



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Virtual)

**Thursday 16 July 2020**

**Session 5**



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 16 July 2020

*[The Deputy Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:03]*

## Labour Market Trends

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** Good afternoon, everyone. The first item of business today is a statement by Fiona Hyslop on the response to labour market statistics. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, and there should be no questions or interruptions.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop):** Covid-19 is the biggest challenge that we have faced in our lifetime. It is first and foremost a public health crisis, and this Government makes no apologies for focusing squarely on the health challenges. It is only by suppressing the virus that we will enable the economy to recover and thrive.

We know that many economic indicators, such as Scotland's gross domestic product and available job vacancies, have deteriorated since lockdown measures were introduced. The latest official labour market statistics, released this morning, show that in the period from March to May this year, Scotland's unemployment rate rose to 4.3 per cent, which represents 120,000 people out of work, and Scotland's employment rate fell to 74.1 per cent, which represents a total of 2,642,000 people in work. The claimant count rate has risen slightly over the past month, to 7.7 per cent in June, after a steeper increase over the past few months. The rate has roughly doubled since March, with a rise of more than 100,000 claimants.

However, those statistics do not reflect the full picture of our labour market, because the furlough scheme has protected many jobs. The latest information from HM Revenue and Customs shows that 736,500 workers in Scotland have been furloughed and 155,000 eligible self-employed people in Scotland made claims to the self-employed income support scheme. The support schemes have been vital in keeping people in work. We estimate that, without them, unemployment could have risen to around 14 per cent.

Take-up rates for the job retention scheme have been highest for accommodation and food services, with 74 per cent of jobs furloughed; construction, with 72 per cent furloughed; and arts, entertainment and recreation, with 66 per cent furloughed. Those numbers make it even more

disappointing that the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not announce an extension to the job retention scheme, particularly for the hardest-hit sectors.

We know that many people have already lost their jobs and that household incomes have fallen. People are understandably anxious about what the future holds. Scottish Government analysis shows that unemployment could rise to around 10 per cent, which is approximately 275,000 people.

I welcome the announcement that the chancellor made last week on support for the economy and jobs, including the job retention bonus and the kick-start scheme. The chancellor's jobs plan might have a headline value of up to £30 billion, although I note that the Office for Budget Responsibility has since provisionally estimated it at around £20 billion. In any case, we should be clear that those estimates are highly uncertain and contingent on demand, and some measures might prove to be poorly targeted.

The reality of last week's announcement is just £21 million of consequential for the Scottish Government, for the economy and skills area. Let me be clear: those measures will not be sufficient to meet the scale of the challenge that remains and they offer very little room for flexibility.

In Scotland, we have already acted quickly to put in place a business support package worth more than £2.3 billion, but we know that more needs to be done. That is why we took the decision last week to make an extra £100 million available in 2020-21, on top of the £33 million that has already been committed for employability support this year and the millions that are already in the skills system. We did that in order to help more people get the support that they need to move back into work or retrain.

Today, I want to outline how we will use that funding to help thousands of people back into work and boost the Scottish economy, focusing on three areas.

First, I recognise the impact that this crisis is already having on our young people. I also understand the potential long-lasting impacts for those who suffer periods of unemployment early in their working life. That is why I have asked Sandy Begbie, who has a wealth of experience in supporting youth employment through the Edinburgh guarantee and the developing the young workforce group, to offer industry leadership to develop an implementation plan for a job guarantee. That was one of the key recommendations of the advisory group on economic recovery, and we will set out more detail on the implementation plan in early August.

We know that we have to act quickly to protect the future of our young people and, to that end, I have decided to invest at least £50 million to

support youth employment. That includes delivery of the job guarantee, and we will work with the United Kingdom Government, local authorities, the third sector, trade unions, Skills Development Scotland and other partners to ensure that no young person is left behind during this crisis.

That initial commitment will not create any new structures or bodies but will build on the successful structures and partnerships that we already have in place, using the principles of “No One Left Behind: Next Steps for the Integration and Alignment of Employability Support in Scotland”. It will also include additional investment in developing the young workforce, our internationally recognised youth employment strategy.

As we shape the guarantee, we will listen to young people and, in particular, to those groups whom we know are more likely to suffer disproportionately from a more challenging labour market. Our approach will be based on a set of ambitious principles that will support the aspirations of our young people. Those principles will make it clear that the job guarantee will be inclusive, with a clear focus on tackling inequalities and supporting young people into fair and sustainable jobs.

Secondly, I know that this is a hugely difficult and worrying time for thousands of people who have already been made redundant or who face the threat of redundancy as the furlough scheme unwinds. It is vital that we provide people with the support that they need to retrain and move into new jobs and, potentially, new sectors. We cannot ignore the need for additional support for people of all ages who are currently in precarious employment, or the need to skill up sectors of our economy as they restart. We need to develop a new retraining offer that can build on the existing skills, experience and expertise of our current workforce and help them to move quickly towards new jobs.

Ensuring that training is relevant, reflects regional and sectoral demands and supports effective transitions in our labour market is important, but so, too, is the opportunity to reinforce our ambitions for a greener, smarter and more digitally enabled economic recovery. I will therefore bring forward proposals for a new retraining offer focused on helping those in sectors where there is the greatest risk of job losses. That new offer will help people to gain the skills that they need to move into new jobs in key growth sectors. That work builds on recent recommendations from the advisory group on economic recovery and the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board, and we will respond to both reports fully by the end of this month.

As I have already highlighted, I know that this is a hugely worrying time for many people who face the threat of redundancy as the furlough scheme unwinds, so, thirdly, I am committed to supporting people who find themselves in that situation and ensuring that they can access timely and effective support. Partnership action for continuing employment is the Scottish Government’s initiative for responding to redundancy situations. Through the provision of skills development and employability support, PACE aims to minimise the time that people who are affected by redundancy are out of work, with support tailored to meet their needs and local circumstances. Through a true partnership approach involving the public, trade unions and the third and private sectors, we will look to maximise resources to provide tailored support for those facing redundancy.

We know that the most vulnerable in society and those furthest from the labour market suffer most in times of recession, and we must do all that we can to support them to progress towards and into work. To that end, the Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills has today announced the extension of Fair Start Scotland services for a further two years, to March 2023. That will provide support for unemployed people who have disabilities or health conditions or who face other barriers to moving into fair and sustained work. That extension period is an opportunity to provide stability and continuity as we respond to the current Covid-19 crisis and move into our economic restart and recovery phases.

We are facing unemployment on a scale not seen since the 1980s, and we are ready to rise to the challenge through initiatives such as a youth guarantee and a new national retraining scheme and through the provision of more funding so that we can provide immediate support and advice if someone loses their job. Of course, that significant package of employment and training support can be effective only if it is aligned with a renewed commitment to fair work and is embedded in a co-ordinated plan to support jobs growth and help businesses retain jobs through the period of ongoing uncertainty.

We have already introduced significant measures such as the £230 million economic restart stimulus package that was announced last month. We are working closely through a range of sectoral forums, including those in hospitality and tourism and aerospace, to retain and protect jobs, where possible. Our response to the report of the advisory group on economic recovery will expand further on our approach for boosting employment, as will this year’s programme for government.

The relationships between Government, business, unions and agencies that have been forged or strengthened during this crisis will help

to underpin a new national effort to grow jobs and embed fair work.

Today's statistics confirm the scale of the impact that the pandemic has had on Scotland's workers, businesses and communities. There is no doubt that meeting that challenge will require a national effort. The Scottish Government will rise to the challenge, but there is no monopoly on good ideas. I want to work constructively with parties from across the chamber to protect our constituents.

We are passionately committed to building a wellbeing economy for Scotland—one that is environmentally sustainable, supports local communities, enables businesses to thrive and innovate, provides good jobs and fair work, and delivers inclusive growth that meets the needs of people across all of Scotland's communities.

Even alongside the chancellor's youth employment scheme, that is unlikely to be all that we will need to do to support employment and skills over the next year, but it is a first step.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement, for which I will allow around 45 minutes. It would be extra helpful if members who wish to ask questions would press "R" in the chat function now.

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement.

Scottish Conservatives welcome the extension of existing schemes that has been announced today, but we are concerned that those schemes are not tailored towards protecting jobs in the sectors that have been hit hardest. That is undoubtedly a result of the Scottish National Party's lack of business understanding. Today's job figures show that 120,000 Scots are out of work, which takes the unemployment rate to 4.3 per cent. It would be even worse still if it were not for the United Kingdom Government's intervening to save almost 900,000 Scottish jobs—including those in the worst-affected sectors such as hospitality and tourism, which will also benefit from the VAT reduction.

However, today's press reports show that English tourists are cancelling bookings due to fears over Nicola Sturgeon's comments on quarantine, which represent a material risk to Scottish jobs. Will the cabinet secretary outline what specific support will be provided to those sectors, and will she assure English tourists that they are welcome in Scotland?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I was going to thank Maurice Golden for his comments and his support in our national endeavour, but if he wanted to spread

doom and gloom he has done so. We need people to have confidence in our tourism sector. As of yesterday, our hotels, restaurant and pubs reopened fully, including indoor spaces, which is good news.

The most important thing for tourists in Scotland, whether they come from the rest of the United Kingdom or from within Scotland, is that they can be confident that they are coming to a place that has managed to suppress the virus to the extent that is safe. We must remain vigilant, which is why we have mitigation measures in place and are asking everyone who comes to Scotland to respect the public health rules here. It is also important to give tourists the message that if they are staying somewhere that is not their home and they start to show symptoms of the virus, they must immediately contact the test and protect authorities and should not wait until they go home or wait to see whether they get better.

That plan has provided a level of vigilance that will give people confidence. It will also mean that communities that are looking to welcome people can do so in a safe way. I urge those who have not already done so to watch the wonderful Orkney promotional video, which makes it clear that tourists are very welcome to go and stay there. The local people want to show the best of Orkney, but they also want the people who go there to show the best of themselves and to respect the communities that they visit. That shows the spirit that has led to Scotland being so attractive to so many people

I add that the Scottish Government has provided more support to tourism than have Administrations in the rest of the United Kingdom, through the creative, tourism and hospitality hardship fund and the pivotal enterprise resilience fund, which have benefited major companies in that area. Such funds were not available elsewhere. I also welcome the furlough scheme and thank the UK Government for using its powers to establish it, as other countries with similar powers have done—I note that France and Spain have also extended their schemes.

I agree with Maurice Golden on the need for targeted support. That is why judicious extension of the furlough scheme is necessary in those sectors that will suffer most as a result of the Covid crisis, such as tourism and hospitality, so that they can get continuing support. I will continue to argue that case, along with my colleagues in Wales and Northern Ireland, when we speak to the UK Government.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** We know that 30 per cent of all workers in Scotland are on the coronavirus job retention scheme life support and that young workers are twice as likely as older workers to be on that life

support. The challenge that we face is big, but it is also urgent, because the job retention life support will be removed step by step over the coming months, before being switched off completely at the end of October.

A week ago, I asked the First Minister whether she would commit to introduce a quality jobs guarantee scheme in Scotland that was not based on low-paid and part-time employment, and which would not run for only six months, which is the model that is being pursued by the Tory Government at a UK level. She told me:

“We are on the same side here.”—[*Official Report*, 9 July 2020; c 18.]

I think that I am accurate in quoting her as also saying that the Scottish scheme will be “more comprehensive”. However, she did not answer my questions.

I want to come back to one of those questions. Today, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said:

“The Scottish Government should work with employers to create good jobs ... Employment and training ... should be conditional on paying the real living wage”.

So, will the cabinet secretary give a commitment that any Scottish jobs guarantee scheme will be conditional on employers paying the real living wage?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I welcome Richard Leonard’s question. The placements and jobs that are provided must be quality placements and jobs. With regard to the basis of the UK Government’s proposed kick-start scheme, we should have been consulted on it first. We might have been able to improve its quality because of our previous experience here in Scotland.

I encourage Richard Leonard to look at the example of the Edinburgh guarantee. That programme was about working with employers to make sure that proper, good-quality jobs were provided, and not just on a part-time basis. Richard Leonard is absolutely right—wraparound additional support and training must be provided. The activity must be purposeful and useful for the future prospects of the young people concerned.

I believe in the real living wage, and I think that it is important that that is a bedrock of any package that we put together. I do not want to preempt what Sandy Begbie proposes in the implementation plan, but I can reassure Richard Leonard that, as the First Minister said, we are on the right page. If everybody pulls together and companies think about what they can do to help with the jobs guarantee, I think that we can come through a very difficult and challenging time in a way that gives our young people some prospects.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to open questions. I would like everyone to have the

opportunity to ask their question, so I ask members to bear in mind that they should be asking a question rather than making a statement.

**Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** In her remarks, the cabinet secretary referred to the Office for Budget Responsibility’s assessment to the effect that the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer’s recently trumpeted £30 billion package of support is actually worth less than £20 billion.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that that falls very far short of what is required to protect people’s jobs and livelihoods? Surely what we need from the UK Government is urgent and proportionate action, not more smoke and mirrors.

**Fiona Hyslop:** In answer to that question, I state that we should consider the scale of the challenge. Other countries have had much higher levels of economic stimulus. For example, the German economic stimulus package was of the order of 4 per cent of GDP, and the UK’s package is less than 2 per cent. In terms of the scale that is needed, the UK Government should look again at capital and provide a new capital stimulus package. The package that was promoted recently by the Prime Minister was recycled capital, so Scotland did not get consequential and no new money was brought into the system.

The scale of the challenge is enormous, and other countries are tackling it based on a recognition of the scale of the response that is required. However, even if the numbers are disputed—whether it is £30 billion or £20 billion; I appreciate that the challenge is a big one for everybody—the point is that the package is untargeted. As I said to Maurice Golden, it is open-ended and demand-led, which he might not even realise. If companies that are struggling have to wait until January to get the £1,000 support, that might mean that they choose to not return people from furlough, which might bring a first cliff edge in October and another in January next year.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Last week, the much-loved Digby Chick restaurant in Stornoway announced its closure, which comes on the back of news of other hotel and restaurant closures across the Highlands and Islands. Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge the importance of the hospitality sector to my region and accept that the Government’s mixed messaging about quarantine is having a direct effect on the sector’s viability, which could lead to further job losses?

**Fiona Hyslop:** There are not mixed messages; the guidance that is set out is quite clear. The hospitality sector is crucial to all of Scotland and I recognise that it is particularly vital in the Highlands and Islands and supports many

businesses in every part of Donald Cameron's region.

The differential position with regard to unemployment is understandable, because tourism is more important to the Scottish economy, relatively, than to the UK as a whole. That is why the sector needs additional continuing support and why the Scottish Government has put in such additional support. The sector will return resilient, but that will be a challenge. We have called for a VAT cut for some time; VAT on tourism in Scotland is the second-highest rate among European Union countries, and it is important that the level is comparable to help businesses.

We want our visitors to have confidence and to know that they have come to a place that is suppressing the virus. We are doing so—although we still need to be vigilant—which should give confidence to people that Scotland is a good place to travel to, with wonderful scenery. We should start talking up the industry and supporting it, such as by getting out to our local restaurants as part of the economic recovery.

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** The UK Government plans to replace the furlough scheme with a one-off £1,000 payment to businesses for each employee who is brought back to work. There appears to be no mechanism to target the scheme on jobs that are under threat. Many companies will be able to claim the payment, even if they plan to retain staff anyway. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the UK Government should re-examine its plans and ensure that the funding is better targeted to prevent job losses?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Job retention is far better than having to fund massive levels of unemployment. Keeping people in jobs that are already there is critical. I welcome the additional support, but it will only be realised in January and, if it is going to everyone—it is a blanket measure and it is very blunt—it may go to companies that were already planning to bring people back, where it would be a bonus. At this stage of economic recovery, we need a far more targeted response. There is a danger that, by being so blanket and blunt, the scheme might not help those companies that cannot wait until January because they are struggling now and could do with support. I think that it should be targeted better. We will get fuller details of the scheme from the UK Government toward the end of July, and that is the feedback that I will give.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Labour market statistics show that women's unemployment has increased by 51.3 per cent since last year, which is three times higher than the increase for men. That is due to the number of

women working in the hospitality sector, but it is also due to a lack of childcare and uncertainty about school education. The effect of that is to push back women's equality by decades. Will the cabinet secretary include women of all ages in her job guarantee scheme and will she ensure that childcare is available to all participants and prevail upon the education secretary to provide women with a degree of certainty about education and childcare?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member's point about supporting women is absolutely right; the impact on women is more severe. I understand that there is a degree of uncertainty about what will happen. However, it is dependent on our suppressing the virus. One of the best things for the economy will be if we suppress the virus sufficiently so that our schools can go back full-time in August.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills will give a statement to the chamber shortly, and the member might have an opportunity to address her question to him then.

I say, unashamedly, that the job guarantee scheme is focused on young people. If it is successful, there might be a prospect of widening it. However, the speed and swiftness with which we will have to establish it means that it is correct to focus it on young people.

However, many young people up to the age of 24 or 25 will be parents, and I recognise that access to childcare is a game changer. Good-quality early learning and childcare is important for young people's development, but it is also vital for parents, in particular for women who are coming back into the labour market. I believe that childcare is fundamental to gaining skills, training and job support, and I will champion the case for that.

I cannot give the member the firm guarantee that she is looking for now, but I am more than happy to engage with her and continue the discussion about it.

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** What engagement has the Scottish Government had with the UK Government on the importance of fair work in the light of the statement that the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave last week?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The Scottish Government believes in fair work and, as I said in response to other questions, employers' commitment to tackling the gender pay gap is part and parcel of this Government's approach and will be part of the fair work principles that underline all our programmes.

Unfortunately, the UK Government did not speak to us before it announced the kick-start

programme. That was unfortunate, because we have good experience in that area following the financial crash that happened more than 10 years ago.

I have written to the Secretary of State at the Department for Work and Pensions, to engage with her. It makes sense for us to work on the UK Government's kick-start programme, which Richard Leonard described as a "very minimum" package. The more engagement, the better. It does not cost much to pick up the phone. There are ideas everywhere that I am more than happy to share.

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** According to figures that were released this morning, almost 20,000 applications for financial support by firms across Scotland remain outstanding. According to the Confederation of British Industry,

"Prevention is ... better than cure",

in that many of those firms need urgent support before they collapse. If they collapse, it will result in further unemployment in Scotland. What urgent actions is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that those outstanding applications are processed as soon as possible?

It is not enough to expect local authorities to process those applications alone. As the cabinet secretary said, this is a nationwide economic crisis and it is time that we see leadership from the Scottish Government on this front.

**Fiona Hyslop:** We provided leadership by moving very swiftly to set up not only the basic small business grant but the creative, tourism and hospitality enterprises hardship fund and the pivotal enterprise resilience fund, which were unique additional funds. Dean Lockhart is incorrect to say that there are 20,000 outstanding applications; I know that the Conservatives keep banging on about that and thinking that somehow there is a queue of people still to get support, but that is not the case. That figure includes those who may have made multiple applications, those who did not provide sufficient information and those who have been refused because they are ineligible. Obviously, in looking after the public purse, we cannot allow fraudulent claims, for example. It is churlish and unappreciative of Dean Lockhart to dismiss local government workers the length and breadth of the country who processed those grants promptly and made sure that more than 100,000 companies received support; they deserve recognition rather than attack from Dean Lockhart.

**Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** We know that some sectors of the economy will perhaps take longer to restart to prevent the spread of the virus. Does the cabinet

secretary agree that consideration should be given to extending the scheme for sectors of the economy that will be unable to resume economic activity at the same pace as other sectors, particularly for work sectors that have not previously been covered by the UK Government and in fact have been let down by the UK Government?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The key areas of concern are tourism and hospitality and culture—for example, many theatres are not open, which is why we have used Scottish Government resources to support theatre venues. We also need to consider the oil and gas sector, not necessarily just because of the Covid crisis but for other reasons as well. Aviation and aerospace have clearly been impacted because of the collapse in tourism on a global level. That is also one of the reasons why, together with my counterpart economy ministers from Wales and Northern Ireland, I have written to the UK Government calling on it to establish a UK task force on aerospace. That is important because the supply chain skills in that sector—for example, the engineering skills—can be used and preserved for the aerospace sector when it returns, which will take some time due to the global collapse, and can be transitioned into other industries, in particular renewable energy, I hope.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Investing in energy efficiency is the cheapest and most effective way of creating jobs in the construction sector while also tackling the climate crisis and making homes cheaper to run. In June, the First Minister said that energy efficiency schemes should be upscaled this year, and since then the UK Chancellor has announced that he will do that in England by reprioritising expenditure. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the Scottish Government will reprioritise expenditure on energy efficiency and does she agree that it could make a major contribution to the job guarantee scheme?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Yes. I completely agree with that and in fact I have already had active discussions on the issue with other ministers, such as the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning, Kevin Stewart. In relation to Mark Ruskell's point about energy efficiency in buildings, the greenest building is one that is already built. It is important that, when it comes to the retrofit programme and moving to alternative energies, we use the powers that we have to develop jobs for young people, and develop skills and training, in sectors such as renewable energy, in particular in the retrofitting side of that industry. I would like to move rapidly on that. We will need the agreement of different employers, too, and that will be one of the Government's early priorities.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** In Shetland, a significant number of jobs have already been lost in the oil and gas and hospitality sectors, and I am still regularly contacted by people who have fallen through the gaps in the available business support. As we deal with the pandemic's impact, the islands growth deal is more important than ever. When does the Scottish Government expect to make progress with the UK Government in introducing a deal?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I have regular discussions—I have another one tomorrow—with Nadhim Zahawi and Alok Sharma, who are ministers in the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and our Welsh and Northern Irish colleagues. One issue that we have been discussing with them is the need for new capital stimulus for green energy; another issue is how we ensure that the cities and regional growth deals that have been developed but not yet signed off can be signed off. We are starting to get extremely impatient. Such deals could be used as part of the stimulus package. Indeed, one of the recommendations in the report of the advisory group on economic recovery is that there should be a more regional approach.

The member it is quite right to identify two of the industries in her constituency that have been particularly impacted in recent times in an area that is small geographically but hugely important. We need to press ahead not just with the islands growth deal but with other growth deals.

The message has been received and is understood. I will ensure that I bring up the topic tomorrow, when I speak to UK Government ministers.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Although times are tough, we must ensure that we do not take any backward steps when it comes to tackling inequalities in employment. Can the cabinet secretary provide assurance that steps continue to be taken to close the gender pay gap?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I agree with the member on that issue, which Rhoda Grant also picked up on in her question. As we know, women have been at the front line of our response to the coronavirus. At this time, they are the majority of the workforce. They are more exposed, because of the jobs that they do, including in the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors, which may be impacted as the furlough scheme unwinds and that support is no longer available.

We need to look at the analysis of the implications and impact of Covid-19 on gender in restarting the economy. I have already mentioned issues around childcare support.

If we are to progress our flagship fair work first policy and be a fair work nation, we must ask employers to commit to tackling the gender pay gap. One of our immediate actions is to provide £89,000 in funding to Flexibility Works, which supports employers to develop flexible practices, enabling women with caring responsibilities to access good-quality flexible jobs.

Caring should not be and is not solely a female responsibility, but, as we know, the reality during the Covid crisis—the research seems to show this—is that women are taking on more of the caring burden. We have a responsibility to those women, and I want to make sure that the Government develops policies that support women. That will be a challenge. Again, it is one of the issues on which I am more than happy to work with members from all parties, to identify ways that we can—[Inaudible.]

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** In the past, constituents have in particular contacted me about the transition training programme to complain that, despite their being overqualified elsewhere for a job, they were failing in their applications because they did not possess a particular Scottish qualification. Does the cabinet secretary recognise the importance of the UK single market? Will she expedite the equivalence of qualifications across the United Kingdom, to ensure that there is a flexible employment pool?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The biggest single market is the European single market, and the biggest challenge to jobs after Covid will be Brexit. Our leaving the biggest single market in which we could operate will have a real impact on jobs and training.

We can certainly look at retraining funds as part of the £100 million package that I announced today. Transition training by upskilling and reskilling individuals facing redundancy is important. I know that colleges are looking at the possibility of supporting people while they are still on furlough, and the economic advisory group's report is clear that we should have an education-led recovery. I have said clearly that colleges that can move rapidly and swiftly to present upskilling and reskilling opportunities are well placed, as are other such training providers.

As I think the member referred to, we have some experience of such retraining from the oil and gas transition fund that was used to address the crisis in the oil and gas industry a few years ago. We will learn from its many successes. However, we want to ensure that we have a good support mechanism to develop skills in the supply chains of both existing industries and those that we want to develop, particularly in the digital and renewable energy areas.

As the member might be aware, we have already developed in the north-east a £62 million energy transition fund to help support opportunities for the very talented and experienced oil and gas industry supply chain to move into new areas. That is also a challenge, because we need to do more in terms of having a serious hydrogen strategy, for example. Again, we discussed with the UK Government some of the issues that it can help with, which are not necessarily always financial. Yes, we need an economic stimulus in that area, but we also need help on the areas of transmission and regulations to ensure jobs there. The member made a practical point about ensuring that the scheme is wide enough to look at qualifications in the round, which I will take back to those developing the fund.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** The Covid health crisis has hit the west of Scotland harder than any other region, with Inverclyde recording the highest death rate in the country. North Ayrshire and West Dunbartonshire already report the highest unemployment rates in Scotland and we are losing thousands of aerospace and airport jobs in Renfrewshire. The Scottish Government used to have a national performance framework target for tackling regional inequality that aimed to reduce the employment gap in Scotland, but it was abandoned at the end of 2017. Given the disproportionate effect that the virus is having on areas such as the west, will the Scottish Government agree to introduce new targets for tackling employment-based regional inequality? Does the cabinet secretary agree that areas that have the highest levels of unemployment and redundancies should get additional resources and support?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member made a serious point about the disproportionate impact that Covid has had on not only health but the economy in different parts of the country. I will certainly consider his suggestion, but I am not necessarily committing to it at this stage. However, we need to find ways of becoming more regional in our support, whether that means the skills retraining being more focused on regional needs and being brave in moving from traditional sectors in those areas to new ones.

That might bring challenges. As the member might be aware, we have particular challenges in local government in terms of the distribution of funds being based on an existing formula to which local authorities have agreed. We therefore might need to resolve some issues with local government if there was to be far more targeted support for different parts of the country. We are starting to see different experiences of the furlough in different areas. Indeed, a member made the interesting point earlier that the

Highlands and Islands has among the highest numbers of those on furlough.

There are therefore different impacts in different areas, so instead of rushing to indicate what support certain parts of the country should get now, we must look at the different experiences in terms of furlough and labour statistics, and the disproportionate impact that they have in different areas. The Inverclyde and west of Scotland area already has targeted support because of depopulation, and we must think about how we can encourage more jobs into that area.

We have to think differently about how the world will be. We could quite easily see a situation in which the flexibility of homeworking can continue. People do not necessarily need to be in their home five days a week and never go to the office. There will be an opportunity for people to think about having lower cost bases and ensuring that people can work and live in areas that have faced depopulation—in the west of Scotland, for example—rather than necessarily expecting everybody to be in or close to our cities and commuting on a daily basis. We have to think differently about how we might work in the future.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I take the point that we have quite serious unemployment figures today and that they may get worse. We have been very dependent on international workers coming into Scotland, and we have needed them in the agriculture, health and social care sectors. Does the cabinet secretary think that we still need those workers? Is the UK doing enough to allow them to come here?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I feel strongly that we need migrant workers supporting our health and social care systems. We have relied on people coming to this country to work in our health and care systems to help to suppress the virus and deal with the real challenges for our hospitals and our care homes in recent months. The UK is now turning round to them and saying, "You're not welcome." The Conservatives who challenged me about how welcoming Scotland is at the moment should seriously think about what the UK Government is doing in telling people who want to come here and can help us with their much-needed skills in our health and care departments that they are unwelcome. That is among the most shocking things that I have seen from the current UK Government in relation to what it is doing with Brexit.

We are living with Covid, and we will live with it for some time to come, but the new immigration rules do not serve Scotland or our health and care system, and they will be very damaging. I want a Scotland that is safe, confident in itself, and welcomes those who want to work with us in building a new Scotland and ensuring that we

have a health and care system that can look after our sick and our elderly. The UK Government thinking, at this time of all times, that it can press ahead with its migration system and Brexit when we should be concentrating and focusing on tackling and rebuilding our economy following the Covid crisis is among the most disheartening aspects of the developments in the past few weeks.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** It is positive that the Scottish Government has welcomed the proposal for a job guarantee scheme that is focused on young people, which emerged from the independent advisory group on economic recovery. Given that the cabinet secretary referred to the need for swiftness on that, when is the scheme likely to become available and when are employers expected to be able to sign up to it? What progress has been made at this stage in involving universities, colleges, apprenticeship providers and employers?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Sandy Begbie will produce the implementation plan for the scheme for the beginning of August. He is already talking with those who can help to deliver that. As I have said, we need to move rapidly because, obviously, there will be leavers from education through the summer period, and we are seeing the unwinding of the furlough scheme. Moving to the new job guarantee scheme will be an important and swift development that will help the labour market in particular. I cannot give an absolute timescale for that, but I can say that the implementation plan will be published at the beginning of August, which is in a few weeks' time.

On the point about universities and colleges, the Deputy First Minister, as well as Richard Lochhead, the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Jamie Hepburn, the Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills and I, collectively met the chairs and chief executives of Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council to address the same point that the member is making about how universities and colleges can respond in relation to skills and training.

Colleges are already responding; they are not waiting to be given instructions. The best colleges are those that are already in tune with needs in their local area. For example, in my area of West Lothian, there are four east of Scotland colleges working together to provide a response, particularly in relation to short-term courses. That adaptability is important. If we think about what Glasgow college did, for example, in taking retail workers and giving them short courses to help them to move into financial services so that they could be recruited by Barclays, that is a good

example of what can be done, and at relative speed. Those are the areas that we need to focus on. There is far more that universities can provide in terms of tackling the demand on the digital side and on energy and renewables. Graduate apprenticeships could be really helpful in that area.

The apprenticeship aspect will be part of the funding that I have announced today. After the financial crisis, we had a scheme that focused on a mechanism called adopt an apprentice, to make sure that apprentices who had been made redundant could be taken on by another employer with some financial support. It is also about looking at ways in which those apprentices who have been made redundant can carry on at least the skills aspect of their apprenticeships, even if they are not in employment.

The member raises an important point that has not been touched on in other questions today, about the exact package for retraining and how we can make sure, as part of the wider support for young people, that we are looking at not just the job guarantee but at universities and their provision.

**Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary share my view that for the UK Government to reimpose benefit sanctions at a time of such economic uncertainty is not only cruel but counterproductive, as it will push people further into financial hardship during the crisis?

Does the cabinet secretary believe that investing to keep people in fair work is a far better option than the social cost resulting from higher levels of unemployment, which would be devastating for people?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Yes, I agree with that. Keeping people in jobs is easier than having to create new jobs. With any recession, there is always disruption to the market and there will be new and emerging companies and the repositioning of many companies into different areas. That is part of the economic market response.

However, in looking at the cost of this, the UK Government should seriously look at continuing support for those sectors that are in effect still closed across the UK. Major events will be one of the last to return, for example, and other areas will not necessarily realise the levels of income that they had and will still be just surviving. Other companies might just get through until next year, until they have to repay their bounce-back loans or pay their deferred tax to HMRC. That is a real danger, so keeping people in jobs is essential.

The member's point about sanctions is really important. There is a moral argument but there is also a very practical one. There is no place for

sanctions in a system that needs to support people. Certainly, we would make sure that there were no aspects of that conditionality and mandate in anything that we did and we would encourage the UK Government to accept that sanctions should have no part to play in a system that is there to support people. If up to 10 per cent of people are unemployed, a sanctions system will just cause more misery and, at this time, it is our job and our responsibility—and the UK Government's job and responsibility—to support people, not to punish them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the ministerial statement in response to the labour market statistics.

14:59

*Meeting suspended.*

15:07

*On resuming—*

## Care Promise

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a statement by John Swinney on the care promise. The cabinet secretary will take questions after his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** The independent care review published its findings on 5 February and, in her statement to Parliament accepting those findings, the First Minister gave a commitment to update Parliament on progress with next steps. I do so today.

Although the Covid-19 emergency response has had a significant impact on the Scottish Government's priorities, we have been working with key partners to ensure that the principles of the care review's promise are reflected in our response to the pandemic, including in the practice guidance and policies underpinning emergency legislation.

"The Promise" report sets out a vision for what the future of care for Scotland's children and young people could be. It advocates for the provision of more intensive, preventative support to families in order to keep them together where it is safe to do so. It also says that, where that is not possible, the alternative should provide children with a loving home, with positive and lasting relationships and support to thrive. Alongside that, it seeks significant changes to the children's hearings system and how we respond to children who come in conflict with the law.

It is clear that achieving that will take a fundamental shift in terms of systems, processes and culture, and it will require all of those who are engaged in supporting children and young people to work to develop and maintain positive relationships so that children feel loved, safe and respected.

Although we cannot legislate for love, we can help to create a supportive and nurturing environment in which love is possible. Central to that are relationships. "The Promise" is aligned with the national performance framework and embeds as its vision the commitment that Scotland's children should grow up loved, safe and respected so that they realise their full potential. The foundations of implementation must maintain that alignment and build on it to shape the required policy and legislation.

Scotland was invited to sign up to delivering the care promise and the significant change that it

contained, and I am delighted that so many members across Parliament did so earlier in the year. There was also support from local government—the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities said:

“Local Government welcomes the recommendations from the Independent Care Review and encourages all partners to work together to ensure we build a care system that meets the needs of Scotland’s young people.”

Since the publication of “The Promise”, I have been carefully considering what now needs to happen to deliver the plan. The implementation of the care promise requires detailed and complex work across national Government, local government and a wide range of partners. I have been heartened to hear that many organisations that will need to make and deliver on commitments to change have been actively thinking about what that means for them.

I am under no illusions about how tough some of the conversations that lie ahead will be, in particular when we come to discuss some of the key challenges such as how we reprofile existing expenditure that is currently in the system towards delivering more effective outcomes.

We also face a major challenge in how we can achieve that in the immediate future. However, the principle that underpins the care promise is that we come together to collaborate, and to think creatively and differently, in order to deliver the vision and to agree responsibilities and timescales to take the agenda forward.

Let us not forget that we are emerging from an acute Covid response period; I am well aware that we are all trying to find our way to a steady state of delivery and a new normal. Over the past few months, I have observed Scotland responding to the Covid emergency in a way that delivers exactly what “The Promise” called for. We have been able to adapt the way in which we all operate to put people and their needs at the front and centre of our conversations with them. I urge all partners in Scotland who will have a part to play in the delivery of the promise to continue on that path.

Along with our work on incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law, which was fully endorsed by “The Promise”, I have been determined that implementation of the promise should not be paused as a result of the current pandemic.

On 5 February, the First Minister agreed in Parliament to the independent care review’s calls for

“an independent oversight body with at least 50% of its members being care experienced including its Chair”.

That can be described as the conscience of “The Promise”, and it has an important role in ensuring

that those who are tasked with making the change happen are making good on their promise to implement change.

Governance and reporting will also include the submission of an annual report to Parliament, and over the coming weeks we will see a hive of activity as the recruitment process for the oversight board is developed and communicated. A major development on implementing “The Promise” was the appointment of Fiona Duncan as the chair of the new oversight board. The Scottish Government has been actively supporting her to ensure that she has all that she needs to be able to undertake the role. That includes putting in place a support team, which I am pleased to say includes some of the previous care review team, thereby ensuring that the ethos of that work is built into implementation planning and development.

Ensuring that the voice of care experience is at the heart of the implementation plan is key to its successful delivery, to understanding the challenges around how it lands on the ground and to offering constructive challenge. Only by listening to voices of those who have experienced care can we truly understand the issues and realities and therefore create life-changing solutions. When we get it right, children in care can thrive throughout their lives: they can do well in school, have good mental health and succeed at work. That is why I am so pleased that Fiona Duncan has started to have those conversations as a priority.

We are already seeing examples of partners taking forward “The Promise”, and the work that is influenced by its contents, led by care-experienced young people.

Children’s Hearings Scotland will soon be consulting young people and those who support them on its new “Children’s Rights and Inclusion Strategy”. The strategy aims to empower young people and put their voices at the centre of the organisation’s work in order to ensure that their views are given real weight in the decision-making process and that they have ownership of their rights.

The Scottish Government and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers have jointly established a children and families collective leadership group to consider the impacts of the pandemic on children, young people and families, especially those in the most challenging circumstances, and the actions that need to be taken by local and national Government in response. The chair of “The Promise” oversight board is part of that group, and there has been a specific focus on ensuring that, as we progress through “Coronavirus (COVID-19): Scotland’s route map through and out of the crisis”, families are able to ask for and receive the

support that they need. Access to effective family support can be a critical factor in ensuring that a child's right to be raised safely in their own family remains a reality in all but the most exceptional circumstances.

I have asked the leadership group to look at developing proposals on how we could make that ambition a reality and build on the good practice that already exists across Scotland, focusing in particular on learning from the sector's response to Covid, in which new collaborations and ways of working have helped us to put the needs of families front and centre.

Collectively, we already know what good family support and the key features that characterise it look like. It should be holistic, empowering for families and rooted in trusting relationships. Help should be early and preventative, at whatever level is required, whether that involves universally accessible support or more targeted interventions.

Above all, we need to recognise that all families, including kinship, adoptive and foster families, need support sometimes. The leadership group has developed a vision and a blueprint that are focused on supporting local services to build on what is working for families in their areas, and on supporting the sector to find new solutions where families' needs are not being met. I am grateful to the leadership group for taking forward that work.

How we turn the blueprint into a reality is our next challenge, and it will be a key early step in the implementation of "The Promise". I am pleased that the promise team will be working with the Scottish Government to drive forward a programme of action based on the group's recommendations, and I am especially pleased to announce that we have identified initial funding of £4 million to make some early progress on those ambitions.

This money will be the first investment in the promise fund, which is being established to support early intervention and prevention work across Scotland in line with the implementation of "The Promise". The need for change was already urgent, and the current situation means that Scotland's families need support now.

We all recognise the need for on-going service delivery throughout the process of service redesign. Scotland's families cannot be left waiting for a better reality to come. The promise fund will provide start-up funding to enable preventative action and early intervention approaches to be put in place. Over time, the work that is funded by the promise fund will become a key part of our new normal: a normal which supports families where they need it, when they need it and for as long as they need it, and listens to them when they speak.

Now is the time for bold, decisive and collective action. We are perfectly placed to collaborate to change the nature and culture of our approach across all Scotland's support services, not simply polish the existing system. To do that, we must all remain accountable to those with lived experience of care.

The care promise has created a call to action. It gives us the opportunity to stop and think about the basics. What do we need to create the society that we want and need to be? How do we ensure that our children can build and maintain the lasting, trusting relationships that nurture them from childhood to adulthood? I look forward to exploring our collective answers and solutions to those questions. By that route, we can transform the lives of children and young people in our society.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I have only around 20 minutes for that, so I make a plea for succinct questions and answers, please. It would be helpful if members could press "R" in the chat function if they wish to ask a question.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank the Deputy First Minister for the advance sight of his statement and his important update. The fact that we are in recess and meeting virtually must not negatively impact on the conclusions or challenges of the independent care review or the promise.

The Deputy First Minister mentioned children's hearings and said:

"Children's Hearings Scotland will soon be consulting young people and those who support them about its new children's rights and inclusion strategy."

Since March, it has not been possible for children's hearings to be held face to face because of lockdown, and the centre for youth and criminal justice expressed particular concern about inevitable delays. Given the delicate nature of such cases, what steps have been taken to ameliorate those delays and to manage the experience of those whose cases have been subject to delay? When does the Deputy First Minister expect the consultation with young people about the rights and inclusion strategy to start?

**John Swinney:** I thank Mr Kerr for his questions. He raises an important point: it is clear that the pandemic has been disruptive to many aspects of public services.

However, a total of 2,966 children's hearings have taken place since 23 March, when lockdown began. I pay tribute to the work that volunteers, agencies and families have done in enabling such a substantial number of hearings to be held in a virtual fashion. As a consequence of those

actions, support, assistance and, in some cases, protection have been provided for children, which has been welcome. Of course, we are now in a position in which face-to-face hearings can take place.

As far as the publication of the strategy is concerned, that is a matter for Children's Hearings Scotland, but I am assured that it will be an early priority for the organisation. Children's Hearings Scotland has made it clear to the promise team and the care review how important it is for it to adapt its practice so that it is consistent with the aspirations of the promise, and I am very confident that Children's Hearings Scotland will do exactly that.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for providing advance sight of his statement.

I agree that there is a clear and urgent need to transform the experience and lives of those in our care system, but it is now four years since the review was first announced, a year since the First Minister set out initial steps in the programme for government and five months since the report was published. Therefore, we welcome today's announcement.

What interim steps have been taken since the announcement of the programme for government and the publication of the care review's report? More important, although we welcome the £4 million that is being provided to make "early progress", what outcomes is it intended will be achieved through that investment?

It is clear that the scale of the cultural and systemic change that the cabinet secretary acknowledged will be required will require further, more significant investment. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that that is the Government's intention and outline the scope and scale of the future investment that the Government is preparing to make? We all agree that the change that is required to improve the lives of young looked-after people is an imperative for us all.

**John Swinney:** Mr Johnson has posed a number of substantive questions, all of which are entirely legitimate.

I very much welcome the sentiment that Mr Johnson has conveyed, which is that we have a shared purpose in improving outcomes for children and young people who have experience of care. That lies at the heart of what I readily acknowledge is an immensely challenging report from the care review, which has led to a significant amount of reflection among different organisations and individuals in Scotland, and an acceptance that current practice must change and be reformed.

The early investment in the promise fund that I have announced today will start that process of reform and will encourage organisations to engage in considering how we can repurpose some of the resources that are already spent in the system to produce better outcomes for children and young people. Fundamentally, that question lies at the heart of our response to the care review's report.

On a personal level, I found the economic analysis that was produced by the care review one of the most compelling pieces of analysis that I have read in a long time. It said that the country was spending significant amounts of public money—up to £1 billion per annum—that in many circumstances, though not all, were producing poor outcomes. The care review has prompted discussion of that issue, which should force us all to reflect on how we might spend that money better to improve outcomes for children and young people. The investment that we are making is therefore designed to trigger that process.

It has been instructive to see that much of the thinking that the care review shared with us has been put into practice during the lockdown. It was about focusing on holistic family support and on looking at what could be done better—by listening to families, supporting them in their contexts and addressing the difficulties that they face—with the objective of safeguarding children and supporting families so that they can remain together.

I pay tribute to the public authorities that have adapted their practices to do exactly that. That provides a clear example of how the care review's thinking has now been applied in practice in Scotland. We will have to see an awful lot more of that happening. The work of the promise fund will be designed to leverage such change in the way in which we undertake public expenditure.

If I might make a comparison, a number of years ago, in my former role as Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, I established the reducing reoffending change fund, which was taken forward by our justice colleagues. Through collaborative action, which has focused on improving outcomes, there has been a significant fall in reoffending levels in Scotland as a consequence of kick-starting such investment in the way that we have done with the promise fund. I am optimistic about that approach, which has a proven track record of working. I look forward to Fiona Duncan and her colleagues taking those important steps forward.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to general questions. I repeat my plea for short questions and answers so that everyone will have an opportunity to be heard.

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** To deliver the promise, it is vital that Scotland better

understands—and gets better at delivering—the rights of our young people. I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary could update us on exactly where we are on the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law.

Also, given the even greater challenges that our young people face in the current labour market, how will the Government help to ensure that one of the important aims that were highlighted in the care review—to create the conditions that enable care-experienced young people to thrive in the workplace—will be delivered? For example, it will be important for us to remember such young people as we deliver any job guarantee.

**John Swinney:** The Government intends to introduce legislation that will have the effect of incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law in the final year of this parliamentary session. I expect that to be undertaken, and it will then be for the Parliament to scrutinise and consider that legislation in the normal fashion.

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture has just given a statement to the Parliament on the interventions that we will adopt in the labour market. It is important that those are inclusive measures that reach all sectors of society. We all know that care-experienced young people often require additional support to assist them into the labour market. We will work to ensure that all individuals who require particular support, including care-experienced young people, are able to receive it.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I am very pleased that improving the life chances of care-experienced young people has remained a priority throughout this crisis. Could the Deputy First Minister outline further why the Scottish Government made the choice not to pause this important work during the pandemic?

**John Swinney:** We acknowledged and understood the significance of the care review when it was published. It has given us a significant insight into the issues and challenges that have been faced by young people who have experienced care. The Government and I were determined that, notwithstanding the multiple challenges resulting from Covid, with which members are familiar, every opportunity should be taken to advance the agenda that was put forward in the care review. I was delighted that Fiona Duncan was able to take on the role of chair of the oversight board, and she is now working in a very focused way to ensure that we have the infrastructure in place to advance the promise.

We intend to take this forward at arm's length from the Government. Fiona Duncan will be given

significant scope to carry forward a challenging approach—it will challenge the Government as well as organisations—to make sure that we have an intensive approach to the implementation of the promise. That is the correct course of action for us to take so that we deliver the swiftest action possible to implement the recommendations.

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** The published evidence framework stated that there is a case to be made for undertaking work to improve public understanding of the care system in Scotland. What work is the Scottish Government undertaking to ensure that that will happen?

**John Swinney:** That work will be integral to the agenda that is taken forward by the promise team. We have to understand—this relates to my answer to Daniel Johnson's question earlier—that we have to refocus the services that are in place. My concern, which the care review report has highlighted, is that many services do not look sufficiently holistically at the needs of individual families. We have to make sure that such holistic family support is available, because it gives us the greatest possible opportunity to address the underlying challenges that families face and which may, as a consequence, mean that a child would have to have experience of the care system. We all know that, if it can be avoided, it is better for young people not to end up in that situation. Our focus is on engaging with partners to understand how they deliver services, with a view to changing the nature of that delivery to meet the aspirations that are set out in the care review report.

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** A great thing about the care review is its unwavering commitment to making sure that the care-experienced community is at its heart. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that care-experienced young people must remain at the heart of the process as the next important steps are taken?

**John Swinney:** A strength of the care review report is the degree to which it engaged with people who have experience of care. In essence, in one of the most powerful examples in my years in parliamentary politics, it gave very visible voice to those concerns and aspirations. By securing the contribution and leadership of Fiona Duncan, I was determined to take that ethos forward into the implementation work, so that we would continue to hear those voices challenge us to do better than we are doing.

That is often uncomfortable, and many aspects of the care review report made uncomfortable reading, but it is the right thing to do to ensure that we address the issues properly and deliver remedies and outcomes that are better for the young people concerned. I give Mr Dornan the assurance that care-experienced young people will remain at the heart of the process and, of

course, 50 per cent of the oversight board will be made up of people who have care experience.

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** In its programme for government last September, the Government committed to extend eligibility for free NHS dental care to care-experienced people and to ensure that those on a qualifying benefit are supported with discretionary housing arrangements from April. How many people have benefited so far? Is there an assessment of how many people will benefit in future years?

**John Swinney:** I do not have that detail in front of me, but I am happy to write to Mr Griffin to give him detailed and specific answers to his questions.

**Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP):** I, too, thank all the care-experienced young people who took part in and helped to shape the care review report. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that it is crucial that, in cases where their staying with family is not possible, children and young people can build the supportive and loving relationships that everyone needs in order to grow and thrive?

**John Swinney:** That is perhaps, by far, the greatest challenge that exists for us in addressing the evidence that has been put in front of us by care-experienced young people, because the aspirations that Gail Ross has set out are the aspirations of those care-experienced young people. We must ensure that we put in place the practical steps that enable such an approach to take place. That is complex and challenging, and it relies, of course, on the engagement of individuals who are able to create that loving and supportive environment for young people.

As I described earlier, our preventative approach is designed to strengthen and support families; it is also designed to ensure that, where that is not successful, we can put in place all the support to enable young people to have that experience. Although it is challenging, that must remain the central focus of what we are doing to produce the best life chances for those young people—and they deserve to have the best life chances.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** We know that children are not under the trained eyes of teachers daily, and there is concern about the children who live in the most challenging of circumstances. Teachers are trying to keep in contact with pupils, but some pupils and families are not responding. Will the cabinet secretary highlight how the Scottish Government intends to engage with authorities to ensure the safety of all children and families?

**John Swinney:** I will try to reassure Mr Whittle on the legitimate issues that he raises. We have been regularly monitoring throughout the lockdown

the proportion of children in the most at-risk circumstances who have been contacted by professionals so that we can be assured of their security and their safety.

The position is improving. To be fair to local authority staff, the position was strong to begin with. If my memory serves me right, the first data set indicates that close to 90 per cent of children with a child protection plan were being seen or contacted by professionals. The figure for the most recent available week—8 July—is 97 per cent. The figure has been well into 90 per cent for many weeks, and that has probably been the case since early to mid-April. Therefore, those in the most at-risk category have been receiving support.

Obviously, Mr Whittle's point is material to resuming full-time schooling, which, as colleagues know, is my planning assumption to which the Government and our local authority partners are working, because that opens up the opportunity for us to offer more support to young people who may be vulnerable and desperately need to receive support. During the next few weeks, we will be working to ensure that we secure that outcome.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I still have four members wanting to ask a question. I can run on for a couple of minutes, but keep your questions and answers short, please, so that we can get everyone in.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** There has been a certain amount of stigma around care-experienced young people. Can the Deputy First Minister suggest how elected politicians such as MSPs or councillors can help to deal with that?

**John Swinney:** What we can all do most effectively is put our effort into creating the type of holistic support environment that I have talked about, because the care review will be successfully implemented only if the Government, our local authority partners, third sector organisations and a range of public servants focus on the needs and interests of children and families who are in difficulty. If we do that, we have the best chance of addressing the challenges that they face. That is my plea, and I am delighted with the degree of cross-party support that has come forward for the work of the care review; it is well justified by the nature and significance of the challenge, and I look forward to working with colleagues to do as much as we can to secure that objective. I remain open to the contributions of members of other parties on how we can do that most effectively.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** The cabinet secretary knows that the Liberal Democrats support the work of the care review.

Research on the pandemic indicates that 18 to 24-year-olds are most likely to have lost work or

income. Although young people have relied on the safety net of moving in with family, care-experienced young people do not always have that support, which others take for granted. What early work has been done to consider the consequences of the pandemic for care-experienced young people, and are the support systems up to recognising and responding to their circumstances?

**John Swinney:** Many of those issues need to be addressed within the specific considerations of employment support, but it is not only about employment support because, as Beatrice Wishart fairly points out, there can be a collateral implication of loss of employment and on the inability to sustain housing and if an individual loses housing, they move into a turbulent and volatile period. The advice and guidance that we have issued, and the practice that I have seen emerging from a range of organisations, is all designed so that we have that holistic support that addresses the needs of individuals and ensures that their unique circumstances as care-experienced individuals can be properly and fully addressed, so that they can go on to have successful lives despite the fact that they may have a negative experience of the loss of employment as a consequence of the pandemic.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** I will follow up on Beatrice Wishart's question. What work is being done to understand the particular impact of the lockdown on care-experienced young people? We all fear that it may be disproportionately detrimental to them. What specific actions are being taken to support care-experienced young people as they return to school—and indeed to ensure that they do return to school—of if they are going on to further or higher education or are facing the challenge of joining the world of work? Will specific resources be provided to ensure that that support is real for care-experienced young people?

**John Swinney:** It is critical in how we respond to the economic difficulties that have been created by the pandemic that we address the particular circumstances of young people with different background experiences, and that obviously includes those with the experience of care. In the equalities work that the Government is taking forward to make sure that our response adequately addresses all the issues that were identified in the equalities assessment, it is vital that we turn that into practical reality.

We will obviously engage the care review team on what interventions can make the biggest difference in supporting young people with experience of care to enter the labour market or, if necessary, pursue other training and educational opportunities. That is a course of action that will

have to be taken by a range of individuals, given the level of economic disruption and the level of unemployment that we expect. We have to focus on the experience of those individuals and we have to recognise that history tells us that in an economic downturn, those furthest away from the labour market in good times will be even further away from it in tough times. We have to ensure that care-experienced young people do not take that route.

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** What measures will the Scottish Government use to track progress on implementing the recommendations in the report of the independent review of care and will the Scottish Government report to Parliament on that?

**John Swinney:** We have accepted that there should be an annual report to Parliament and that the oversight board should be very challenging if it does not believe that sufficient progress has been made in a timely fashion to address the recommendations. The Government willingly volunteers for that scrutiny.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, everyone. That concludes the ministerial statement.

15:46

*Meeting suspended.*

15:55

*On resuming—*

## Transport

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The final item of business is a statement by Michael Matheson on transport. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson):** I will provide Parliament with an update on the Government's transport transition planning as we move through phase 3 of "Coronavirus (COVID-19): Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis" and our Covid-19 lockdown exit strategy.

Once again, I start by giving my thanks to our dedicated transport workers for their professionalism and commitment, and to the people of Scotland for the prudent and conscientious approach that they have adopted in their travel behaviours during the pandemic.

The overarching focus of our work throughout the crisis has been to provide a safe transport system that meets the needs of the country and keeps Scotland moving, while continuing to suppress the Covid-19 virus. That is why we have provided unprecedented levels of financial support to assist our public transport system in continuing to operate. We have committed a total of £321 million to support all modes of public transport, which includes supporting our rail network with £231 million, light rail with £9 million, and the bus industry with additional funding of £46.7 million to support increased service levels. We have also provided financial support to our ferry operators through existing contract mechanisms.

There has been a tremendous response from local authorities and other public bodies to the £30 million spaces for people fund. I am pleased to report that an ambitious programme—*[Inaudible.]*—exceeding the £30 million fund. However, we have identified an additional £3.4 million pounds from the active travel budget, and we are considering options to repurpose more funds to ensure that all eligible applicants can receive funding.

As we look forward, I will outline some aspects of our transport transition plan in phase 3, which allows many more people to return to work and travel for tourism and hospitality. Although there is a degree of uncertainty in any analysis, our estimates—*[Inaudible.]*

—as we are currently experiencing, up to around one million across all modes.

With 2m physical distancing, there is potential for there to be overcrowding on public transport, in particular at peak times. Last week, therefore, an exception was granted to enable the public transport sector to operate with reduced physical distancing of 1m, provided that the operator carries out a risk assessment and appropriate mitigation measures are put in place. This will help to increase capacity.

We continue to work with local authorities in the Glasgow and Edinburgh city regions, given the reliance on public transport in those areas, to help them develop—*[Inaudible.]*

—for the months ahead, as well as engaging closely with island authorities, which rely more heavily on our ferry network.

We are still encouraging people to stay local for work; to continue to work from home if possible; to walk, wheel or cycle; and to continue to adhere to all travel guidance. In that context, we are working with a range of transport providers to deliver a travel demand management programme as we move through the phases of the route map. That work is based on analysis of transport trends data and will allow us to tailor our messages to specific target groups.

We are working with partners such as Traffic Scotland, Traveline Scotland, ScotRail, bus and ferry operators and active travel partners to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach in delivering those messages to the travelling public. We are encouraging people to make use of live information from the network to help them plan their journeys and avoid busy times and services.

Focusing on the busiest areas, we are engaging with employers—as I did on my recent visit to Scottish Power—to offer them travel demand workshops, which will enable them to better support their employees as they return to work

I have spoken about our funding support for bus operators. Today, in the context of our regional planning, I am announcing a new bus priority rapid deployment fund, which will support local authorities to respond to the challenges of reduced public transport capacity and increase the effectiveness of the capacity that is available. The £10 million fund will involve light-touch processes to allow local authorities, working with bus operators, to quickly put in place measures where demand could potentially exceed capacity and where congestion could reduce effectiveness. Bus priority measures can address congestion issues by making bus journeys more attractive, which in turn leads to modal shift from car and—*[Inaudible.]*—improving air quality.

We all want our air quality to be the best that it can be. However, air quality remains an issue for the oldest and youngest people in our society and

for those with existing health conditions, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is critical that low-emission zones are introduced in our four biggest cities as quickly as possible.

We are making available £8.8 million of funding for bus and coach operators to reduce emissions through the bus emissions abatement retrofit scheme, which—[Inaudible.]—improved grant thresholds for operators. That funding will continue to help support our ambition to protect public health and to improve our air quality.

The easing of restrictions in phase 3 applies equally to travel to and within our islands. I know that there have been concerns about capacity restrictions that create challenges on particularly busy routes, such as those to Arran and Mull. I am pleased to report that in recent weeks there has been positive progress. We have been working with local authorities and key ferry stakeholder groups, and with CalMac and Serco NorthLink, which have both taken steps to increase capacity to help support island economies and offer the opportunity for travel to and from the mainland. CalMac has brought forward a move to two-vessel services on key routes and put in place additional or larger vessels on particular routes, and Serco NorthLink has increased the number of sailings across the Pentland Firth to three per day.

During the transition period, it has been necessary to manage the booking system closely to balance the needs of all travellers. However, I am pleased to confirm that both CalMac and NorthLink services will be available to book as normal for the remainder of the season.

Covid-19 has had a massive impact on the aviation industry globally. As demand for travel has collapsed, airlines have had to reduce their operations, which has in turn had a knock-on effect on airports, handling companies and many ancillary services.

As travel restrictions ease, airlines are slowly restarting routes. In 2019, Scotland was better connected to the rest of the world than ever before, and our ambition is to help Scotland's airports to restore connectivity as quickly as possible.

This is a problem for the aviation—[Inaudible.]—worldwide, and Scotland is one part of a global industry in which competition is intense. However, we have a strong track record in helping airports to improve connectivity, and a solid base on which to build. We will continue to focus on routes that are important for business and tourism, with a particular focus on winning back key north American—[Inaudible.]—for summer 2021. We will do all that we can to help airports to return to normal levels of operation, as that will lead to the

reinstatement of many of the jobs that have been lost as a result of the pandemic.

As we transition into—[Inaudible.]—our aim is to build confidence in the safety and security of our public transport system, both for the people of Scotland and for visitors—[Inaudible.]—to support our economic recovery.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, cabinet secretary. The sound was very bad, so it may be that members did not pick up everything that you said. As members ask questions, that may become apparent. You are also not looking too great, cabinet secretary, so we will turn off your camera and see if that improves the sound at all.

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement and I add my thanks for the hard work of transport workers across Scotland who have helped to keep the country moving during the crisis.

With schools due to start back in less than four weeks, a number of parents have voiced concerns that there might be insufficient capacity in the school bus network and other forms of school transport to take their children back to school. Can the cabinet secretary provide his personal assurance to parents that there will be sufficient capacity to take children back to school when schools reopen and that no children will be left behind?

In relation to the on-going quarantine measures that have been imposed on travel to Spain, thousands of Scottish holidaymakers have unfortunately had their holiday plans cancelled due to the Scottish Government's decision to impose these measures and travel bodies such as the Scottish Tourism Alliance have also described the decision as "a blow" to inward-bound tourism from Spain. Why was the decision made to introduce quarantine for the whole of Spain, making no allowance for areas with low coronavirus levels? When will those quarantine measures be reviewed?

Finally, with respect to the aviation sector, as the cabinet secretary touched on, in correspondence between us he said that it might take five years for connectivity in Scotland to recover to pre-Covid levels. Given the scale of the disruption, what specific measures is the cabinet secretary taking to make sure that connectivity in Scotland can recover before that?

**Michael Matheson:** I will deal with each of those issues in turn, starting with the school transport issue. I do not know whether Mr Lockhart is aware of this, but lead responsibility on school transport sits with the education portfolio. My colleague the Deputy First Minister is taking

forward a body of work on issues relating to school transport for when the schools return in August.

Mr Lockhart will also be aware that the First Minister has indicated that the Scottish Government's scientific advisers have provided some specific advice in relation to school transport; there is not a requirement for physical distancing on school transport itself. My officials are engaged with colleagues in the education sector to offer any support that we can, but the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills will set out in more detail how some of the issues around school transport will be addressed prior to schools returning.

The decision to implement quarantine restrictions for those who travel to Spain was based on the data that was available from the Spanish authorities on the prevalence of Covid-19 in Spain as a whole. Subsequently, we asked them for further details on regional variations in order to consider whether a regional approach could be taken to lifting those restrictions. That matter is being actively considered at the present time. The undertaking of that assessment depends on the Spanish authorities providing accurate data. Any decision on quarantine will be made on public health grounds to ensure that we protect public health in Scotland as effectively as possible.

The aviation sector in Scotland is being impacted by the worldwide—*[Inaudible.]*—in the downturn of aviation. The challenge that we will face is an increasing level of competition for direct routes, with fewer aircraft being available for those routes as airlines downsize their overall operations. It could therefore take several years for us to recover some of the loss of capacity that is being experienced in the aviation industry overall.

We have a very strong track record in attracting direct routes into Scotland and into global hubs, and we will continue to work in support of the aviation sector, the wider tourism sector and the economic sector—*[Inaudible.]*—in the months and years ahead. Given the very strong track record that we have in the area, I am determined to ensure that we drive that forward in the weeks and months ahead. That is why we are engaging with the aviation sector on how we can best do that.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance sight of his statement, and I add my thanks to Scotland's transport workers.

The Government's own travel trend data shows that, although car use is up by a third since last year, bus, rail, ferry and air journeys are down massively, and even walking and cycling levels have fallen from their already low levels. It is therefore disappointing that the cabinet secretary

has not committed any extra overall funding to active travel but has merely cut funding for permanent active travel schemes to pay for temporary ones. I am also disappointed that there is still no sectoral help for civil aviation, despite the Fraser of Allander institute report for Unite the union that warns that 5,000 jobs are at risk.

I want to ask the cabinet secretary about the funding that he has announced today, primarily for bus services. No conditions were attached to previous funding, so we are seeing bus routes being axed by bus operators across Scotland. What conditions will be attached to the funding that has been announced today for buses to stop operators cutting services? Can that funding be used by councils for school transport—specifically, not school transport buses but service buses that are used by thousands of Scotland's schoolkids who are entitled to free travel and do not go on school transport but go on those buses to get to school?

Finally, when will the cabinet secretary give councils the powers that are set out in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 to run their own bus services for the benefit of their communities and stop the cutting of bus routes that we are seeing at present?

**Michael Matheson:** It would, of course, be inaccurate to suggest that the Scottish Government has not increased its active travel funding. Colin Smyth will be aware that, in this year's budget, we have provided a record level of funding for active travel of over £100 million. Alongside that, we have provided an additional £15 million directly to local authorities. That provides them with around £23.5 million in total for active travel initiatives on their own alongside the additional funding that the Scottish Government is making available for active travel infrastructure.

Mr Smyth referred specifically to the funding that I have announced today. That will not be provided to bus operators; it is funding for bus prioritisation that will be provided to local authorities in order to put the infrastructure arrangements in place in areas that they see as being key to helping to improve bus connectivity where traffic congestion can have an impact on the quality and reliability of services.

The funding of an additional £10 million that I have announced for rapid deployment and fast prioritisation is specifically for local authorities to put those arrangements in place. That will be driven by the local view, so local authorities will determine the best way for that resource to be deployed in their local area. I know from the engagement that we have had to date with COSLA and several local authorities that they already have significant plans for how to improve bus prioritisation. That will assist people who make

use of buses, as there will be more reliable services and congestion issues that impact on services will be tackled.

On the final point on issues to do with the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, the member will be well aware of the significant demands that have been placed on local authority staff in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. The Government has had to pivot its resources towards dealing with the pandemic, and local authorities have had to do the same. The measures that we are taking forward are policies on which we are working in partnership with local authorities in the effort to manage the demands on us all. At present, local authorities are not demanding the right to run bus services, given the competing demands that they have. However, I have no doubt that that issue can be revisited as we go forward and when local authorities have better capacity to deal with more issues.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to open questions. The session is becoming very difficult because of sound issues, so I request that members ask short questions and that there are short answers. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will be willing to follow up in writing with more information.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on compliance with compulsory face coverings on public transport and on how public transport capacity now compares with that of pre-Covid levels, particularly in my region, South Scotland?

**Michael Matheson:** On 22 June, when we introduced the provision for mandatory face coverings on public transport, compliance levels were initially around 10 per cent. Now, however, we often see compliance levels of up to 90 per cent and sometimes beyond. There are variations at times, and, where they demonstrate a lack of adherence to the provision on wearing masks, transport operators are taking proactive action to address that.

On Ms Harper's second point, capacity on our rail network is at 60 per cent and will increase further in early August, ahead of the schools returning, to provide about 70 per cent of seating capacity. On buses, operators are now up to 70 per cent of their normal service provision, but some are up to 90 per cent. Most of them expect to be up to 100 per cent of service provision by the beginning of August.

**Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** It would appear from the cabinet secretary's statement that the full amount of Barnett consequential—£448 million—coming to the Scottish Government as a result of UK Government spending on transport will not be spent on the transport sector in

Scotland. Can you confirm whether that is the case? If so, why is that not being spent on transport in Scotland?

**Michael Matheson:** We continue to have dialogue with the UK Government in order to get clarity on the Barnett consequential. My colleague Kate Forbes has pursued that issue with the Treasury because of its lack of clarity on the areas, including transport in Scotland, for which specific Barnett consequential will be provided. For example, more than £1 billion was provided to Transport for London but, as yet, the Treasury has not clarified whether there will be Barnett consequential for Scotland from that funding.

I assure Mr Lindhurst that we are continuing to pursue the UK Government for clarity on the Barnett consequential for transport. To date, the Treasury has not provided full transparency on the detail.

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that there should be engagement with charities such as the Royal National Institute of Blind People, which is currently promoting a coronavirus courtesy code to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged by changes to street layouts that are put in place to encourage active travel?

**Michael Matheson:** Mr Adam has raised an important issue. The RNIB policy document has been shared with Transport Scotland officials and the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, which has provided bespoke specific guidance for local authorities on the spaces for people initiative. We continue to engage with third sector organisations, such as the RNIB, to address any concerns and to ensure that local authorities that introduce new active travel infrastructure through the spaces for people initiative take full account of the accessibility needs of people who have disabilities, including visual or partial sight problems.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** Unite the union told a cross-party group of members yesterday that there was an impending disaster for the aviation industry if the Scottish Government does not have a short and medium-term plan to help it with job cuts, which it faces on a scale never seen before. Will the cabinet secretary meet urgently with Unite the union, the GMB and other relevant unions? Will he address something that was not in today's statement: a sector-specific plan to save all of Scotland's airports?

**Michael Matheson:** Pauline McNeill raises a very important issue that is well recognised by me and the wider Scottish Government. There has already been extensive discussion with the aviation sector in Scotland about the challenges that it faces. The difficulties are linked to the global

downturn that is affecting the aviation sector across the globe, so any action in Scotland has to focus on areas where we are able to influence change. Our work to develop an aviation sector recovery plan focuses on identifying routes that can be re-established to increase sector capacity. The trade union sector is involved in that—officials have already had engagement and ministers will engage with the unions as we develop the recovery plan.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** I thank the cabinet secretary for his announcement of changes to the bus emissions abatement retrofit scheme, which I welcome. Looking to the longer term and the green recovery that we want, will hydrogen have a long-term future as part of the fuel for buses, lorries, trains and ferries?

**Michael Matheson:** The opportunity to use hydrogen in the bus industry is already being tested in north-east Scotland, in Aberdeen, and also in Dundee, through a Scottish Government-supported initiative. We are also working to develop a hydrogen accelerator programme in partnership with academia and industry in Scotland, further details of which we will set out in the weeks ahead.

The member will also be aware of our recent announcement of the energy transition plan, which we are supporting in the north-east of Scotland. We are investing an additional £62 million in a range of initiatives to support the transition from a hydrocarbon-based economy in the north-east of Scotland to one that is based on sustainable new technologies. That includes the provision of a specific level of funding for hydrogen. Therefore, I assure the member that we continue to actively support exploration of the potential for greater use to be made of hydrogen, particularly in the haulage and bus sectors of the heavy road industry, and we will continue to work with partners to develop technology in that area in the years ahead.

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** The cabinet secretary rightly talked about the success of the spaces for people scheme and announced that an additional £3.4 million is to be allocated to it from the active travel budget. He also advised us that he is considering options to repurpose active travel money. Once again, the active travel budget is to be raided. Will sums of money be “repurposed” from the massive roads budget to more sustainable modes of transport?

**Michael Matheson:** As I am sure that I have said when the issue has been raised previously in Parliament, the money that is being used for the spaces for people programme through the active travel budget is funding that cannot be spent in this financial year because of the challenges that

the pandemic has presented. Therefore, we are utilising the money to support local authorities to help the public to use active travel as an option during the pandemic. I assure Mr Finnie that the Scottish Government remains committed to continuing to sustain our record investment in active travel in the future.

I also assure Mr Finnie that we are deploying any underspends in capital spending programmes, such as road building programmes, to other areas where they can be better deployed. He should be assured that we have a long-standing on-going commitment to making sure that we best utilise the record investment that we are putting into active travel.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will let the session run on a wee bit, because I am anxious that the remaining four members get to ask their questions. However, I ask people to be as succinct as possible.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** Island holiday accommodation providers have been advised that, if a visitor is suspected of having come into contact with Covid while staying with them, the visitor should return home to isolate and, in doing so, should avoid the use of public transport. How has that travel plan been island proofed? Has the cabinet secretary had any conversations with ferry and air travel operators in the islands about what the process would be for those people who need to get home from Shetland to isolate?

**Michael Matheson:** The clinical advice is that anyone on an island who is diagnosed as having Covid-19 or who suspects that they might have Covid-19 should not make use of public transport. That is the case on the mainland as well as on the islands.

According to the guidance that has been issued by the Scottish Government, any individual who, on undergoing a test, is confirmed as having Covid-19 should take the advice of the health professionals who advise them on what action they should then take. Therefore, they might have to remain in the accommodation that they are renting on the island, or alternative accommodation might have to be identified. If that is the case, the local authority, working in partnership with the health authorities, will seek to identify potential alternative accommodation.

Advice and guidance on the matter has already been issued, and it is extremely important that anyone who travels to our islands complies with the guidance in the event that they are diagnosed as having Covid-19.

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** Is the cabinet secretary able to indicate what can be done to keep ferry capacity in the

Western Isles at a level at which it can continue to cope with the demands of islanders and tourists over the coming weeks, and to ensure that the CalMac online booking service is able to give an accurate picture of when sailings are and are not full?

**Michael Matheson:** As a result of moving to 1m physical distancing on our ferry network, capacity has increased significantly on routes to Dr Allan's constituency, routes to the rest of the Clyde and Hebrides ferry service network and routes to the northern isles.

As it stands, CalMac has advised us that it has capacity on all its routes, including at peak times on the busiest days. There continues to be additional capacity available on the network beyond the current demand and for the forward bookings that can now be made.

To assist islanders in particular, and the tourism industry on our islands, the booking system has moved from four-week booking to booking slots being made available for the extended season. That gives travellers and islanders greater certainty when it comes to booking seats. In addition, CalMac and NorthLink Ferries are holding back a quantum of tickets on each sailing in order to meet any unexpected on-day demand. In particular, that is for islander residents who may have to leave or return to their island at short notice.

**Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):** I welcome the extra money that was announced today to support bus companies. However, coach companies, which are all about holiday tours and local travel for private groups, have had little support, and they have either collapsed or are close to collapse and desperately need help. Can the cabinet secretary give us any hope that there is some support for them?

**Michael Matheson:** I recognise the challenges that the coach sector faces, which is largely because of the downturn in the tourism industry. Coach companies can apply for the wider package of measures that is available for businesses that are being adversely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. They can also apply to the retrofit programme funding, should they consider that to be necessary for their vehicles.

**Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** As the cabinet secretary is aware, the announced relaxation in the 2m physical distancing rule for public transport was accompanied by a non-exhaustive list of possible mitigations. How are such mitigations working in practice? How has the cabinet secretary worked with stakeholders to put them in place?

**Michael Matheson:** Although public transport operators have been given an exception to move

from 2m to 1m physical distancing, they can do so only once they have completed the necessary risk assessments. They must engage with their staff and the trade unions before they apply any changes.

Operators that have completed risk assessments and carried out that engagement have introduced other mitigation measures. In some cases, they have introduced enhanced cleaning programmes or made available additional sanitiser and are ensuring stronger compliance with face coverings. In some cases, they are considering putting in place Perspex screens to protect members of their staff. Once those measures have been implemented, the operators can move to phase 1.

The guidance that we have issued to transport operators is to make sure that they comply with the risk assessment procedure, which they must complete prior to moving from 2m to 1m physical distancing. Those that we have engaged with to date have, prior to making such changes, followed the proper process by completing the necessary risk assessment and engaging with the workforce.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That was a really difficult session. There have been problems with the sound, and not just with the cabinet secretary. Thank you for your forbearance.

*Meeting closed at 16:34.*

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