

Parliamentary Reports and Policy Updates: May 2015



Scottish Parliament

British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill Update

The Education and Culture Committee

The Stage 1 debate took place in the Chamber on Tuesday 5th May 2015. Both Mark Griffin's motion on the Bill and the financial motion were passed.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9933>

The Bill has now moved onto Stage 2. The Education and Culture Committee will consider all amendments lodged on Thursday 28th May at the meeting on 2nd June -

[http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_Bills/British%20Sign%20Language%20\(Scotland\)%20Bill/List_of_Amendments_for_webpage.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_Bills/British%20Sign%20Language%20(Scotland)%20Bill/List_of_Amendments_for_webpage.pdf)

Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

The Welfare Reform Committee

On Tuesday 5th May, the Welfare Reform Committee took evidence from two panels on their experience of claiming PIP. For the full report, go to

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9938>.

Carers (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Health and Sport Committee took evidence from a number of carers' organisations on Tuesday 5th May. To read the full report, go to

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9934>

Evidence was taken on Tuesday 12th May from organisations that support young carers. To read the full report, go to <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9943>

The Health and Sport Committee met to take further evidence on the Carers (Scotland) Bill on Tuesday 26th May. To read the report on this evidence gathering session, go to

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9972>

Attainment of Pupils with Sensory Impairment

The Education and Culture Committee took evidence on Tuesday 12th May from Dominic Everett from the Royal National Institute of Blind People; Dr John Ravenscroft from the Scottish sensory centre; Sally Paterson from the Scottish Association for Visual Impairment Education; and Tracy Christie from Hazelwood school parent council in support of children and young people with a visual loss.

And from a second panel of witnesses in support of children and young people with a hearing loss: Heather Gray, National Deaf Children's Society; Rachel O'Neill, Moray House school of education; Dr Audrey Cameron, child protection research centre; and Catherine Finestone, British Association of Teachers of the Deaf Scotland.

To read the full report, go to _

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9951>

On Thursday 19th May, the Education and Culture Committee continued to gather evidence for their inquiry into the attainment of pupils with a sensory impairment from Alison McGillivray from East Renfrewshire Council, David Watt from Education Scotland, Brian Shannan from Fife Council, Eileen Burns from the Hamilton school for the deaf and Richard Hellewell from Royal Blind.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9963>

The Education and Culture Committee heard the final evidence in its inquiry into the educational attainment of pupils with a sensory impairment from the Scottish Government on Tuesday 26th May. The report is available at

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9977>

Police Scotland (Community Engagement)

S40-04295 Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the effectiveness of Police Scotland's strategy for engaging with local communities.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson):

The Scottish Government has the clear expectation that community engagement should be a key part of all public bodies' functions. Local policing and local accountability are fundamental to policing in Scotland, and Police Scotland's annual policing plan, which was launched just last week, sets out clear examples of the vital role that Police Scotland plays in our communities, including examples of where our police service is working closely with communities not only to solve crime but, importantly, to prevent it from taking place.

Police reform has led to an almost 150 per cent increase in the number of local elected members across Scotland who are scrutinising the police service and shaping local delivery. Around 360 local councillors now attend local policing committees, compared with 146 local councillors who attended prior to the creation of Police Scotland.

Local policing and local accountability remain fundamental to policing in Scotland. Each of the 14 Police Scotland command divisions has a local commander who works with the council, the communities and local partners to shape and deliver policing through 353 ward-level policing plans that cover every community in Scotland.

Margaret Mitchell:

I thank the cabinet secretary for his comprehensive answer. Does he recognise and value the excellent prevention work of and local intelligence provided by crime prevention panels and does he agree that the proposal to cut their budgets and remove police officer support from their meetings is a retrograde step?

Michael Matheson:

As I said, the national annual policing plan sets out a range of measures that Police Scotland intends to take forward over the next year, including work with local partners to ensure that it delivers effective policing. I mentioned that a key part of that is action on prevention. I have no doubt that, if the member has concerns about the way in which Police Scotland is operating in partnership with some local crime prevention bodies, she will be more than willing to engage with it directly on how she feels that the situation can be improved. I am always open to suggestions from members on how such matters can be better addressed, but the member can be assured that Police Scotland recognises the importance of local engagement and working with partners in the community to deliver effective policing in communities.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab):

In recent correspondence with the chief constable, I ascertained that he will review the opening times of police stations following the closure and curtailment of many of them last year. Will the minister join me in urging the chief constable to ensure that community councils and other community groups are not just able to take part in that consultation but positively encouraged to take part in it and to understand that their views are critical to understanding the effect that those changes have had in communities?

Michael Matheson:

Local engagement is an important part of policing at a community level. I expect Police Scotland to engage with a range of stakeholders that have an interest in how it operates locally. As the member stated, she has engaged with the chief constable on the matter. She may also wish to pursue the issue with the Scottish Police Authority, which has oversight of how our police go about such matters and how the chief constable handles them. However, I recognise the points that the member has raised. It is extremely important that all stakeholders that may have a view on the issues are given the opportunity to participate in the discussion. I encourage her to continue to support the organisations that may wish to express their views on such matters.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9937>

Self-directed Support (Guidance)**S4O-04296 Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):**

To ask the Scottish Government what guidance it provides to local authorities on the purposes for which self-directed support may be used.

The Minister for Public Health (Maureen Watt):

Self-directed support involves a rights-based approach that enables eligible individuals, their families and carers to have flexibility, choice and control of their care and support in order to meet their health and social care outcomes. The Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 is accompanied by statutory guidance, which was launched in April 2014. That guidance supports local authorities to take an approach in which personal needs are assessed as part of a collaborative conversation. If eligibility for support from the local authority is agreed on, a care and support plan will be developed that is based on what the person wants to achieve—their personal outcomes. The person also has choice in and control over how the care and support are delivered.

Graeme Dey:

What commonsense flexibility can be deployed in that regard? I ask that question in relation to a situation that a constituent of mine has found themselves in. They want to use SDS to fund a course of applied behaviour analysis therapy, in the hope that that will help their child to communicate and thereby ease the considerable difficulties that the family face, will provide respite from those challenges and, in turn, will ensure that the child perhaps has a more productive educational experience than at present. Could such a use of SDS be permissible?

Maureen Watt:

Flexibility and creativity are essential to making the best use of support within available budgets. Local authorities provide social care and support to children and families as part of the wider policy and practice framework of getting it right for every child. The local authority has a duty under the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 to offer flexibility and choices in relation to a child's care and support. If the member has not already done so, he may wish to direct his constituent to contact Angus carers centre or Dundee Carers Centre for information and support on access to self-directed support. Jointly, those organisations have been awarded £143,000 for 2015-16 from the Scottish Government's support in the right direction fund to ensure that the people of Scotland have access to high-quality information, support and advocacy services.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9937>

Human Rights Act 1998 (Abolition)

S4T-01013 Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what the implications for Scotland would be of the abolition of the Human Rights Act by the United Kingdom Government.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil):

The Scottish Government's position is that implementation of the Conservative Government's proposals would require legislative consent and that this Parliament should make it clear that such consent will not be given. On 11 November last year, this Parliament passed a motion in support of the Human Rights Act 1998 by a majority of 100 to 10.

There is currently insufficient detail in what is proposed to predict with any certainty the impact on Scotland. However, given the almost unanimous opposition in this Parliament and among Scottish members of Parliament at Westminster, it would remain open to exclude Scotland from legislation to repeal the 1998 act or for the Scottish Government to pass legislation to give effect to a range of rights in policy areas that are within devolved competence.

If the UK Government followed through on its threats to withdraw from the European convention on human rights, people in Scotland would no longer be able to take cases to the European Court of Human Rights. The ECHR is the world's most successful human rights treaty and it has been hugely influential around the world. It is incumbent on this Parliament to send a clear message that the proposals are unacceptable and will not receive our support.

Mark McDonald:

I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for his comprehensive answer. Given that, in 2013, Strasbourg ruled against the UK in a measly 0.48 per cent of cases, does he agree that we are seeing a case that is built on sand and which is actually extremely dangerous posturing by the Conservative Government?

Alex Neil:

The Scottish Government believes that the European Court of Human Rights fulfils an essential function as part of the ECHR system. It is essential that citizens have the right to petition the Strasbourg court when they feel that their rights have been breached. The statistics demonstrate that rulings against the UK are comparatively rare, but that is not reflected in some of the rhetoric that we hear.

Mark McDonald:

The cabinet secretary highlighted that he considers that the Scottish Parliament would need to be asked to give consent through legislative consent motions and that he would be minded to recommend that we refuse such consent. Has he received any indication from the UK Government that it would seek the Scottish Parliament's consent via legislative consent motions?

Alex Neil:

We have not received any information about the UK Government's intentions. The Queen's speech will take place in the next two weeks or so, and I hope that in or around that we will get more details of what the Conservative Government proposes.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

There is no case for abolition and I firmly believe that the Human Rights Act 1998 should stay. It is appalling that one of the Conservative Government's first acts is to attempt to abolish the 1998 act and leave ECHR. As with many of its policies, ideology and rhetoric are being put above the practicalities and impact of delivering policies. How does the cabinet secretary plan to keep the Parliament informed of any discussions that he has with the UK Government?

Alex Neil:

I am happy to give an undertaking on that. As I said in my first answer, in November last year, the Parliament voted on this very issue and, with the exception of the Conservatives, we were united in our opposition to scrapping the legislation and withdrawing from the European convention on human rights. I am happy to keep Parliament informed, as and when I have information to give to Parliament.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):

I understand—perhaps the cabinet secretary can explain whether the Scottish Government agrees—that if the Tories, who I see have not bothered to turn up to defend their position, scrap the Human Rights Act 1998 without withdrawal from ECHR, and if the other signatories to the convention accept that position, the Tories might not need a legislative consent motion. Consent would be needed for withdrawal from the convention but not necessarily for scrapping the act. That would give rise to fragmentation not just within the different parts of the United Kingdom but even within Scotland. Police Scotland, for example, would be subject to different rights regimes when dealing with devolved criminal justice matters and reserved drugs and terrorism matters. Is that an accurate description of the situation, particularly in relation to legislative consent?

Alex Neil:

Rather than speculate, it will be better if I wait to hear exactly what the proposal is. I can then give Patrick Harvie a more precise reply. The proposal goes beyond the powers and legislation to set up this Parliament. For example, the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland has ECHR requirements built into it. The matter therefore affects not just Scotland and the Scottish Parliament but, in particular, Northern Ireland and the Stormont Parliament. It also affects people in England—and the National Assembly for Wales and people in Wales. I am happy to give a specific answer to the question once I see the detail of what is proposed.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):

I congratulate the new MPs entering the UK Parliament this week, but I hope that the understandable euphoria of Scotland's new batch of Scottish National Party MPs is curtailed somewhat, because there is no doubt that the plan to get rid of the 1998 act is just one in a long list of policies that will see the new Tory Government attack the young, the old, the weak, the vulnerable and of course migrants and trade unions. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we should fear for the rights of ordinary working people across the UK and that this is just the first grenade being lobbed in what will be a bloody assault?

Alex Neil:

I agree in general terms with Neil Findlay. It is clear, from a range of policy pronouncements that have been made on a range of issues—on welfare cuts, for example—that legislation and measures proposed by the new Conservative Government give a lot of cause for concern, particularly for the more vulnerable members of our community.

On human rights, we are all vulnerable, irrespective of our social or economic status. Human rights are a fundamental that affects every individual in our society. We in this Parliament, and people across the United Kingdom—including, I believe, some Tory MPs—would be very concerned about any dilution of human rights legislation in this country.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):

Does the cabinet secretary consider that there is an opportunity to sort out some of the not inconsiderable problems that have arisen from the incorporation of ECHR directly into Scots law via the Scotland Act 1998? The Cadder ruling demonstrates that the consequences had not been fully appreciated.

Alex Neil:

We cannot decide to tear up a whole system of law because there are rulings that we like and others that we dislike. Week to week, I am sure that many of us see judgments made in the courts that we might not agree with, but that is not an excuse to get rid of the court system. It is fundamental that our human rights are protected under ECHR. As Mark McDonald pointed out, ECHR has played a vital role in upholding the rights of individuals and organisations. It would be a sad day if we were to tear up our membership of ECHR or in any way dilute the protection provided by the Scotland Act 1998 and other pieces of legislation that cross-reference ECHR. It is a fundamental framework for the protection of human rights in our country

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9942>

S40-04339 Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab):
To ask the Scottish Government what representations it has made to the United Kingdom Government concerning the Human Rights Act 1998.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil):

On Friday, I wrote to Michael Gove, the new Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, to reiterate the Scottish Government's opposition to the repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998. The First Minister also raised the matter directly with the Prime Minister when they met last Friday. I have sought an early meeting with Mr Gove to further underline our concerns. I know that those concerns are shared by the overwhelming majority of members in the Parliament, as was shown by the vote last November.

Last week, I undertook to keep the Parliament informed of the progress of the discussions, and I am happy to reiterate that undertaking today. The UK Government's programme for the first session of the new UK Parliament will be set out in the Queen's speech on 27 May. My colleague the Minister for Parliamentary Business will update the Scottish Parliament on the legislative consent implications of the Queen's speech in due course.

Malcolm Chisholm:

I am grateful that the cabinet secretary has expressed this Parliament's abhorrence for what is proposed. In his letter, did he raise the necessity of a legislative consent motion, which clearly will not be approved by this Parliament? Is it not the case that what is proposed drives a coach and horses through the Scotland Act 1998 as well as potentially putting the UK outside the family of nations that are committed to universal human rights?

Alex Neil:

The repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998 and withdrawal from the European convention on human rights have potentially huge implications, not just for the Scotland Act 1998 but for the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland. We have made it absolutely clear that there will be no co-operation from this Government on the repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998. Such a measure is regressive and reactionary and is entirely the wrong thing to do. If the opportunity arises for us to frustrate the passage of such legislation in any way whatsoever, I am sure that most members in the Scottish Parliament will be united in exploiting that opportunity to the full.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9958>

Access to Work Scheme

S40-04340 Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):
To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact on disabled people in Scotland of the Department for Work and Pensions proposal to cap the access to work scheme.

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham):

The Scottish Government has sought urgent assurances from the Department for Work and Pensions on how its intention to cap the support that is available through the access to work scheme will impact on disabled people in Scotland. The DWP estimates, based on current delivery, that the number of individuals who are likely to be affected in Scotland is small. Nonetheless, we are continuing to work with the DWP to better understand the future impact of those changes in Scotland and to press for assurance that those who are affected will receive the support that they require.

Jackie Baillie:

I am pleased that the matter is being considered further, because the access to work scheme is a success at providing support to disabled people to enable them to access and sustain employment. What action is the Scottish Government taking to support disabled people in accessing employment?

Roseanna Cunningham:

We are taking a number of actions. They include the delivery of “Developing the Young Workforce—Scotland’s Youth Employment Strategy”, which has been debated in the chamber; developing outcomes with community jobs Scotland specifically for vulnerable groups; and improving the uptake of modern apprenticeships by disabled people, which we also discussed last week. In that regard, we have committed £500,000 to delivering an equalities action plan that will be published in autumn 2015 and will contain specific improvement targets for—among others—those who are disabled. We are promoting and supporting the supported employment framework and are working closely with partners, including local authorities, to support them to develop and deliver the model locally. We see supported businesses as one small but important part of the overall support that is available to disabled people.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9958>

Welfare System

S4F-02793 Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):

To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government has made an assessment of the likely impact on Scotland of a £12 billion reduction in the United Kingdom welfare system.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):

The UK Government has not yet set out how it will achieve those cuts, so we have not yet been able to make a full assessment of the impact in Scotland. However, if it is assumed that Scotland would take a proportionate share of the £12 billion cut, benefit expenditure in Scotland would be reduced by about £1 billion. That reduction would be in addition to the estimated £6 billion cut to the Scottish welfare bill over the six years to this financial year.

The Scottish Government is already working hard to mitigate the worst of these measures and our current funding will result in an investment of around £296 million over the period 2013-14 to 2015-16.

I want to see an alternative to these measures because I do not believe that it is right that we continue to see some of the most vulnerable people in our society being put in poverty or pushed further into poverty.

Patrick Harvie:

We cannot know what the impact of these cuts will be, given that the Conservative Party committed to them without caring how they were going to be achieved. It is no wonder that one of the attendees at last night’s Poverty Alliance event in the Parliament told me that she has never seen such a tangible level of fear among so many people in the face of this threat to what remains of the welfare state.

We can argue for greater control of social security in Scotland, but surely we also have a responsibility to build widespread opposition to these cuts across the whole of the UK. Does the First

Minister agree that this assault on those in greatest need follows years of stigmatising and blaming people in poverty—indeed, a propaganda war against the welfare state itself? What will the Scottish Government do in its actions and use of language to reclaim the principle of a society based on mutual care and compassion where everyone’s dignity matters, not just those who are labelled “strivers” or “hard-working families”?

The First Minister:

I very much agree with both the substance of Patrick Harvie’s question and the sentiment that lies behind it. For our part, the Scottish Government will never seek to stigmatise the most vulnerable in our society. I take the view—I hope that it is shared on most if not all sides of the chamber—that a decent social security system that looks after people in need is one of the hallmarks of a civilised society. What the Conservatives have done over the past five years with the help of the Liberals to start to rip away that safety net is absolutely appalling, and I believe that we all have a duty to oppose any further attempts to take that net away.

Patrick Harvie rightly mentioned the lack of care taken over the detail of the £12 billion cuts. I cannot have been the only person who was completely and utterly appalled to hear Iain Duncan Smith say three days before the general election:

“as soon as we have done the work and had it properly modelled then we will let everybody know what” the impact “is.”

That really sums it up.

This Government will continue to do a number of things. First, we will continue as far as we can—as I said yesterday, there will be a limit to how effectively we can do this—to seek to mitigate the worst impact of those cuts. Secondly, as Patrick Harvie has invited us to do, we will be part of marshalling the opposition to an additional £12 billion of cuts to our welfare budget. Thirdly—and most important—I repeat what I said yesterday to Labour: please be part of this. We will do everything in our power to wrest the powers over welfare out of the hands of the Tory Government and put them into the hands of this democratically elected Parliament.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9950>

Rent (Private Tenants)

S4F-02792 Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab):

To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government considers that there is a need to protect private tenants from unfair rent rises.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):

Yes, I do. The Scottish Government’s vision is for a private rented sector that provides good-quality homes and high management standards and which inspires consumer confidence. We want tenants to have more security and to be able to assert their rights without fear of eviction. That is why we have consulted on a new tenancy for the private rented sector that proposes to end unpredictability in rent increases by prohibiting more than one rent increase a year, with 12 weeks’ notice required for any change, and also puts in place protection for tenants against unfair or excessive rent hikes, through a process of adjudication.

Michael McMahon:

Although there is widespread support for the Government’s plans to simplify and clarify the private rented sector tenancy system and improve security of tenure by removing the no-fault grounds for repossession, does the First Minister recognise that there are concerns that, because of the second consultation, the timetable for legislation is in danger of slipping, and that the Government’s proposals do not go far enough to make the private rented sector secure, flexible and affordable for tenants?

While we wait for the bill, will the First Minister confirm that she supports the reintroduction of rent controls that she believes that tenants’ welfare should be put first and that she believes that tenants must be protected by being given sufficient and justifiable notice to leave by landlords?

The First Minister:

All those objectives are what led to us consulting in the way that I outlined. The consultation that I and Michael McMahon referred to attracted more than 7,500 responses, which will be analysed by an independent social research company. We expect to publish the findings in early August and we have committed to introducing a bill to Parliament this autumn, so we are determined to keep that timetable on track.

We want to see a private rented sector that provides good-quality homes and high standards of management and we want to ensure that the tenants who live in those homes have the protection that they deserve. We have consulted on a range of proposals around a new tenancy and some of the issues around rent increases that Michael McMahon mentioned. We are serious about tackling those issues, but I am sure that all members will understand that, having embarked on the consultation, it is essential that we complete the process.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD):

I look forward to the new modern tenancy regime, with more proportionate rent rises. Will the First Minister and her Government support tenants to have the right to stay longer in their homes than the current six months?

The First Minister:

We want to ensure that tenants have appropriate security of tenure. That is what this process is entirely about. When we introduce the bill—as I said, we plan to do that in the autumn—our proposals will be subject to full parliamentary scrutiny, and if members such as Jim Hume do not think that the proposals go far enough in any particular areas, they will have the opportunity to put forward amendments.

We are absolutely determined to deliver a modern private rented sector tenancy that is fit for the future, that encourages people to make homes for rent available—because they are required—but which also ensures that people who rely on the private rented sector can also rely on high-quality standards. We have given that commitment and are determined to deliver it.

The last point that I would make is that, although the issue that we are discussing is hugely important, the way to improve the affordability of housing is to increase the supply of housing. Over the lifetime of this session of Parliament, our planned investment in affordable housing will exceed £1.7 billion. We are three quarters of the way into our five-year target for affordable housing and are confident that we are going to meet that target.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9950>

Mental Health (Scotland) Bill: Stage 2

The Health and Sport Committee considered amendments to the Mental Health (Scotland) Bill at the meeting on Tuesday 19th May. To read the full report, go to

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9956>

The Health and Sport Committee met again on Tuesday 26th May to consider amendments to the Bill. To read the report on these amendments, go to

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9972>

Bedroom Tax Mitigation

The Welfare Reform Committee took evidence on the “bedroom tax” from Scott Wilson, who was a your say witness to the committee and who has been helpful to us in the past; Hanna McCulloch, policy and parliamentary officer at the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland; Jeremy Hewer, policy adviser with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations; Cliff Dryburgh, benefits manager at the City of Edinburgh Council; Annette Finnan, head of area services for housing at South Lanarkshire Council; and Lorna Campbell, service manager for revenues and benefits at Dumfries and Galloway Council.

To read the evidence presented, go to

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9967>

Major Urban Railway Stations (Access)

The Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee met Wednesday 20th May to take evidence on access to Scotland's major urban railway stations from Anne MacLean, the convener of the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, and Hussein Patwa, who is a member; Jolin Warren, who is the head of research at Transform Scotland; and Robert Samson, who is the passenger focus manager at Transport Focus. To read the report, go to

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9965>

Modern Apprenticeships (Deaf People)

S40-04392 Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government how many deaf people have undertaken a modern apprenticeship in the last five years.

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham):

The information that Skills Development Scotland publishes is not broken down by disability. The member will be aware that information on individuals who take part in a modern apprenticeship is gathered on the basis of self-declaration, so it may be an underrepresentation of the true picture. However, SDS is currently undertaking a data-matching exercise, which will provide an indication of the potential underreporting of disability and other health factors. That exercise, which is in its final stages, will provide a more accurate picture of disability participation in the programme.

In addition, the £500,000 funding for SDS that was announced in Parliament on 13 May will support the final development and delivery of an equalities action plan for MAs and will include specific improvement targets for disabled participation.

Presiding Officer, I apologise for my voice.

The Presiding Officer:

It was very attractive.

Mark Griffin:

I thank the cabinet secretary for struggling through that answer.

I welcome the investigation that the cabinet secretary mentioned, but we know from the statistics that we have that the proportion of deaf school leavers who enter the jobs market is particularly low in comparison with the proportion of those from the hearing population who do so. Given that an apprenticeship represents one of the best ways of entering the jobs market, how does the Scottish Government plan to improve the deaf awareness of employers of apprentices and to increase the number of deaf apprentices?

Roseanna Cunningham:

A number of initiatives are in place to help with that. "A Template for Success" is an SDS initiative that is aimed at post-school transition for deaf young people. There are also careers information and guidance workshops that highlight apprenticeship opportunities through the Commonwealth apprenticeship initiative, which is dealt with through the hearing impairment unit at St Roch's school in Glasgow and which is particularly targeted at deaf young people. In addition, there are equalities-funded programmes that are targeted at those with disabilities, who include deaf young people.

The member will be aware of the concerns that exist about the proposals from Westminster that could cap access to work provision, which would have a particular impact on deaf young people. We are talking to the Department for Work and Pensions about that.

There are other specific projects that are funded by the Scottish Government, including a Deaf Action project and a Deaf Connections project. There are projects that are specifically designed to get young deaf people into employment. The difficulty with the modern apprenticeship programme is

that we leave it entirely up to young people to choose whether to declare that they have a disability, and I have spoken to young people who have told me that they would not and did not declare themselves as having a disability.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9973>

Modern Apprenticeships (Disabled People)

S4F-02801 Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):

To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to allow more disabled people to access modern apprenticeships.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):

That is an important issue. The number of disabled people accessing modern apprenticeships is disproportionately low, so addressing an underrepresentation is a key Government priority. Through the funding that we provided last year, Skills Development Scotland is working with Barnardo's and Remploy on specific early-targeted pathway projects to help disabled young people into a modern apprenticeship. We are also undertaking research to better understand the issues that prevent disabled people from participating in the programme. That work will be used to develop an equalities action plan by autumn 2015. It will be supported by £500,000, which was announced last week, to address equality issues in the modern apprenticeship programme.

Kevin Stewart:

Many public bodies and companies benefit greatly from employing disabled people. What can the Government do to persuade more employers that taking on young people with learning and physical difficulties as apprentices could be not only positive for the employees but highly advantageous for their companies?

The First Minister:

First, we should encourage employers to see—as many do—the enormous contribution that people with disabilities can make to the workplace, to society and to our wider economy. More particularly, we are developing a new employer recruitment incentive, which will support vulnerable young people, including those with a disability. The incentive is aimed at supporting young people into sustainable employment, and encouraging and equipping small businesses to recruit young modern apprentices into their workforce.

We are also going to identify a lead body to support recruitment of young disabled people, to develop a new work experience model and to introduce an improved approach to career services. All that is detailed in the developing our young workforce implementation plan.

Kevin Stewart raises a serious issue, and it is one that we are determined to address.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=9960>



Zero-hours Contracts

There was a debate in the House of Commons on zero-hours contracts. To read the full debate, go to <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150527/debtext/150527->

[0003.htm#1505281000001](#) and <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150527/debtext/150527-0004.htm>

Bills presented

European Union Referendum Bill

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Secretary Hammond, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary David Mundell, Mrs Secretary Villiers, Secretary Stephen Crabb, Mr Oliver Letwin, Mr David Lidington and James Wharton presented a Bill to make provision for the holding of a referendum in the United Kingdom and Gibraltar on whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Monday 1 June; and to be printed (Bill 2) with explanatory notes (Bill 2-EN).

Scotland Bill

Secretary David Mundell, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mrs Secretary May, Secretary Michael Gove, Mr Secretary Duncan Smith, Secretary Amber Rudd, Mr Secretary McLoughlin, Mrs Secretary Villiers, Secretary Stephen Crabb, Greg Hands and Damian Hinds presented a Bill to amend the Scotland Act 1998 and make provision about the functions of the Scottish Ministers; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Monday 1 June; and to be printed (Bill 3) with explanatory notes (Bill 3-EN).

Government's Legislative Programme (Scotland)

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): Seventeen of the 24 new Government Bills for this Session of Parliament contain provisions that apply to Scotland, either in full or in part. The Government's ambitious programme of legislation will help to create jobs and support working people. It will reduce the tax burden on the lowest earners and will ensure there are no rises in VAT or national insurance contributions for the next five years, and no rise in the income tax levels for which the UK Government have responsibility.

Bringing the different parts of the United Kingdom together is a priority for the Government. For Scotland we will meet our commitment to deliver in full the recommendations of the cross-party Smith commission on further devolution. The new Scotland Bill will give the Scottish Parliament wide-ranging new powers, including greater flexibility to make its own decisions and making it more accountable for raising the revenue it spends, while keeping the advantages of being part of the United Kingdom.

Other measures affecting Scotland include a focus on energy security and support for the North sea oil and gas sector and moves to tackle extremism and strengthen counter-terrorism. The legislative programme also includes measures to control immigration and to hold a referendum on membership of the European Union.

This statement provides a summary of the Government's new legislative programme and its application to Scotland. It does not include draft Bills.

At present the only Bill that triggers the need for a legislative consent motion under the Sewel convention is the Scotland Bill. However, it is possible that the need for consent may arise as Bills are prepared for introduction.

The Government are committed to the principles of the Sewel convention, and we will continue to work constructively with the Scottish Government to secure consent for Bills that contain provisions requiring the consent of the Scottish Parliament.

The Bills listed in section 1 will apply to Scotland, either in full or in part, on introduction. Section 2 details Bills that will not apply in Scotland at introduction. In addition to the new Bills listed below there will also be a Finance Bill and the HS2 Bill from the last Session will be taken forward.

Section 1: New legislation applying to the United Kingdom, including Scotland (either in full or in part);

Scotland Bill

Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill

Energy Bill

Immigration Bill

Enterprise Bill

Trade Unions Bill

Wales Bill

Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill

EU Referendum Bill

Investigatory Powers Bill

Psychoactive Substances Bill

Extremism Bill

National Insurance Contributions Bill

Bank of England Bill

European Union (Finance) Bill

Votes for Life Bill

Armed Forces Bill

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150528/wmstext/150528m0001.htm#1505282600005>