and emergency departments. Data suggest that people with severe asthma attend A and E departments roughly four times more often than people with non-severe asthma.

However, the situation can improve. Earlier, I mentioned Olivia Fulton, who is a great example of how improvement in severe asthma care can be achieved. She had serious challenges with her severe asthma, but thanks to proper care and treatment, she is now playing for Scotland's women's wheelchair rugby team. Asthma education has certainly empowered Olivia.

Since 2013, Asthma and Lung UK Scotland has surveyed people with asthma, and, earlier this year, it launched its "Life with a Lung Condition" survey for the second time. The survey results highlighted that 24 per cent of Scots received all three recommended aspects of asthma care: an annual review of their asthma care and treatment, a check-up on their inhaler technique and a written asthma action plan. In particular, 75 per cent of those who were surveyed said that they received an annual review, 50 per cent said that their inhaler technique was checked and 40 per cent said that they had received a written asthma plan.

I would welcome an update from the minister regarding what further steps the Scottish Government could take to increase awareness of asthma education in Scotland so that people know what their entitlements are and are empowered to press for them.

In 2021, the Scottish Government launched the "Respiratory Care Action Plan 2021-2026", which sets out a vision for driving improvement in prevention and in the diagnosis, care, treatment and support of people living with respiratory conditions in Scotland. One aspect of the plan is that the pillars of asthma care should be available to everyone, so I would welcome an update from the minister on the implementation of the RCAP.

I will touch briefly on the link between asthma and inequality. We know that people from the most deprived areas of Scotland are much more likely to receive an asthma diagnosis. Managing a variable lifelong condition with complex treatments such as inhalers is difficult; managing asthma while juggling multiple jobs, family responsibilities and financial pressures is even harder.

I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling health inequalities, and it is important to note that good-quality housing, sound state welfare support and good air quality are key components of achieving health equality. With regard to air quality, 57 per cent of those who are living with asthma in Scotland say that air quality makes them feel more breathless.

In closing, I highlight one final point: the importance of working across countries to learn from experience and ensure good practice. The International Coalition for Respiratory Nursing—of which I am a member, as I am still a registered nurse—was created in 2021. The ICRN is a global network of advanced respiratory nurse practitioners, with the aim of working together to improve care for people who live with lung conditions and to educate and empower patients. I support this year's world asthma day theme, "Asthma Education Empowers", as educating people empowers them to receive improved care and, consequently, have healthier outcomes.

Again, I welcome the debate, and I look forward to contributions from colleagues.

18:07

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I congratulate Emma Harper on securing this members' business debate for world asthma day. Asthma is a chronic respiratory disease that affects more than 250 million folk around the world. In Scotland, about 360,000 folk are diagnosed as suffering from asthma, including more than 72,000 children, and there will be many more folk out there without a diagnosis at this point.

I do not think that many colleagues will be surprised to hear that I am one of those 250 million—especially colleagues who noticed me catching my breath when I was trying to ask a general question in the chamber a few weeks ago. It is no always easy to be wheezy.

I remember when I first went to the doctor and was diagnosed as borderline asthmatic or as having borderline chronic obstructive pulmonary disease—I remember that the doctor was unable to tell me which condition it was. I was given three different inhalers: one for asthma symptoms, one for COPD symptoms and a blue inhaler for if and when I needed it. It is a pity that I had not carried it with me on the day that I needed it in the chamber.

There was a fair bit of trial and error to find what worked for me, and I know that I am not alone in that experience. What works best for me is not just inhalers—what I no longer puff has made a real difference. I quit smoking more than four years ago, after being a smoker for nearly four decades of my life, and I feel that that has made a huge

difference to my health. Although I am trying to be healthier and I have my inhalers, living with asthma can still be challenging. However, the more I learn about asthma, the easier it gets. Education can empower folk to manage their conditions and to go about their lives as they wish.

There are a few things that it is helpful to know. Those include what asthma is and what is happening to your lungs; what your symptoms are; how to manage your symptoms; how to recognise whether your symptoms are getting worse; and what can be a trigger for your asthma—for example, pets, perfume or deodorant—and how to avoid those triggers. However, that is not an invitation for anyone to stop wearing deodorant; as with many other things in the Parliament, there is a balance to be struck.

Finally, the most important thing that I feel folk should know, whether or not they are asthmatic, is how to recognise an asthma attack and what to do about it. The main symptoms of an asthma attack are if your asthma symptoms—coughing, breathlessness, wheezing or a tight chest—are getting worse; if your inhaler is not working; if you are too breathless to speak, eat or sleep; if your breathing is getting faster and it feels like you cannot catch your breath; or if your peak flow score is lower than normal. Children might also complain of a tummy or chest ache.

Once you have recognised an asthma attack, here is what to do. First, sit up straight and try to keep calm—I realise that that is easier said than done. Take a puff on your inhaler—usually your blue one—every 30 to 60 seconds, for up to 10 puffs. If you feel worse at any point or if you do not feel any better after 10 puffs, dial 999 for an ambulance immediately.

I conclude my remarks with that life-saving advice and congratulate my friend Emma Harper again on securing this important debate.

18:11

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): I am delighted to make a contribution to this debate, and I thank Emma Harper, who is a fellow member and co-convenor of the cross-party group on lung health, for securing it.

Back in February this year, I lodged a parliamentary motion on people with uncontrolled asthma to highlight the issue of severe asthma. Thereafter in February, I was very pleased to sponsor an exhibition in the members lobby entitled “Better lives for people with uncontrolled asthma”, which was specifically for MSPs and staff to find out more about severe asthma. That is a serious public health challenge in Scotland, and it is classified as a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

The adverse implications of severe asthma can put a significant strain on our healthcare system. We already know that asthma, which affects about 17 per cent of adults, is the most common respiratory disease in Scotland. However, severe asthma affects more than 4 per cent of that population, and it is sometimes quite difficult to manage. In the cross-party group, we have learned about all the things that can support people with that.

Asthma and Lung UK has estimated that Scotland has among the highest prevalences of severe asthma in the United Kingdom. Poorly controlled severe asthma challenges people’s mental and physical abilities. We know that the condition leads to an average of four asthma attacks a year. Well over half of people who live with it have depression or anxiety, which leads them on to other problems with their health and wellbeing. About 70 per cent of patients report that the condition severely impacts their work or education.

A key opportunity to improve outcomes for patients with severe asthma is through improving the pathway towards accurate diagnosis. We have talked in the past about diagnosis and delays in referrals to specialist clinics to undertake patient-centred assessments. We need to deal with that.

I welcome the fact that the theme of this year’s world asthma day is “Asthma Education Empowers”. That tells us a lot about what we can do when we talk about accurate diagnosis and how people can be treated. For some patients, that might mean starting on a medicine class known as biologics. Those medicines transform lives, but only one in five people receives such therapies in Scotland. We need to consider how more people can be accessed, because access to treatment will save lives.

Emma Harper: In the cross-party group, we have talked about how pulmonary rehab and singing help with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Does Alexander Stewart agree that PR and singing can help folk with asthma, too?

Alexander Stewart: Without question. There is the whole idea of working the lungs. I do not have asthma but, as Emma Harper knows, I do a little bit of singing, and I know how that helps me.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Is Mr Stewart about to burst into song?

Alexander Stewart: I will not sing this evening. Members can come to the choir to hear me some other time.

As I said, we must ensure that we have access to experts and clinicians across Scotland and that the issue of access is looked at. I look forward to hearing what the minister has to say on that,

because we know that there needs to be much more equal access to advanced therapies, which can be transformative. We must manage severe asthma.

I hope that the minister will, in her summing up, talk about: where we are when it comes to the progress of the respiratory care action plan; a pledge to address the misdiagnoses and the underdiagnosis that we know are taking place; implementing clear national once-for-Scotland protocols, because we know about the issues of disparity; establishing nationally agreed severe asthma referral pathways that promote collaboration between primary and specialised care; and collaboration across partners, including patient advocacy groups, as well as the third sector.

18:15

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I thank Emma Harper for securing this debate to mark world asthma day 2024. I also say well done to Jackie Dunbar, and urge her to keep going. I gave up smoking 22 years ago and have never looked back, so I encourage her to keep at it.

As Emma Harper and Alexander Stewart have said, this year's theme is "Asthma Education Empowers". That is important, because knowledge of how to access good and timely treatment can be life changing for those living with asthma.

Asthma and Lung UK's 2024 survey revealed that basic asthma care levels continue to fall in Scotland, with only 24 per cent of sufferers receiving the three basic provisions of asthma care. Data also shows that, in Scotland, there are significantly low levels of uptake of specialist treatments such as biologics for those who might be eligible. There is a postcode lottery across Scotland. It is interesting to note that, despite its own challenges, NHS England currently leads Scotland with a 17 to 21 per cent higher uptake. There is something that we can learn from that.

Clearly, there are issues with the levels of education about and knowledge of what services are available in Scotland, in both specialist treatments and basic asthma care. However, the problem lies not with public knowledge alone; Asthma and Lung UK has reported concerns that the Scottish Government does not accurately collect and report the correct number of people living with respiratory conditions, which is an issue that anyone with an interest in long Covid will be familiar with. That matters, because poor data collection means poorer treatment options and, ultimately, poorer patient outcomes. The issue must be addressed.

Patients have also raised concerns about a lack of awareness in primary care, leading to delays in

specialist referrals to clinics for patient-centred assessment and to gain an accurate diagnosis. The more that we ensure that GPs are properly supported and have the time to take opportunities to expand their knowledge of and education on subjects such as asthma, the more that we can ensure that patients are signposted and treated before their symptoms worsen or they end up in hospital.

The survey further showed that only 40 per cent of people hospitalised with asthma were getting the follow-up care that they needed within two days of leaving hospital. That is the case, despite current Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network guidance stating that follow-up care is required to ensure that symptoms remain under control. The result is that around one in six people who receives emergency care for an asthma attack needs hospital care again within two weeks. There is, therefore, a logic to our getting prevention right. We know that the national health service is already under immense pressure, and the lack of that basic follow-up care only exacerbates the problem.

Patients and health professionals need support from the Scottish Government if asthma education is to actually empower them. They need better data collection, action in primary care to improve diagnostic tools and public health campaigns that provide up-to-date information about treatment. Scotland also needs the timely implementation of the respiratory care action plan's severe asthma recommendations, the creation of clear, national, once-for-Scotland protocols for severe asthma and the establishment of nationally agreed severe asthma referral pathways, which will promote collaboration between primary and specialised care.

Without action to address those issues, asthma will continue to be a significant public health challenge in Scotland, causing pain and discomfort and placing strain on the NHS that is avoidable.

18:20

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Emma Harper for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I recognise the knowledge and skills that she has in this area and I praise the on-going work that she is committed to doing in the Parliament and beyond. I have heard her speak about this subject many times, and it is much appreciated.

Scottish Labour welcomes, as my colleague Jackie Baillie does, world asthma day 2024, which is supported by the World Health Organization and took place yesterday. We recognise this year's theme of "Asthma Education Empowers".

As far as prevalence is concerned, asthma in Scotland affects, as we have heard, around 368,000, 71,000 of whom are children. An important point that has been raised by Asthma and Lung UK as well as by members relates to the collection and recording of information. Currently we do not have an accurate collection method or an agreed reporting system across health boards and the Scottish Government, and given that, according to the Royal College of Physicians report, two thirds of asthma-related deaths could be preventable, I ask the minister whether the Scottish Government is looking at that issue. Perhaps she will say something about that in her closing remarks.

As other members have said, medical advisers and professionals who work in the field have identified key risk factors in managing the condition, including the overuse of relief inhalers, the underuse of preventer inhalers and recent emergency hospital visits with no follow-up. Such factors give great insight into the reasons for this year's theme of education empowering people; it makes it clear that it is important to teach people with asthma about their condition and that, by learning about it, they can manage their symptoms better. That helps the patient, the doctors and the NHS.

When I did some research for the debate, it became clear that we need strong will and a strong commitment from the Government to prioritise this lifelong condition. According to recent Asthma and Lung UK research, many Scots with asthma are falling short on the basic care guidelines. We know that there is pressure on NHS staff, so I ask the minister to tell us how she believes that the Government can help to reverse that pressure on staff and offer asthma sufferers some hope that the outcomes from that condition can be changed.

We have heard about three things: an annual review, an inhaler technique check and a written action plan. The research shows that only 24 per cent of Scots received all three; 25 per cent received one; and 17 per cent reported receiving none. This is an important matter, and I know that the minister will consider it to be so. We would, I think, all agree that every person with an asthma diagnosis should be offered all three elements; they should know that that is their basic treatment plan and entitlement.

In my final minute, I ask the minister, as others have done, to update us on the care action plan and to point to some specific points of action that the Government has undertaken, so that people with asthma can feel that moves are being made and improvements for their care are being put in place.

Again, I thank Emma Harper for securing the debate and all the members who have contributed to it.

18:23

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I, too, thank Emma Harper for lodging this important motion, and I welcome the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Scottish Government. I also put on record my thanks to those who support people living with asthma in Scotland, including our NHS and third sector organisations such as Asthma and Lung UK. Finally, I thank Emma Harper and Alexander Stewart for their sterling work in the CPG. I have interacted with them before and will be happy to do so again, if I am still in this role.

Carol Mochan is absolutely right to say that asthma is important to me. Both my father and brother had it, and, going back to what Jackie Dunbar said, I remember that, any time we went out, we had to make sure that the appropriate inhalers were packed. I also thank Emma Harper for outlining the symptoms.

World asthma day gives us time to reflect on the progress that has been made in respiratory care and on the challenges that we face. We know that care and treatment for conditions such as asthma are not always where they need to be, but we are continuing to work collaboratively across our whole system to tackle it.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving services across the country and meeting needs through the implementation of a respiratory care action plan. The plan sets out key priority areas for driving improvement in prevention, diagnosis, care, treatment and support for people living with a range of respiratory conditions.

As well as the national plan, significant work is being done across the wider health and social care landscape. The centre for sustainable delivery supports professionals across Scotland to come together and share best practice while working towards consistent once-for-Scotland pathways in respiratory services. A priority in the current work plan of the respiratory specialty delivery group is the development of a once-for-Scotland asthma pathway. Indeed, the group's aim is to design a national pathway in partnership with clinicians and, importantly, those who live with asthma.

A major milestone in asthma care this year has been the publication of "Quality Prescribing Strategy for Respiratory: A Guide for Improvement 2024-2027". The document aims to keep people at the centre of their treatment and respiratory disease management and to promote safe,

evidence-based and sustainable prescribing with regular reviews of medication. The guide will support clinicians across the multidisciplinary team and people with respiratory conditions in shared decision making, and it offers practical advice and options for tailoring care to individuals' needs and preferences.

Alongside the guide, a suite of national therapeutic indicators that has been developed with Public Health Scotland will allow clinicians to identify those most in need of a review. Primary care teams will be able to drill down to cluster and practice-level data and benchmark across Scotland, driving consistency in care.

It is important to address the point that Jackie Baillie and Carol Mochan made about the importance of data. We are currently working with Asthma and Lung UK and other key partners on commissioning a full national audit programme for respiratory conditions.

The prescribing guide also has a focus on net zero. Many people with asthma might be surprised to learn that the environmental impact of inhalers for treating asthma and COPD is equivalent to around 80,000 tonnes of CO₂ a year. That is more than the emissions from the entire NHS fleet and full NHS waste combined. We want to ensure that patients and their prescribing clinicians are equipped with the facts to enable them to make choices.

We also understand that environmental factors play a huge role in the day-to-day lives of people who live with lung conditions such as asthma. Our vision for Scotland is to have the cleanest air in Europe, and we are committed to protecting the public from the effects of poor-quality air as quickly as possible. The introduction of low-emission zones in our four largest cities in 2022 was a key initiative in further improving urban air quality.

I congratulate Jackie Baillie and Jackie Dunbar on their smoking cessation. I was just commenting to a friend that I can remember getting the no-smoking lesson back in primary school; one of my friends went back to his parents' house, where his father smoked, and he stuck stickers all the way up the stairway. They got ripped off, but the marks were still there. The father has now stopped smoking, which is great. It took a long time, but he did it.

As a Government, we remain committed to a tobacco-free Scotland by 2034, and the United Kingdom Tobacco and Vapes Bill will help us to achieve our ambitious target. Scotland has a range of world-leading tobacco-control measures, and smoking rates continue to decline. Our tobacco and vaping framework, which was launched on 22 November last year, sets out our road map to 2034 and outlines decisive action,

including work on the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, to ensure that we hit our goal. That suite of preventative measures will help people better manage their condition and support us in preventing respiratory disease in future generations.

I agree with everyone who has talked about the appropriateness of the theme of this year's world asthma day: "Asthma Education Empowers". As Carol Mochan has said, we understand the benefits of empowering people with asthma through the appropriate education, so that they can manage their disease and recognise when to seek medical help.

We also work with many third sector partners who provide invaluable support to those living with lung disease. I am not going to start singing now, but I spent an amazing couple of hours singing for lung health with the Cheyne Gang in Leith, which Emma Harper introduced me to. I know that the chamber would not want me to sing, but it was great.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The fact that you were singing will be clear for the *Official Report*, minister, so please do not start.

Jenni Minto: I will not, but it was amazing—I thought that you were about to tell me that my seven minutes was up, Presiding Officer. In any case, the event was clearly about encouraging people to think about breathing with their entire lungs and giving each other peer support.

In 2023-24, more than 600 nurses accessed training modules as part of our respiratory care action plan to build on the knowledge and skills in the NHS workforce. Another positive development has been the delivery of guidance for children living with asthma transitioning into adult services. We know that that is a particularly challenging time for young people, their families and carers, and that not all areas of Scotland offer transition services, but guidance has been developed by a group of asthma specialists in partnership with the third sector and those with first-hand experience of a good transition.

I will close by reiterating the Government's commitment to ensuring that everyone living with asthma in Scotland receives the best possible care and support. As we move through 2024, we know that there is still a way to go in respiratory care and the only way that we will improve is by understanding the needs of those who live with the condition. My thanks go to all members who have contributed to this important debate today, and, most important, to those working across health and social care to deliver those commitments.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:31.

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