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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 18 June 2020

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 12:30]

Covid-19: Next Steps

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. Our first item of business today is a statement from the First Minister on Covid-19: next steps. The First Minister will take questions after her statement.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Presiding Officer, thank you for the opportunity to report on the latest review of the coronavirus lockdown regulations.

First, I will summarise the progress that we have made so far in tackling the virus. I will then set out the careful changes that we intend to make to the rules and guidance over the next three weeks, and when those various changes will take effect. Finally, I will give details of some further work that we have commissioned to inform future decision making.

I will start with my usual report on the daily statistics. In doing so, I thank our health and care workers—indeed all key workers—for the extraordinary work that they are doing in incredibly testing circumstances.

As at 9 o'clock this morning, 18,077 positive cases have been confirmed, which is an increase of 11 from yesterday. A total of 929 patients are in hospital with Covid-19. That represents a total decrease of 36 from yesterday, including a decrease of six in the number of confirmed cases. A total of 23 people last night were in intensive care with confirmed or suspected Covid-19. That is a decrease of one since yesterday.

Unfortunately, I also have to report that, in the past 24 hours, two deaths have been registered of patients who had been confirmed through a test as having Covid-19. That takes the total number of deaths in Scotland, under that measurement, to 2,464.

Those numbers, together with the figures that were published yesterday by National Records of Scotland, make clear the human cost of the virus. That human cost has been utterly devastating, and it should serve as a serious warning against any complacency as we move into the next phase of fighting what is a dangerous, and sadly often deadly, virus.

However, the sustained decline in the number of people dying from the virus also demonstrates the

real progress that we have made. Yesterday's NRS data showed that the number of Covid deaths last week was less than one ninth of the peak level. The number of people in intensive care has fallen by more than 90 per cent since the peak, and hospital admissions, which at one stage were at 200 every day, are now down to single figures each day.

The R number is currently below 1 and has been stable at between 0.6 and 0.9 for the past three weeks. We estimate that the number of people who could be infectious with coronavirus in Scotland as of last Friday was 2,900. I remind members and the public that three weeks ago our estimate, which has since been revised, was 19,000.

The progress that we have made to date is clear and substantial. However, it has been made possible only because of the efforts and enormous sacrifices that people across Scotland have made. I am deeply grateful to each and every one for all of that.

Taking account of that progress and the other evidence that we are required to assess, I am therefore pleased to confirm that the Scottish Government has concluded that we can now move into the next phase of our exit from lockdown. I will set out specifically what that means in a moment. However, I stress that we must still exercise care and caution. Our progress so far is because of lockdown. The virus has not gone away, and we must all remember that.

As we gradually remove the restrictions that have kept the virus under control, there is a real risk that transmission could rise again. That is why, if we do not want to go backwards—as none of us do—we must progress carefully.

I know that, in many ways, even more patience is required now than was required previously, when the danger of the virus was perhaps more obvious. As we start to feel that the virus is receding, there will be a growing and understandable desire to move back to normality more quickly, and we will all feel frustrated at times if that journey seems too slow. That is true for individuals—for all of us—and, I know, for business. The impact of this crisis on businesses, large and small, is colossal, and we all want the economy to reopen as quickly as possible.

However, if—as I believe is the case—frustration, leading to a premature easing of too many restrictions, is our biggest risk right now, it is equally true that patience could reap our biggest rewards. If we can suppress the virus more—if we can get as close as possible to eliminating it now—we give ourselves a better chance of not simply controlling future outbreaks or clusters, but of doing so through more targeted measures

rather than general, blanket restrictions on our way of life.

The alternative, which would happen if we moved too quickly, is that the virus would continue to circulate in the community at a higher level of transmission. The measures that would then be needed to stop it running out of control and growing exponentially again would be more restrictive and would have to be applied much more generally and, potentially, for much longer.

So, difficult though I know all of this is, the prize for going a bit more carefully now is a recovery that is much more sustainable and one that will, I hope, allow more normality to be restored to our everyday lives. That will be important in every aspect of life, but it will be vital particularly for children getting back to normal, full-time schooling as quickly as possible. That is why, although we are moving to phase 2 today, we are still being cautious and we are not going to do everything at once. We intend to take a staged approach to avoid bearing all of the risk at the same time.

In deciding when to implement each measure, we have tried to reach a reasonable order of priority, and to think about the various interdependencies—that is, about how a decision that we take in one area affects life in other areas. All of that said, I readily acknowledge how difficult this is. There is no perfect route out of lockdown. All approaches and any approach that we take will have risks. What we are trying to do is manage and mitigate those risks as far as we possibly can.

Because of that, we have decided that, during phase 2, we will continue to ask people, as far as possible, to stay within or close to their local area. Our ambition is to be in a position to lift that restriction in phase 3 and in good time for the proposed resumption of tourism from 15 July. However, at this stage, for leisure and recreation purposes, we are asking people not to travel more than around 5 miles or so from their home—although I stress that that does not apply to meeting family and friends. Of course, home working should still be the norm whenever that is possible.

Asking people to abide by that guidance gives us much greater confidence in making other changes during phase 2, so I will now take some time to set out the most important of those changes in the order in which we propose that they happen. Detail of all the changes that will be made during phase 2, and the timing of them, will be available on the Scottish Government website.

The only change that will take effect immediately from today is in our guidance for people who are shielding—that is, those who are most at risk from Covid-19 and who have therefore been advised until now to stay inside completely. I

indicated last week my hope that, from today, anyone who is shielding—unless they live in a nursing home or a residential care home—would be able to go outdoors for exercise, such as for a walk, wheel or cycle. I am very pleased to confirm that change today. So, if you have been shielding, and you planned to take some outdoor exercise today, you can go ahead, although you are, of course, very welcome to continue to listen to my remarks first.

Our clinical advisers have made a further assessment of the evidence and I am pleased to say that they have given the go-ahead to some additional changes to the guidance. To provide some advance notice of that, we have decided that those additional changes will apply from tomorrow.

From tomorrow, our advice will be that shielding people can also take part in non-contact outdoor activities such as golf. In addition, the advice from tomorrow will be that people who are shielding can meet outdoors with people from one other household, but in groups of no more than eight.

I want to stress, however, that if you are shielding, you should continue to be extremely cautious, which means that you should stay at least 2m away from other people at all times, even if you live with the people that you are outside with. Do not go inside someone else's house, or allow someone from another household to go inside yours, even to use a toilet. When you do go outside, try to choose times and areas that are quieter and wash your hands thoroughly as soon as you get home.

I know that the requirement to stay indoors at all times, without meeting up with anyone, has been incredibly tough for shielding people—undoubtedly the toughest aspect of the lockdown. I hope that the change to our advice, which allows not just outdoor exercise but limited outdoor meetings, can provide a real improvement to your quality of life, crucially, without significantly increasing the risks that you face. We will provide further guidance before 31 July, when the current shielding period is due to end.

I turn to advice for the general population. We are also making some limited changes, which will take effect from tomorrow, to the rules on social interaction for those who are not being asked to shield. The rules currently state that one household can meet up with just one other household. Those meetings must be outdoors and should involve no more than eight people, who should maintain strict physical distancing of 2m.

From tomorrow, people from one household can meet outdoors with people from up to two other households. You can meet those two households together or separately and it does not always have

to be the same ones, but it should be no more than two at a time and no more than two in a day. We still advise that there should not be more than eight people in any group.

We will also change the guidance so that you can, if necessary, go indoors to use a toilet if you are meeting in the garden of another household, and I hope that those changes will make family meetings a little bit more practical. Please, however, remember that meetings must still be outdoors at this stage. With the one exception that I will outline shortly, we still judge that the risk of mixed household gatherings indoors is too high.

If you go inside to use a toilet, please avoid touching surfaces and immediately and thoroughly clean those that you do touch. By doing that, you will avoid possibly creating a bridge for the virus to travel from one household to another.

When we consider what changes to make, we are always mindful of the wider harms that have come from the restrictions in place to tackle Covid. One of those harms is loneliness and isolation, particularly for older people who live alone and for lone parents. From tomorrow, we will change advice to allow anyone who lives on their own, or only with children under 18, to form an extended household group with one other household.

In an extended household group, people will be able to meet indoors without physical distancing and to stay overnight—although only if they wish to do so, of course. However, they must continue to see any other households outdoors only, and stay more than 2m apart from them. No member of such an extended household group should form a similar arrangement with any other household, and an extended household must not include someone who is shielding.

If one member of an extended household group gets the virus, all the group will have to isolate, regardless of whether they live in the same property. I also encourage those who choose to form extended households to pay particular attention to hygiene measures to reduce the risk that one household will bring the virus into another.

The extended household change is not open-ended, although we will consider if and to what extent we can expand it over the next few weeks. I know that it will not immediately make a difference for everyone but, from tomorrow, it will allow a grandparent who lives on their own to form a group with another household in their family, a single parent and their children to join with another household for support, and a non-cohabiting couple, where at least one of them lives alone, to be reunited indoors without physical distancing. I hope that that will help to ease some of the

isolation that is one of the cruellest consequences of tackling the virus.

Inevitably, complexities are involved in the changes and there will be many questions about the detail. You will find more information on the Scottish Government website, but with the best will in the world, we cannot provide precise answers for every single bespoke situation so, when in doubt, please use your judgment and err on the side of caution. If you are worried that something that you are thinking of doing risks spreading the virus, please do not do it.

The various changes that I have just outlined are the only ones that will take effect before this weekend. However, further changes will come into effect on Monday 22 June. For example, from then, the construction sector will be able to move to the next phase of its restart plan and then move through the remaining phases, subject to on-going consultation with Government. Dentists will be able to reopen from Monday, initially for urgent care. Professional sport can resume, although, since strict public health restrictions remain in place, that will be only behind closed doors. Places of worship will reopen but for individual prayer only, not communal worship.

I know that during the crisis many will have drawn real strength and comfort from their faith. I also know that people of all faiths are missing the ability to gather together. I want to acknowledge that and thank the priests, ministers, rabbis, imams and many others who have worked so hard to keep in touch with faith groups. The nature of the virus and how it spreads means that it may still be some time before large religious gatherings are permitted, but I hope that the reopening of places of worship for individual prayer will be welcomed and that it can and will provide an additional source of comfort for many.

Those are the main changes that will take effect from Monday 22 June. However, in 11 days, from Monday 29 June, some further phase 2 changes will take effect. From then, some indoor workplaces that have so far opted to remain closed in line with guidance, such as factories, labs and warehouses, can start to reopen, but subject to strict physical distancing, hygiene and health and safety guidance. Non-essential offices and call centres should remain closed at this stage.

Businesses that are able to reopen should use the period between now and 29 June to ensure that all physical distancing and safety measures are in place and to contact their staff to put in place staggered work times, agree flexible working where possible for those with childcare issues, and ensure that staff have a safe means of getting to work.

From 29 June, outdoor markets will also be able to reopen, as will outdoor playgrounds and outdoor sports centres. Outdoor businesses such as zoos and garden attractions can also reopen from that date although initially, until we can, I hope, lift this restriction for phase 3, people should not travel more than around 5 miles to visit them. Where those places are ticketed, tickets should be bought in advance.

Restrictions on moving house will also be lifted on 29 June. In addition, registration offices will reopen, but only for essential business, and marriages and civil partnerships will be permitted, but only outdoors at this stage and with limited numbers.

I turn to non-essential retail. The retail sector is a vital part of our economy. It is also a large and complex sector and we want to support people in the sector to get back to work quickly but safely—that is fundamental. We said in the route map that we hoped to allow small shops to reopen in phase 2, and we will. However, by waiting a bit longer, until midway through this phase, we can go a bit further, although still with some limitations.

From 29 June, retail premises of all sizes can reopen, but only if they have outdoor entrances and exits. I am afraid that for the time being, indoor shopping centres will remain closed, except for access to essential shops such as supermarkets and pharmacists. However, indoor shopping centres should prepare to reopen in phase 3, as indicated in the route map.

For those shops that can reopen from 29 June, local authorities and retailers should use the period between now and then to ensure that plans for the responsible use of public spaces are in place, for example, to manage queues, pedestrians and cyclists and to ensure that unnecessary street furniture is removed and that markings and guidance are in place to support strict physical distancing. Shops must also ensure that appropriate physical distancing and hygiene measures are in place.

Of course, all of us as customers have a role to play. When shops reopen, I ask everyone to exercise patience, stick to the measures that are, after all, in place for our safety, and at all times to please respect retail staff, who will be asking us to shop in a slightly different way.

Finally, there are some changes, especially in relation to health and other public services, that have already begun and which will build up over the coming weeks. There will be a more significant reopening of health services, consistent with our national health service mobilisation plan. More general practitioner services will be available, and GP practices will make more visits to shielded patients. The health service more generally will

resume more of the services that were regrettably postponed in March.

As I said earlier, dentists will reopen from this Monday coming. In addition, optometry practices will reopen for emergency and essential services from Monday 29 June.

We will work with local authorities and others to resume some care services that were postponed and, more generally, public services will be gradually and safely reopening and scaling up. To take just two examples, energy efficiency schemes and visits to Housing First tenants will start to resume.

Public transport will operate increased services during this period, albeit with constraints on capacity, due to the need for continued physical distancing.

Those are the key specific measures that I can confirm at this stage. They represent a significant but careful change over the next three weeks, as we continue to suppress the virus. They should provide a firm basis for taking further steps in the future.

One other change that was envisaged in the route map for phase 2 was the reopening of outdoor hospitality, such as beer gardens. Unfortunately, I am not able to give a date for that just yet. We might be able to set a date later that is within phase 2, but I have commissioned further advice from our scientific advisory group to inform that decision.

There is emerging evidence that places such as pubs, restaurants and gyms can be hot spots for transmission. It is important that we better understand that evidence and what further mitigation might be necessary to protect people in such spaces, before we permit them to reopen. I appreciate that that will be hard for the hospitality industry. I want to give an assurance to businesses in that sector that we will continue to support preparations for reopening, for example by encouraging local authorities to facilitate the use of open, outdoor spaces that pubs and restaurants can use for additional space.

I expect to have that further scientific advice in two weeks. I will set out then, hopefully on or around 2 July, whether outdoor hospitality can reopen during phase 2—I hope that that will be the case—or whether further mitigations are required ahead of phase 3.

I understand the desire of all businesses to reopen quickly. However, it is vital that when services and venues reopen, they do so safely and in a way that is consistent with continued suppression of the virus. That is how we best avoid a resurgence of the virus that could lead to businesses having to close all over again.

On a related issue—although this affects many other areas, including education and public transport—I have also commissioned further advice from the advisory group on physical distancing requirements. Let me be clear that the advice and evidence we have at this time supports physical distancing at 2m. We know that—although there are no absolutes and we should not see this in isolation—the shorter the distance, the greater the risk of transmission, so I will not change that guidance without rigorous consideration and appropriate assurance.

However, I have asked our advisers to consider whether there are particular settings and circumstances in which, with additional mitigations if necessary, it might be possible in future to recommend a distance of 1m or 1.5m. I hope to have that advice also within two weeks, and I will report on it then. However, let me reiterate that, at this stage, the advice is unchanged: you should continue to maintain 2m distance from people in households other than your own.

Finally, I want to make some broader points about priorities for the future. In the context of beating the virus and saving lives, no priority is higher for me and this Government than getting children back to full-time education, but that must be done safely.

Therefore, as I set out yesterday, we will be working to ensure that contingency plans for blended learning—if and for as long as that is necessary—maximise the time that children spend in school. We will also be working to create the conditions and put in place the protections that can get children back to school on both a full-time and a normal basis as soon as possible. Indeed, part of the reason I am taking a cautious approach to easing lockdown now is to help us do precisely that, by suppressing the virus as much we can. We will work with councils to keep parents and young people fully updated in the period ahead.

We understand the increasing pressures that parents face in juggling childcare and work, so, in the meantime, we will continue to increase access to critical childcare for those who need it most, and we will work with employers to encourage maximum flexibility in working arrangements. Also, although it is not the principal motivation for them, extended household groups may now—and in future, as we expand them, hopefully—help with informal childcare.

Another key issue is public transport. We want people to work from home whenever they can—that is likely to be the advice for the foreseeable future—and to cycle or walk, wherever it is possible. However, as we open more workplaces and public services, more people will use public transport. We have for several weeks recommended that people should wear face

coverings in enclosed spaces in which physical distancing might not always be possible, such as on public transport and in shops. That is because of the evidence that wearing face coverings can reduce the risk of the virus being transmitted.

If you have Covid but maybe do not realise it because you do not have symptoms, a face covering reduces the risk of your passing the virus on to other people. Other people's wearing of face coverings helps to protect you in a similar way. It is not an absolute safeguard; physical distancing, hand washing and good hygiene will always be more important in preventing transmission.

However, face coverings can help to reduce the risk of transmission, and that is important. For that reason, we have decided that, from Monday, face coverings will be mandatory on all public transport; that includes taxis and private hire cabs, buses, trains, the Glasgow subway, Edinburgh trams, planes, and enclosed areas on ferries.

That will be subject to some exemptions: for example, for children under the age of five, for people who have breathing difficulties, and for those who have a physical condition that makes it hard to keep a mask in place. It will also not apply to drivers who are already protected by a shield of some kind.

We believe that that measure will be increasingly important as the use of public transport increases, and that implementing it now will help to reduce the risks of transmission and build public confidence.

Over the next few days, we are consulting further on whether face coverings should also be mandatory in shops. I will report back on that before non-essential retail opens on 29 June. However, I appeal to the public: please do not wait for that—please follow now the strong advice to wear face coverings in shops.

The measures that we have set out today are proportionate and cautious, but they are also significant. They restart more of the economy, reopen more public services, and allow us to see more of our family and friends. They also lay the groundwork for further changes to come. Crucially, we consider that, if everyone abides by the rules and follows the guidance—I cannot stress enough how vital that is—those changes are consistent with the continued suppression of the virus, which is critical to a sustainable recovery.

The changes also mean that the overall message that we communicate to the public must evolve, too. The willingness of all of us to stay at home has been fundamental to our progress so far, and I encourage people still to stay at home as much as possible. However, as we are now permitted to go out more, our overarching message must adapt. In this next phase, instead

of asking you to “stay home, protect the NHS and save lives”, we will be asking you to “stay safe, protect others and save lives.”

That advice recognises that, although the virus is being suppressed, it has not gone away. It is still highly infectious, deadly to some and dangerous to many. We must continue to suppress it—indeed, we must do everything that we can to eliminate it as far as is possible. Each and every one of us has a part to play in that. By sticking to the rules in each phase, we can all help. We will keep ourselves safe, we will protect each other—which will also help to protect the national health service—and we will save lives. We will also ensure that all of us, together, can move more quickly and more safely to the next phase.

Please continue to stay 2m away from people in other households; with the exception of those who can form extended household groups, meet with other households only outdoors; wear face coverings in enclosed spaces; wash your hands frequently and thoroughly; and, if you have symptoms of Covid, get a test and self-isolate immediately. I remind everyone that they can book a test at nhsinform.scot or by phoning NHS24 on 0800 028 2816.

If you experience any of the symptoms—a new cough, a fever or a loss of or change in your sense of taste or smell—please do not wait to see if you feel better the next day; book a test immediately and follow the advice on isolation.

For the weeks ahead, let us all remember that, now perhaps more than ever, the decisions that we take as individuals will affect the wellbeing of all of us. If we all act, as we have been doing, in that spirit of solidarity and love for each other, we will get, and keep, the virus under control, and we will get our lives back to something that feels much more normal.

The Presiding Officer: The First Minister will now take questions.

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): It is no exaggeration to say that lives and livelihoods will be on the line over the coming months. We are facing what is potentially the biggest economic downturn of our lives. We need the Government to respond with urgency and ambition, but that the Government is simply not showing that ambition.

Let us examine the dilemma that is faced by working parents. Andrew McRae of the Federation of Small Businesses put the problem well this morning in saying that if businesses and the economy are to return, they need staff in place. He continued:

“That is why we are worried by the suggestion that some children will only return to school a couple of days a week well into the autumn—making life incredibly difficult for working parents.”

He is right. How is a single working mother with two children at home for three days a week supposed to get back to work? What measures will be in place for her? Does she not deserve more than what the First Minister called “a contingency plan”?

The First Minister: It is regrettable that Jackson Carlaw is incapable of rising to the challenge of a national crisis. I have recognised all along how difficult this is for individuals and businesses across the country, but my first responsibility is to protect the health of people throughout the country and to do everything that I can to save lives from the deadly virus.

Not long ago, Jackson Carlaw stood up and claimed that the Government had not done and was not doing enough to protect health and save lives. Now, however, he seems to think that we can throw caution to the wind, forget that the virus is a threat, and take action that would not be responsible. I will act responsibly, I will act carefully and I will act cautiously.

On young people and schools, let me remind members that 11 August, when all children in Scotland will be able to return to school, is actually several weeks earlier than the return will happen in England, where children will not return to school until September, on a blended basis. Our job is first to make sure that children can return to school safely.

Let me quote the World Health Organization’s director for Europe. He said that

“A warning shot has been fired: school reopenings in a few countries have resulted in local ‘flares’ in the number of cases—we need to remain diligent and lift restrictions with care.”

That is what I will do. We will continue to take action to suppress the virus and we will work to ensure that any contingency that is necessary for school education maximises the amount of time that young people are in school, but we will also work to create the conditions to suppress the virus, to get children safely back to school full time and on a normal basis.

In the meantime, we will do everything we can, including some of the changes that I announced today, to support parents with the childcare challenges that they face.

Jackson Carlaw: I note the limited relaxations that the First Minister announced; indeed, I welcomed every one of them a fortnight ago when they were announced elsewhere, to much derision from her.

We need much more ambition from the Scottish Government. Children need it so they can get back to school and continue their education, and

working parents need it so that they have a chance of staying in work.

The Scottish Government is simply not listening on economic recovery. We read that leading companies across Scotland are unable to get a call with ministers or civil servants. We hear from senior business figures, some of whom are close to the Scottish National Party, who think that the First Minister does not get it or that there is no plan. Today, the head of the Scotch Whisky Association, Karen Betts, urged the Government to make

“an open call for all hands on deck”.

She wants the Government to reach outside the First Minister’s inner circle so that fresh ideas can be brought in. Will the First Minister do so and will she do it now?

The First Minister: I will not do that right now because I am standing up in the Scottish Parliament’s chamber answering questions. However, this afternoon I will speak to all the key business organisations and the Scottish Retail Consortium. I will continue to speak to interests and organisations right across the country, but I will never take my eye off my fundamental responsibility, which is to keep the country safe and avoid lives being lost.

Jackson Carlaw said that he would have welcomed the lifting of restrictions that I have announced today two weeks ago. That would have been utterly reckless and it would have put lives at risk. That is why increasing numbers of people across Scotland are glad that Jackson Carlaw is not standing in this position.

We have to act carefully and we have to put the health of the country at the centre of everything that we do, because if we ease restrictions too quickly, the virus will run out of control again and we will be back to square 1, imposing a lockdown and requiring businesses to close. That would be wrong and irresponsible and, if we were to do it, Jackson Carlaw would be the first person in the chamber to stand up and say that we had gone too quickly and had not discharged our responsibilities, because he blows with the wind—or, rather, he blows in whatever direction his colleagues at Westminster tell him.

Jackson Carlaw: I am glad to hear that the First Minister is engaging with all those organisations. I hope that she is not just talking to them, but is finally listening to them. She needs to listen, because she needs all the help that she can get.

On one hand, the First Minister’s top economic adviser claims that the United Kingdom will be the worst-performing developed economy in the world and that Scotland will be even worse. On the other

hand, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Kate Forbes—the minister who is supposed to lead our response to this generational crisis—finds time to go on Twitter to attack the media for reporting the adviser’s comments, and insists that it is all fine. Could someone tell Scotland’s finance secretary that Trumpian tweets and getting the Twitter mob to blame the media do not make jobs? Is not it the case that the SNP Government does not comprehend the depth of the economic crisis that we are about to go through?

The First Minister: I have comprehended the depths of the health crisis, the economic crisis and the education crisis since day 1. With my ministerial colleagues, I have literally been working around the clock to steer Scotland through this crisis. We will do that for as long as it takes, and we will continue to try to steer a steady, consistent and safe path for the country.

Despite the tone and tenor of exchanges today—prompted by the tone of Jackson Carlaw’s questions—I will, as far as I can, continue to do that in a non-party-political way. I regret the constant tendency of Jackson Carlaw to politicise all the issues. Scrutiny is important, but anyone who doubts that that tendency exists should reflect on the fact that Jackson Carlaw supports, when the UK Government does them, most of the things for which he criticises the Scottish Government. There are many examples, from schools to the economy. The most egregious example of that inconsistency—if I can put it so mildly—is that Jackson Carlaw led the pack that bayed for the head of Cath Calderwood but lost his tongue over Dominic Cummings. Such party-political engagement, inconsistency and hypocrisy have no place when we are dealing with a national crisis.

This time is tough and hard for individuals, businesses and Governments across the world, and my job is to focus on getting the country through it. Regardless of Jackson Carlaw’s attempt to distract attention from that—which I suspect is more about distracting attention from the travails of a Government somewhere else—I will focus on the job at hand and get Scotland safely through the biggest crisis that we have ever faced.

Jackson Carlaw: We all welcome plans to get the country out of lockdown, but Scotland does not need just a plan to open back up—it needs a route map back to recovery, as well as imagination, ambition and an open mind. However, one high-profile business figure said about the SNP last week:

“I’m not sure they understand the scale of it all. What’s the plan? There’s deafening silence.”

Children need a plan so that they can get back to school, parents need a plan so that they can get

back to work and Scotland needs a plan so that we can avoid a depression as great as we have ever seen. I hope that the First Minister will deliver that, but it does not augur well that the front-bench team deals in angry tweets rather than in commonsense solutions. Is not it time for Scotland to get back to work, and for ministers to engage with everyone else in order to achieve that?

The First Minister: Jackson Carlaw should deal with the Twitter trolls among his own members before he starts to give anybody else lessons.

This is serious stuff. Let me try to introduce a note of consensus: Jackson Carlaw is right to say that Scotland needs plans for all those things. Scotland has those plans and will continue to see them being implemented.

I have hard work to do, so if Jackson Carlaw wants just to snipe from the sidelines, I will leave him to do that, although I regret it and would welcome him back to a constructive approach so that we can collectively get through this. I will get on with the hard graft of getting the country safely through coronavirus and building the sustainable recovery that we all want. I will focus on that job and will leave Jackson Carlaw to indulge in whatever makes him happy.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): Four weeks ago, when the Government launched its route map out of lockdown, I said that the Labour Party stood behind the First Minister and the Government. This is a national fight to eradicate a deadly virus, and that remains the case today. Of course, that does not mean that we will not hold the Government to account, especially where there are yawning gaps between what is announced at daily press briefings and what is happening out there in the real world.

Four weeks ago, I asked the First Minister for three guarantees for easing restrictions: first, that the evidence behind decisions to relax lockdown be shared; secondly, that testing be maximised with a fully working test, trace and isolate system; and thirdly, that the strategy be agile enough to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. The people we represent are not yet convinced that those guarantees are being met. For the public to have confidence in easing restrictions, the evidence and the testing strategy must be robust and shared widely. The truth is we are still woefully behind in using the testing capacity available. As recently as last week, almost 74,000 tests went unused.

Four weeks ago, the First Minister announced that phase 2 would include expanding visits from family to their loved ones in care homes. That was welcomed and long awaited—it has been confirmed in today's document that accompanies the statement. However, with 85 per cent of

Scotland's care home staff not being tested by last week—one month to the day after the health secretary said that all staff would be tested regularly and repeatedly—what is the First Minister doing to ensure that the much-needed extension to visiting will be safe? Can she confirm that it will happen and when it will happen?

The First Minister: I will first address Richard Leonard's three points on guarantees. First, when we take the decision to move from one phase to another, we publish the analysis of the evidence that that is based on. That analysis will be published early tomorrow and so be available for people to read, scrutinise and ask questions about. Secondly, test and protect is up and running and is working. The biggest challenge for us now is to ensure that every member of the public knows about test and protect, what to do when they have symptoms, where to go to book a test and what to do around self-isolation. When people are contacted to tell them that they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive, they need to know where to go for support in order that they can self-isolate.

There is a campaign behind that and, over the next week or so, information will go out to every household in the country, telling people exactly what to do in those circumstances. Every member of the Scottish Parliament has a responsibility to help in that task. The testing capacity is there, the contact tracing capacity is there and the support for those who are required to isolate is there. That is part of the big challenge that we face in the weeks ahead.

We are expanding routine testing. The figures that Richard Leonard gives on the testing of care home staff are just wrong. The latest figure is that 22,500 staff have been tested through national health service laboratories. Additional staff will have been tested by drive-through centres. That represents a significant proportion of care staff. We will be doing that testing regularly. Further consideration will be given to other groups. Testing will have a role to play in getting parts of our society back to normal.

Lastly, on the issue of visits to care homes, the route map update that we are publishing today says that we will give further consideration to that and will then set out when visiting on a normal basis can resume. It is likely that that will start with visiting outdoors. However, our clinical advice is that we must take great care in that. The number of cases of coronavirus in care homes is reducing, the number of deaths is, thankfully, reducing and the number of care homes with outbreaks is reducing. However, given the experience that we have had in care homes, we want to tread very cautiously. I remind people watching this that there are already arrangements in place for visiting in

end-of-life situations and, as I talked about yesterday in the chamber, other exceptional circumstances. We will therefore continue to take great care as we navigate through all these things.

In all this, I believe, as I think I said the first time I stood in the chamber and addressed the matter, that proper, robust scrutiny is very important for the Government as well as for everybody else. However, what I will not be swayed by, in any aspect of this, is the normal political to-ing and fro-ing. I have the biggest responsibility that I have ever had in facing the current situation and I am determined to do the right things in the best way and at the right pace to get the country through the crisis.

Richard Leonard: I understand the First Minister's caution, but it needs to be underpinned by the resources going into not just testing capacity but testing being carried out, especially in settings such as residential care homes.

Turning to another issue, just this week we learned more about the impact of Covid-19 on the Scottish economy: manufacturing down by 25 per cent; retail and wholesale down by 35 per cent; and construction down by 40 per cent. We know that businesses need a steady supply of work and that, unless something changes soon, blue-chip companies such as Rolls-Royce and Alexander Dennis are facing a significant cut in capacity. We need action urgently.

Yesterday, in response to Neil Bibby, the First Minister said that, instead of

"lots of different task forces",

there should be

"more joined-up strategic task forces."—[*Official Report*, 17 June 2020; c 22.]

What we need is not a reactive approach based on short-life task forces but a proactive, comprehensive, forward-looking, planned, long-term approach for the whole Scottish economy. That is why, four weeks ago, I asked the First Minister to work with us, trade unions and employers to establish a new industrial strategy, a new plan for the economy and a new plan for jobs. Will the First Minister today finally commit to that to save businesses and jobs and build the Scottish economy back better?

The First Minister: I think that I committed to that the first time that Richard Leonard asked me about it. Indeed, the Scottish Government is working already on the recovery in a range of ways. In an economic sense, on Monday next week we will have the recommendations from the group that Benny Higgins has been chairing for us, which will feed into the work that we are doing. I welcome constructive inputs from people and from

members, parties and interests across the chamber.

My comments yesterday about task forces were in response to another Labour Party member's request to set up a task force. Criticising me for what I said when I was responding to that request is perhaps a little bit unfair.

I will not go into detail about particular discussions or support for an individual company but, with a company such as Rolls-Royce, a big challenge for us is to work with it to get to a repurposing of what it does. However, the challenge that Rolls-Royce faces just now is part of a global challenge. With companies such as Alexander Dennis in the bus industry, we have an opportunity to align our recovery from this crisis with our climate change ambitions. There are therefore potentially massive opportunities for such companies.

Those are things that are already under way in the Scottish Government and I welcome ideas and suggestions, whenever they come, from people across the chamber.

Richard Leonard: I turn finally to the subject that has preoccupied lots of people this week. Parents across Scotland have shared their anger over the past few days about a lack of leadership in setting out a plan for getting pupils back to school full time, which should be the goal of all of us. Just yesterday, the First Minister described the blended learning models that councils are working towards as a contingency plan, but it must be the ambition to go beyond that contingency plan to return children to school for their whole class time in a safe way.

Responding to the calls from the Parliament and, more importantly, to the legitimate concerns of parents, pupils and school staff, including teachers, will require the agility that I called for four weeks ago. Let me ask the First Minister again what I asked her yesterday: will she produce a route map with a clear timetable that explains how she will get pupils back into classrooms five days a week and how she will provide the resources that are needed to ensure that that can happen as quickly and safely as possible?

The First Minister: Yes, but—I hate to point out the basics to Richard Leonard—we have to do the work to produce that. That is what is happening right now.

On the day we published the route map, we also published the education recovery group's report. That plan was agreed not only with Government but with local government, teaching unions and parents organisations.

The plan that was published then is being operationalised by the work that councils are

doing. We are applying scrutiny to that and, as I said yesterday, we are also working on what conditions and protections are required to get children back to school not only full time but as normal, so that they are not only getting a full-time education but are able to interact with each other as young people want to. That requires continued suppression of the virus. Therefore, we have to take the actions that we are taking now and go with the considered plan so that we drive the levels of the virus down, and then we can consider different ways of getting schools back.

Unfortunately, there are no magic wands when it comes to this virus; only a lot of really hard and detailed work will get us to where we all want to be. That is what the Government is doing. I say to Richard Leonard—but it is possibly more accurate to direct it at the other side of the chamber—that if we act in a reckless way when it comes to getting kids back to school and do not—*[Interruption.]* Richard Leonard has said that he wants to know what the plan is.

We need to have contingency in case the virus runs out of control again, and we also need to have a plan for if we get the virus suppressed. That is what we are dealing with. We will continue to do that hard work. However, if we end up with an outbreak of the virus in schools in October or November, Jackson Carlaw and Richard Leonard will be the first to stand up—as they have been to speak on the issues with care homes—and ask why we did not take greater care.

I will not compromise the safety of children. We will act in a way that keeps them safe and gets them back to school as quickly as possible.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): The Scottish Greens stand in solidarity with asylum seekers. We will support them in their efforts to make a better life for themselves and we utterly condemn the racist thugs whose behaviour in Glasgow's George Square in recent days has appalled people across Scotland.

Around one third of households do not have access to a car, and in Glasgow the figure is more than 50 per cent. The First Minister will understand the relief of some of the lowest paid workers that public transport services are being increased as we enter phase 2. However, many will be concerned about the practicalities, because without adequate transport provision many people face the possibility of losing their job if they are unable to get to work. How will the First Minister ensure that those who most need access to public transport will get it?

The First Minister: I associate myself with Alison Johnstone's opening remarks. The scenes in Glasgow last night were horrifying and disgraceful, and we should be pretty blunt about

the cause of what happened. It was not caused by people protecting statues or the cenotaph; it was caused by a bunch of racist thugs seeking to pour out their vile prejudice against asylum seekers and refugees. That is not what Scotland is about. Welcoming refugees and asylum seekers is a part of who we are, and we should stand against the scenes that we saw in Glasgow. In my view, those who broke the law should face the full force of it.

Those questions about public transport are important. Transport Scotland is working with transport operators to ensure that they maximise the capacity that they have in a way that is safe, with physical distancing and hygiene in place.

Part of that is about making sure that employers help with staggered start times. We are also encouraging and investing in active travel; Michael Matheson has made announcements about that in recent weeks. We are enabling more people to walk and cycle to work, rather than relying on cars or on public transport.

The wearing of face coverings will help to build public confidence that it is safe to use public transport, notwithstanding the continued risks that the virus poses to us all.

Alison Johnstone: I welcome the First Minister's remarks about face coverings and their part in protecting our key transport workers on our buses, trains and ferries. She is right that that will encourage confidence in those who rely on those vital services.

Public transport will inevitably be running at greatly reduced capacity, so it is critical that businesses continue to follow Scottish Government advice to work from home wherever that is possible. The First Minister has suggested staggered start times; it is important that we all avoid rush hour. That will become increasingly challenging as businesses begin to open in the weeks and months ahead. What steps will the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland take to ensure that businesses comply with that, wherever possible?

The First Minister: There is active engagement across all sectors, and we are publishing guidance for all sectors about safe opening. The responsibility is placed on employers to make sure that they do what they can to be flexible with workers. We want to encourage all employers—and this is something that I should have mentioned earlier—to play their part in making sure that the public know about test and protect and about what to do if they have symptoms.

None of that is straightforward. Anybody, in any part of the chamber, who says that any of that is straightforward is doing a disservice to the public, individuals and businesses across the country. It is difficult. It will continue to be challenging. We must

work through those issues, as we have been doing for the past three months.

We all have a part to play. Government has a part to play in making sure that guidance is in place and that the necessary support, including financial support, is in place. Employers have a responsibility to make sure that they are supporting their workers. Individuals can help by walking and cycling where possible and also by working from home where that is possible.

Collective action and endeavour has got us to where we are now in tackling the virus and it will continue to be important as we work through the significant challenges that still lie ahead.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I thank the First Minister for advance sight of her statement. I reiterate my intention to continue to provide constructive support to make this work.

The First Minister has announced the return to work for thousands of parents, but without adequately explaining who will look after their children. There is no school yet. Childminders are still limited and can be costly. Critical childcare is also strictly limited and grandparents and friends are still largely off limits.

I have asked the question twice already this week, but the answer is still not clear. How will parents who are required to work get the childcare that they need?

The First Minister: That is an important question. I will be frank: there is no single, straightforward answer to any of these questions. That is hard for me to say and it is hard for people to hear. I recognise that.

If we look at any other part of the UK, we see that there are no straightforward answers to these questions. We are still dealing with an unprecedented challenge. We must try to balance things as far as we can. We are still saying to employers that they should encourage and support home working where possible and that they should be flexible where there are childcare issues. We are increasing access to critical childcare beyond what has been available so far, and we will continue to do that as far as possible.

Although childcare is not the principal motivation for the steps that we have announced today about extended households, those steps will make more informal childcare possible and I hope that we will be able to expand that concept in the next couple of weeks.

None of this is straightforward. There is no magic solution to dealing with a situation in which, to save lives, we have had to close down big parts of our economy and society. As we open those up again, we are moving carefully and gradually. I recognise how difficult that is for people. If I try to

pretend that there are easy solutions, or if I try to go too quickly to create solutions before it is safe to do so, I risk taking the whole country backwards and seeing the virus run out of control.

I have already quoted the WHO's comments from this morning, and I will not repeat that quote. However, its comments are very sobering, indeed. The quote actually ended with Dr Hans Henri Kluge saying:

"I repeat: The risk remains high across ALL our Member States."

Unfortunately, that means continued caution. I recognise that, for many people, that means continued inconvenience and disruption. We will do everything that we can to mitigate that in the weeks ahead.

Willie Rennie: The First Minister knows that I support a focused approach. However, the problem is that she is asking people to return to work, and their employers are expecting them back. People cannot afford to stay off work, because the furlough is ending.

Today's changes on childcare are minor, and the Government does not plan to lift restrictions on childminding capacity until phase 3, which is at least three weeks away. I support caution; I also support a joined-up approach. However, the route map and the guidance are not joined up. They are flawed. How will the First Minister fix that?

The First Minister: I do not know whether Willie Rennie is saying that we should not open up parts of our economy carefully, or whether he is saying that we should put children into unsafe environments. We are seeking to join up those aspects. We are taking a phased approach through phase 2. We are not asking people to go back to work until a later part of the phase, when we hope that we will be able to extend the extended household concept, for example. At that point, we will be getting into the period when we are making decisions for phase 3, which will, I hope, open up other possibilities around childminders and other early years settings.

Yes, I accept that there is no perfect alignment with any of those aspects right now, but that comes from the uniqueness and the severity of the situation with which we are dealing. We are trying to get the steps in as much alignment as possible, and we will continue to try to do that.

I say again that the more that we continue to suppress the virus now, the more we open up the possibility of going more quickly in the future.

As I keep saying, none of this is easy or straightforward for anybody across the country. If people want to make alternative suggestions, I will always listen to those. We are taking a considered, careful and planned way forward, in

which different individuals, interests, businesses and organisations, with the support of Government, all have to play a part in getting us through this. It is not easy, but there really is no alternative to taking the careful route that we are taking right now.

The Presiding Officer: As everyone can imagine, there is much interest among members in this topic. I encourage everyone to keep it succinct and to the point.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I share the First Minister's interest in the economy being boosted as safely and carefully as possible. The ambitions of many businesses to develop their premises have stalled, and they are keen to move on. What will phase 2 mean for the operation of organisations such as valuation joint boards, where the process of getting businesses up and running is being stalled due to Covid constrictions?

The First Minister: We have said that non-essential offices should remain closed but that other indoor workplaces can start to reopen. Lots of organisations have been doing a lot of work online and virtually to support people who are working at home, and it is important that we continue to support that way of working.

However, increasingly and progressively over the next few weeks, we want more businesses to be able to return to something that is closer to normal. For public and quasi-public services in particular, that will be essential in getting other things moving. Getting registration offices open, even for essential business, will be important in allowing limited weddings and civil partnerships to take place.

This is a complicated puzzle for us all, and we have to get all those bits working together as best we can. I remind people that every single Government in the United Kingdom and across the world is grappling with the same issues. We look to learn from other countries, where they are doing things differently. However, there is no straightforward, simple way through this. We are dealing with a deadly virus for which there is no cure and not many treatments, although we had some positive news on that front this week.

That is the situation that we face. Anyone—for whatever purpose or motivation—pretending to people that there are simple solutions that we are just not bothering to find is doing them a disservice, given the severity of the crisis that we face. I know that Clare Adamson is not doing that, but, in some of the comments made today, it sounded a bit like other members were.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Dentists in more than half the dental practices in Scotland that have been surveyed fear that their practice will not

survive the coronavirus crisis. They feel that there has been a total lack of transparency in the information that the Scottish Government has provided to them.

Today's statement lacks any detail on the full restoration of dental services in Scotland, so will the First Minister say now what support ministers will provide to that vital part of our health services? If we do not see action from the Scottish Government, all of us fear that the current public health emergency will turn into a long-term public health crisis.

The First Minister: I do not think that that is a fair characterisation. The chief dental officer has been working closely with the dental profession. The plan that he put together was subsequently shared among many other countries by the WHO, because it was seen as being a high-quality piece of work.

For obvious reasons, in the past few weeks dentists have been considered to be at high risk of transmitting the virus, but we are now able to move forward—thanks, in large part, to the work that the chief dental officer and the profession have been doing. Practices will be able to reopen on Monday—initially for urgent care, but we hope that they will be able to get back to normal soon afterwards. I know that, although they might not relish a visit to the dentist, many people will have plans to catch up on treatment that they have missed. Dentists will work hard to achieve that and, as they always do, they will have support from the Scottish Government to the extent that they need it in the weeks ahead.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Phase 2 allows university lab research to resume but, right now, universities are also setting budgets for teaching and learning in the next academic year, in which they face a shortfall of at least £0.5 billion. They have still had no indication of how the Scottish Government will support them through that. When will the Government respond to the crisis in the university sector, which is a sector that will be critical to our economy's recovery?

The First Minister: I am sorry, but that is just plainly and factually wrong. Not only have we worked with universities, and will continue to do so, but we have already given them an additional £75 million for research. We will work with universities in the same way as we will with every sector that has been affected by the crisis: methodically, and step by step.

Right now, the greatest thing that we can do for any sector, interest or business is to create the right conditions for suppression of the virus, which will allow them to get back to normal as quickly as possible. We will continue to work across all those areas to ensure that universities and businesses

have the support that they need from the Scottish Government in the way that they have been getting it throughout the crisis so far.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the First Minister confirm that all the changes that she mentioned in her statement apply across the whole country, including islands and remote rural areas? Will she also confirm that, because the 5-mile limit for leisure journeys has been continued, people should still avoid making day trips to islands solely for recreation?

The First Minister: The changes that I have announced today apply throughout the country and in every part of it. As part and parcel of our approach to scaling up public transport, we will look at the capacity of ferries so that people who require to get off or on to islands to visit family, in the way that all of us can now do, are able to do so. It is important that people who live on islands can take advantage of the freedoms that we are all now able to enjoy.

The restriction on travel for recreation and leisure that we are asking people to abide by is important. It, too, applies across the country. We are asking people not to go further than 5 miles for such purposes, and not to flock to beauty spots or tourist attractions. Such actions still pose a risk and put avoidable pressure on parts of our infrastructure. We very much hope that we will be able to lift that restriction when we go into the next phase—not least because we are looking forward to seeing our tourist industry resuming from 15 July.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Yesterday, the First Minister said that she would “move heaven and earth” to get schools reopened. I agree that she should do so. I also agree that the health of our children and their families is important, but people should not have to make a choice between losing their health and their children losing their education. If the Government’s own advisory group should report back to it that the current social distancing guidelines can be reduced, councils will have to rewrite their current plans, which will come at a cost. How much will local authorities be given to support them in delivering education, the right to which is the most fundamental of all children’s rights?

The First Minister: I agree that it is not a choice between education and health, but we cannot have one without the other. Therefore, we have to make sure that we prioritise both, which is exactly what we will do.

It is interesting that the Tories want us to just write a blank cheque, which is never the approach that they take in government to anything, unless they

are absolutely forced to, such as in the case of providing children with free school meals.

We will work with councils to assess their plans and what they require to do. If those plans change—as plans in almost every sector might do as the experience of the virus and what we need to do to tackle it changes—we will work to support councils in the way that we have to. If that requires resources, we will make those resources available, but we will do so through a proper process of dialogue and engagement. That is the right and responsible approach of someone who is actually responsible for delivering things and is not just talking about them.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware that Scotland’s gross domestic product fell by 18.9 per cent during April, which is the largest monthly fall ever in Scotland. Andrew Wilson, author of the Scottish National Party’s Sustainable Growth Commission report, warned that Scotland was heading for the worst economic slump in the developed world. Is he right?

The First Minister will be aware that economic poverty kills as much as any virus does. What will she do to save jobs and tackle poverty, and will she now publish a child poverty strategy rather than delay it indefinitely at this critical time?

The First Minister: As an aside, Andrew Wilson is a former colleague and a great friend of mine, and he is someone for whom I have a great amount of respect. However, it amuses me—and I need any amusement that I can get right now—that when Andrew Wilson argues for the SNP and the cause that it stands for, according to the Opposition, he is wrong and is usually called a “corporate lobbyist”. However, when he says things that can be construed as criticisms of the SNP, suddenly we have to take it all as gospel. I look forward to the same respect for Andrew Wilson emerging among members on Opposition benches when he argues the case for Scottish independence.

The points about GDP and poverty are important. Of course, GDP has fallen—we saw it fall in the UK by more than 20 per cent. We have effectively put the economy into hibernation, and the challenge now is to get the economy safely out of hibernation so that a recovery in GDP happens as quickly as possible. That recovery will be more possible than it would have been had there not been such an attempt—led, to be fair, by the UK Government—to protect the productive capacity of the economy.

This Government has done more than any other across the UK to tackle child poverty. We will be taking forward our plans for the child income supplement, and we have made announcements

around free school meals and food insecurity. With regard to the child poverty strategy, I agree that it has to be put in place as quickly as possible so that we can do the additional things that we need to do. However, the world has fundamentally changed in the past three months and we need to pause to make sure that our strategy takes account of the changes and the much greater challenges that we now face. Anybody who does not recognise that is not thinking about the issue as closely as they need to.

The Scottish Government's commitment to tackle child poverty was strong going into the crisis and is even stronger as we come out of it.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): The hospitality industry will, no doubt, be disappointed, but I hope understanding, about the need to wait a little longer before opening beer gardens. I welcome the First Minister's comments that local authorities have been asked to be flexible about allowing the use of outdoor spaces, but will the Scottish Government also meet the hospitality industry to discuss what further steps can be taken to support the sector, particularly the extension of the furlough scheme and reduction in VAT?

The First Minister: Yes, we will have on-going and close engagement with the hospitality sector. We are already arguing for the extension of the furlough scheme, and will continue to do so, and for the UK Government to consider how the scheme might in the future be targeted on particular sectors on which the crisis is having a longer impact. We will also continue to consider the support that we can provide for sectors such as hospitality and tourism.

I understand that the hospitality sector will be disappointed at not having a specific date today. As I said earlier, I hope that we can give a date during phase 2. However, some of the most concerning emerging evidence about the virus is on what is referred to as super spreading and the risks in some settings that come from a range of things but which are often associated with how people are breathing if they are shouting over noise or exercising. We must understand that properly to ensure that any mitigations that are required are put in place.

That is why we have commissioned further advice. We will have it within a couple of weeks, and I hope that it then opens a way to opening for the hospitality sector. It is important that local authorities think about how they can provide additional outdoor space that would not normally be used so that, for the remainder of the summer months, the hospitality sector can start the process of recovery.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a similar topic, hospitality businesses, be they pubs, cafes, hotels or restaurants, are in despair. They will be bitterly disappointed by the statement and the lack of detail in it. For that sector, every day matters at this time of year. Can the First Minister therefore give a firm date when the review of the 2m rule will be published? Will that review contain a full and rigorous analysis of the science on the issue?

The First Minister: I recognise how difficult it is for the hospitality sector, but I hope that the member is not suggesting that we should just go ahead regardless of the concerns. Interestingly, there is no firm date for the opening of the hospitality sector anywhere else in the United Kingdom, which suggests that all Governments, and not just the Scottish Government, are proceeding cautiously on the issue.

I gave a date for reporting back on the advice—I said that it would be “around 2 July”, and I hope that it will be on 2 July. I cannot pre-empt what will be in that advice, but I hope that we will then be able to give the go-ahead to outdoor reopening within phase 2. However, I really hope that Donald Cameron is not suggesting that, if the advice says that further mitigations have to be put in place to protect people from the virus, we should somehow ignore that.

There is a tendency for people who are listening to exchanges such as this one to think that everybody thinks that the virus has gone away. I understand that when it is among the general public, but I am less understanding of it when it comes to other politicians, who should understand the risks that we still face. This virus has killed more than 4,000 people across the country, and there are 4,000 families grieving people right now as a result. To suggest that we proceed recklessly is wrong, and I will not do it.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): The First Minister said that she is continuing with getting Scotland through the crisis “safely”. I ask her to reflect on that rhetoric. We have one of the worst death rates in the world, and it is totally inappropriate to make claims that are contradicted by the reality that is faced by the 4,000 families across Scotland who have lost loved ones.

Councils will be key to getting us through this, and they need money now. The Lothian councils need £100 million to fill the budget black hole and get education going again. When will they receive that money?

The First Minister: On Neil Findlay's first point, I am the last person anybody will ever hear downplaying the human cost of the virus in any way. Nobody has suffered more than the families who have lost loved ones. The experience that I

have had over the past three months of standing up every day having to report on the numbers of people dying will literally live with me forever. I will never in any way, shape or form diminish the impact of that. It is that experience that makes me so determined to do everything that I can to reduce the numbers of people who die from the virus from here on in.

Neil Findlay is one of the people who legitimately say that we should have done more earlier. There is nothing untoward about saying that, but I do not agree with it, because I think that we acted in the way that we believed was appropriate at the time. However, anybody who believes that should understand the need to behave in an appropriate, careful and cautious way now. I see it as my key responsibility to get this country through the virus as safely as I can, and I will not be swayed from that by party-political issues.

On the issue of council funding, over the course of the crisis, councils have had around £300 million in new money and up to £200 million of flexibility with money for early learning expansion that had already been allocated, but which, because of the delay caused by the coronavirus, they have been able to allocate to other places. So there is £500 million or thereabouts in additional funding. I do not underestimate the pressure that councils are under. We will continue to work with them to assess what additional resources they need. To say that councils have not been given additional resources during the crisis would be factually inaccurate.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The famous Seamill Hydro hotel, which opened in 1880, faces unprecedented difficulties due to the pandemic. Yesterday, it began a redundancy consultation with its 200 employees, between a quarter and a half of whom face potentially losing their jobs, due to the fall in tourism and income from functions such as wedding receptions.

Redundancy will have a devastating impact on employees and the local economy. The pivotal enterprise resilience fund and rates relief have helped greatly, but what else can Scottish ministers do now to assist Seamill Hydro during phase 2? What hope can the First Minister give to the hospitality sector, given the restrictions necessitated by social distancing for the foreseeable future?

The First Minister: As Kenneth Gibson knows, I grew up in Ayrshire, and Seamill Hydro is a place that I know well. I know how distressed everybody who is associated with it will be at this point. That feeling will be replicated across the entire hospitality sector. There is no doubt that the loss of much of the summer season is putting many

businesses at risk. Tourism is an important part of our economy and we are absolutely committed to supporting a safe and strong recovery for it.

We have provided a support package of £2.3 billion of lifeline funding to businesses throughout this period; that included specific support for hospitality and tourism. We will continue to look at how we provide financial support to the sector. We have also—this was called for and welcomed by the sector—provided an indicative opening date of 15 July and we will publish sectoral guidance later today on what businesses should do to prepare to reopen safely. We will of course continue to engage with the sector over the coming days and weeks.

With regard to Seamill Hydro, any decision to consider job cuts is a dreadful one to take, and I know how difficult that will be. We will continue to extend as much support as we possibly can to staff there or at any other tourist business at this time, and we will fundamentally continue to work to get the sector opened as quickly and as safely as possible.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I sincerely thank the First Minister for her remarks about opening zoos on 29 June. More than 5,000 people joined our campaign to ask her to help Edinburgh zoo to reopen, and opening will be a much-needed lifeline.

My question is about shielding. There was good news in today's announcement for people who are shielding. It seems as if they are moving into phase 1 as we move into phase 2. Can people who are in shielding expect to follow the phases, albeit at one remove, in future announcements? Also, the First Minister spoke about extended family groups. Can people who are shielding be part of those extended family groups?

The First Minister: No. I said that in my statement; I appreciate that it was possibly difficult to follow all the detail. They absolutely cannot, and that is an important point of clarity.

On the member's more general point about advice for those who are shielding, there should not be an expectation that it would follow one phase behind, not least because we hope by the end of July to give much more tailored advice to people who are in the shielding group that will be much more specific to the conditions and which will allow them to take a more informed and risk-based approach. I hope that that will bring the shielding group—albeit that they will no doubt continue to have to take additional precautions and be much more conscious of risk—more into line with the general population. We will continue to ease those restrictions as much as possible and it is really good that today we have been able, on

the advice of our clinical group, to go further than we thought we would be able to go last week.

I will be delighted to see Edinburgh zoo reopen on 29 June. Also, later today I can confirm that we will provide emergency support funding for zoos in Scotland. The aim of the funding will be to prevent animal welfare issues and it will be based on need. A sum of £1.6 million is being made available for grants and a further £1 million for loans. I hope that, as well as the reopening date, that additional financial support will be welcomed.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): The First Minister said that further discussion will take place on making face masks mandatory in retail outlets. She will be aware that trade unions are concerned about staff having to enforce such a policy. Will trade unions be part of the discussion?

The First Minister: Yes, they very much will be. We are seeking to involve trade unions in all the discussions that we are having. I recognise the concern that shop workers have about being in a position in which they have to enforce the wearing of face coverings or take action against people who are not wearing them. We do not want shop workers to be in that position, so we will have further consultation to work out such issues and will come to a conclusion on the matter.

I think that there is a strong case for the mandatory wearing of face coverings in shops, as there is for the mandatory wearing of them on public transport, but we need to work through the issues properly. I say to people across the country, do not wait for a decision on the wearing of face coverings being mandatory, because it is for your protection. For the reasons that I set out earlier, by wearing a face covering you protect other people, and other people wearing a face covering protects you. I ask people across Scotland to do that now. If you are in a shop or on public transport—where you will be required to do this from Monday—make sure that you cover your face. We are asking you to wear a face covering, not a medical mask, to provide additional protection.

However, it is the other measures—physical distancing, hand washing, cough hygiene—that are the most important things in reducing the risk of transmission.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): What is the scientific basis for the First Minister's view that outdoor markets are safe to open, but not beer gardens?

The First Minister: I genuinely refer Graham Simpson to the large amount of material that is already published, which is in addition to the scientific evidence that I get directly. There is a lot of emerging evidence that, in particular locations,

including pubs, whether indoors or outdoors, the risk of transmission could be higher. Gyms and places where there is congregational or communal singing fall into the same category. In short—I am not expressing this in the way that an expert would do—we are talking about places where people's pattern of breathing might be changed. If someone is shouting to be heard over music or is singing, they are more likely to inhale and have the virus transmitted in that way.

That emerging evidence is very strong. The situation is not necessarily the same in places such as markets, where people wander around, but even outside at a pub, if there is music playing or there are lots of people there, particularly when there is alcohol involved, and voices are raised, in summary, the risk is higher. I am not qualified to say how valid that is or what the correct mitigations are, but that risk is there and scientists across the world are talking about it.

People are now used to hearing about the R number; I encourage them to read up on the K number, which is about superspreading and the kind of situations that I have spoken about. When there are such risks, it would be reckless and irresponsible of me not to understand them better before taking the decision to reopen pubs.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The First Minister is aware that the hospitality sector faces catastrophic job losses, the extent of which will depend on the decisions that she takes in the future. Glasgow, the city that the First Minister and I represent, is very dependent on the hospitality sector. Businesses in the sector locked down when they were asked to, but many do not believe that they have been given the comfort that they need. They are terrified that the furlough scheme, which ends in October, will finish well before any recovery plan is in place.

I have listened carefully to what the First Minister has said to others. I fully understand why she cannot give indicative dates—I totally accept that—but she does not seem to have addressed what specific assistance the Government can give the hospitality sector or what recovery plan it has for the sector. Does the First Minister have any thoughts on a recovery plan specifically for the hospitality sector? Many businesses in the sector do not get grants because their property has a rateable value of more than £51,000. I would like the First Minister to provide some detail. She has said that she will meet the sector. Will she talk to it about what specific recovery measures she can offer?

The First Minister: I will address specific strands of that question. We will produce guidance for the hospitality sector on safe reopening, but we need to understand some of the risks that I mentioned so that we know that we are advising

businesses to do the right things and all the things that they need to do. That is why we have commissioned the additional work that I mentioned. Like any other sector, the hospitality sector needs clear guidance on the steps that it will be required to take.

Secondly, suggestions have been made by, for example, Glasgow City Council about how we could provide support to the hospitality sector over the medium term—that would involve providing financial support to reduce some of the burdens that businesses in the sector are under. We are looking at those suggestions closely and will engage with the sector on them.

Thirdly, on the furlough scheme, I hope that we will be well on the way to recovery but that depends on suppressing the virus over the next few months. I have said before and I will say again that I think that it is essential that there is an extension of the furlough scheme so that there is not that cliff edge for companies, particularly those that are in sectors that we know will have suffered a longer-lasting impact. We will continue to make that case strongly to the Treasury.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): The First Minister has confirmed that face coverings will be mandatory on public transport from Monday. Are there any plans to encourage people to wear them by providing masks at train stations, for example?

The First Minister: We encourage everybody to think about how they will equip themselves if they are travelling on public transport from Monday. Passengers are advised to use simple face coverings such as scarves or bandanas, for example; this is not about requesting or advising people to use medical face masks.

We expect that there will be a small number of passengers who might not have immediate access to a face covering or might need some encouragement, so we are working with ScotRail to help travellers across the rail and bus industry to make the change in the initial stages. ScotRail has a supply of masks to give away to passengers in the early days, and they will be distributed at rail stations and major bus stations for a limited time to give travellers the opportunity to source their own face coverings.

I stress that I am talking about simple face coverings. People do not have to go and buy medical masks. In fact, we are expressly saying that that is not required.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. I am afraid that that is all that we have time for. We have to move on to the next item of business; my apologies to those members whom I was not able to call.

There will be a short pause before the next item of business. I remind members to observe social distancing rules if they are leaving the chamber.

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, Europe and External Affairs

14:02

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): I call members back together for the commencement of business.

The next item of business is portfolio questions, starting with questions on the constitution, Europe and external affairs. I remind members that questions 1 and 5 are grouped together.

If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, I ask them to press their request-to-speak button if they are in the chamber or, if they are participating remotely, to enter the letter R in the chat function during the relevant question.

We have some quite detailed questions, so I ask members to try to be succinct.

Brexit Negotiations

1. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its analysis of the Brexit negotiations. (S5O-04412)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell): As the member is aware, this morning I appeared before the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, at which she was present. I depressed committee members then and I do not want to depress her yet again with the same answer. However, the fourth round of negotiations has ended with no discernible progress: the same intractable disagreements remain, and there was no political movement on them.

There was a discussion between the Prime Minister and Ursula von der Leyen on Monday, and although there was an indication that both sides wish to intensify discussion, there was no indication of clarity around how a decision should be reached. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom Government has decided not to seek an extension of the transition period, which will be deeply damaging to Scotland.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the cabinet secretary for his answer. The news remains as depressing as it was this morning. To Scotland's extreme misfortune, we are stuck with an extraordinarily reckless UK Tory Prime Minister whom we did not vote for and who is thirled to an ideological political obsession that we do not subscribe to and which will cause untold damage to our economy, jobs and, indeed, our way of life.

My constituents in Cowdenbeath did not vote to become poorer. Surely there must be a better path for Scotland.

Michael Russell: There is, indeed, a better path for Scotland, and that is—as the member is well aware—the path of independence. *[Interruption.]* Of course, the moment that I mention that, there is baying from those on the Tory and Labour benches. *[Interruption.]* Sorry—there is only one person on the Labour benches, and I would never accuse Sarah Boyack of baying at anybody; the noise from the Tories must have echoed around the chamber.

I make it absolutely clear that anybody who believes that there is still validity in remaining with the present UK Government has a very considerable job of persuasion to do—indeed, were they able to do that, they would be able to sell London bridge to anybody, anywhere in the world.

The reality of the current situation is this: if a Government refuses to accept, as the UK Government does, the mandate of the Scottish people, and if Scottish politicians—we are talking about MSPs—refuse to accept the mandate of the Scottish people, the only conclusion that we can come to is to ask, “What are those politicians doing here?”

Brexit Negotiations

5. Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on Brexit negotiations. (S5O-04416)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell): I can provide this update: there is only a single Tory left in the chamber—maybe they are creeping away.

Beatrice Wishart was present at the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee this morning and will be aware that my view is that the negotiations are stuck, that there is no political will from the United Kingdom Government to deliver anything but no deal or a low deal, and that, were we to allow that to happen, there would be severe and lasting damage to Scotland.

Beatrice Wishart: When no deal became a possibility last year, businesses were asked to prepare. They were told to do what they could to mitigate the impacts in case it became a reality. Should businesses be making no-deal preparations now and, if so, will they be supported by the Scottish Government to do so?

Michael Russell: Beatrice Wishart raises a very important point. I indicated two weeks ago in a statement in the chamber that the Scottish

Government is reluctantly but necessarily having to restart its no-deal preparations. It is doing so at the same time as we are faced with the Covid crisis, which is the worst crisis that any of us has lived through. According to the front page of, I think, the *Financial Times*, the recession will potentially be the worst since the frost fair of 1709, an event at which neither I nor Beatrice Wishart was present.

In all the circumstances, we are asking people to do something that will be incredibly difficult. Businesspeople who are trying to save their own business and save the economy are being penalised by the addition of a type of Brexit that will be immensely damaging. I can no longer take seriously any Conservative who says that they are interested in business when they could, at the stroke of a pen, take that threat away for the next two years. They could still do that until the end of the month.

We have to prepare, and we will have to talk to businesses about how they prepare. Before the First Minister's statement today, I was involved in a telephone discussion with people involved in the food industry, and everybody now realises that preparation will have to take place. They are looking at that with dread, because they are also facing the Covid disaster. We need to recognise that and try to help as much as we can within our own resources, which are not infinite.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I am pleased to still be here and to be standing up for the 1 million-plus people in Scotland who voted for Brexit.

Will the cabinet secretary admit—honestly, for once—that he has been keen to sabotage Brexit negotiations since the beginning and that, rather than getting behind the UK's chief negotiator David Frost as both sides ramp up negotiations to deliver a good deal, the truth is that he simply does not want Brexit to happen?

Michael Russell: It is not a blinding revelation that I do not want Brexit to happen; I would have thought that that was immensely obvious. I am talking about the reality, in which the type of discussion that we have had with the UK is about trying to find a way in which the circle can be squared.

I do not believe that many people in Scotland would vote for the type of Brexit that is now emerging, not just as a preference of the UK Government, but as a decision of the UK Government, which is either a no deal or a low deal. Hardly anybody would vote for that. I am sure that the constituents of Mr Mundell who voted for Brexit—and some did, although they were not in the majority, just as an overwhelming majority of 72 per cent of people in Scotland voted against

Brexit—[*Interruption.*] I hear that 17,000 people voted for it—apparently Mr Mundell knows each of them. He should go and ask—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Russell. Mr Mundell, please do not sit there and yell across the chamber at Mr Russell. It is discourteous to me and to those at home who are trying to hear what is going on. If Mr Mundell wants to have that argument, he can have it afterwards. I am sure that Mr Russell would oblige.

Michael Russell: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I shall look forward to you managing me in future bouts.

The reality of the situation, which Mr Mundell needs to recognise, is that not all 17,000 people voted for the same type of Brexit. For example, many of them perhaps voted for the assurances that the current Prime Minister gave, before he was Prime Minister, that we would stay in the single market and the customs union. However, the reality is that Scotland voted against Brexit by a vast majority and it is being dragged out of Europe against its will.

I repeat the line that I used in the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee this morning. It is not good enough for Mr Mundell to behave like Citizen Smith and to say to his constituents: "Good news, comrades—the butter ration has been cut." However, that is what he is doing.

Covid-19 (Co-operation with Europe)

2. **Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on co-operation with Europe in relation to tackling Covid-19. (S50-04413)

The Minister for Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth): The Government believes that working closely with our European partners is key in fighting Covid-19, as the disease knows no borders. Indeed, collaboration with international partners to draw on wider international expertise is a key element that we have sought to include in our "Framework for Decision Making: Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis".

My colleagues and I have been following the measures that the European Union has adopted in response to the pandemic with great interest in relation to both the immediate emergency response and the longer-term road to recovery. We are actively engaging with the United Kingdom Government in relation to Westminster's decisions on engagement with the EU to ensure that our voice is heard.

Neil Bibby: As the minister said, no nation will beat coronavirus alone. The pandemic is global

and we must confront it in co-operation and solidarity with our neighbours and the international community. To that end, will the minister outline whether the authorities in Scotland are co-operating with the other nations in the UK and with nations in Europe and around the world in a global drive—[Inaudible.] Will she also outline what steps are being taken to ensure that we have stockpiles of medicines and pharmaceuticals, given the concurrent threat of Brexit to the security of our supplies?

Jenny Gilruth: Neil Bibby is absolutely right to say that international co-operation has never been more important. We are liaising with UK Government officials in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department of Health and Social Care on all aspects of vaccine development, including the work of the Covid-19 vaccine task force and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. Given the range of trials that are under way, engagement at the EU and global levels will be key in supporting any Covid-19 vaccination programme in Scotland. We therefore welcomed the launch of the EU strategy for Covid-19 vaccines last Friday and the confirmation that the UK is eligible to participate.

The Scottish Government remains of the view that it is reckless of the UK Government to impose any additional damage on Scotland's economy at this time through its refusal to seek an extension to the transition period.

We are working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care and the other devolved Governments to plan for the end of the transition period, which includes doing all that we can to ensure that we still have access to medicines in the event of border disruption. Those plans include contracts with pharmaceutical companies and suppliers and the stockpiling of medicines, which we know will be more challenging given the current circumstances and the impact of Covid-19.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let me say a wee word. The questions and answers are rather long. We will not get through all the questions if we keep that up.

Slavery (Scotland's Historical Role)

3. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the issues raised by the global Black Lives Matter protests, what steps it is taking to acknowledge and counter Scotland's historical role in slavery and promote the contribution that can be made through its international development work with Commonwealth countries. (S5O-04414)

The Minister for Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth): During last week's

Parliamentary debate on anti-racism, the Scottish Government and the entire chamber were united in their solidarity and support for the Black Lives Matter movement.

Although we are rightly and resolutely focused on improving the lives of black, Asian and minority ethnic people in Scotland, it is clear that the roots of the entrenched structural racism in our country can be traced to the abhorrent practice of slavery. As a country, we must acknowledge Scotland's role in the legacy of slavery, upon which many of our cities are built, and the motion for that debate included a commitment to establish a museum to address Scotland's historical links to the slave trade.

In terms of international development, we place great importance on Scotland being a good global citizen, which means playing our part in tackling global challenges, including injustice and inequality. We embed human rights and promote a focus on equality across all our development activity.

Sarah Boyack: I welcome those actions. Minister, at last week's meeting of the cross-party group on international development, a key issue was the negative impact of the pandemic on charities, which do fantastic work in developing countries.

Given our historical role in slavery and the British empire, which saw the large-scale extraction of wealth from across the world, what will the Scottish Government do to promote and support the work of Scottish charities with Commonwealth countries to eradicate the inequalities that still exist, whether it is a lack of clean water or long-term inequalities that need to be addressed?

Jenny Gilruth: Covid-19 has thrown up a number of challenges for all charities, not least in the sector of international development, as the member rightly says. I have proactively met—remotely—some of our key stakeholders in Rwanda and Zambia and I will shortly meet those based in Malawi. Those conversations have been helpful in establishing how Covid-19 is impacting people on the ground. All our projects are also undertaking their own impact assessments in relation to Covid-19.

We fund local charities through our £10 million-a-year international development fund, through the climate justice fund and through the humanitarian emergency fund. We will also provide core funding to networking organisations to support the international development sector. On that point, I was grateful to meet Scotland's International Development Alliance last week to discuss some of the challenges that the sector faces in light of Covid-19. We will continue to work with those

charities in the fight against Covid-19, which is of particular importance in the field of international development.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a short supplementary from Stuart McMillan—followed by a short answer, please.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Scotland's role in slavery and human rights needs a full debate. This week, I suggested basing a national museum for human rights in Greenock due to our many historical links to slavery. Is that something that the minister and the Scottish Government would consider?

Jenny Gilruth: As he is Greenock's constituency MSP, I understand Stuart McMillan's interest in this matter and in his local area's history in relation to Scotland's involvement in the slave trade. No decision has yet been taken regarding the location of a national museum for human rights, although he will be aware that that was agreed to in last week's debate, as I said earlier.

The Scottish Government is engaging with Glasgow university to do work in this area as part of a wider conversation about how we properly acknowledge Scotland's role in the slave trade. I will ask officials to keep Stuart McMillan apprised of progress in this area, given his constituency interest.

Veterans (Covid-19 Support)

4. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support vulnerable veterans during the Covid-19 outbreak. (S5O-04415)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that all armed forces personnel, veterans and their families living in Scotland are able to access the best possible care and support.

At a time of such uncertainty for so many, we are taking a number of actions; for example, we are disseminating advice to third sector organisations that provide direct support to veterans; we are working closely with Veterans Scotland to ensure that it has up-to-date information on the latest advice and guidance on the Covid-19 outbreak; and we are supporting Veterans First Point, which has been proactively working to support veterans through its services during this unprecedented time.

Jeremy Balfour: I want to focus on young army veterans who will be looking for employment outwith the armed forces. As the minister is aware, many of them struggle the most to get into employment and the employment scheme is there to help them. Can the minister set out how many

ex-armed forces personnel have been supported through the community jobs Scotland programme and how the Scottish Government intends to use the programme to get young veterans back into work?

Graeme Dey: Mr Balfour highlights an extremely important issue, namely early service leavers and their routes into employment. Alongside supporting the spouses of serving personnel, this is becoming a particular area of focus for the Scottish Government. There have been a total of 37 declared ex-armed forces young people on the community jobs Scotland programme since phase 5, when they were added to the eligible groups, but more early service leavers will be supported as a result of meeting other eligibility criteria without having declared their service history.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, discussions continue between Scottish Government officials and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations about the best interventions to support individuals on the CJS programme. However, in addition to the support that we offer through that, Skills Development Scotland has undertaken a range of actions to support individuals whose education, job or future choices have been affected.

I would add one small point. An immediate pathway into employment will not best serve all early service leavers. For some, moving into education as a means to enhance future employment prospects might benefit them more. Therefore, the Scottish Government also looks to offer a range of options to early service leavers in that regard.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I want to get through the last three questions, so I ask members please to be concise.

New Trade Agreements

6. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what engagement and discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government in relation to the forming of new trade agreements. (S5O-04417)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell): My colleague Ivan McKee has had extensive discussions, but, despite his and the Scottish Government's best efforts, the approach of the UK Government means that the quality and scope of that engagement remains below what is required to ensure that UK trade policy identifies, protects and promotes Scotland's interests. We continue to try to influence that, but clearly we could not consent to legislation that would put us in a position of disadvantage.

Alex Rowley: Listening to Donald Trump and his continued commitment to a trade deal, many in Scotland are worried that such a deal will result in a reduction in food standards, in workers' rights, in health and safety and, ultimately, in jobs. Are people right to be concerned about that? Would any NHS services be at risk in a trade deal with the USA?

Michael Russell: The member's point is an important one. The US trade ambassador made it clear even today that there can be no trade agreement without, for example, access for the US meat industry. That would mean a lowering of standards. If that is the position on the US meat industry, it will equally be the position on other areas. Countries negotiate hard on such matters. Clearly, the level of protection that we had as a member of the EU, which enabled us to resist that, will be considerably lowered in any case, but it will be completely abandoned if the UK Government follows its ideological prejudices and simply tries to have the lowest possible standards.

In any case, the US is also saying that it is highly unlikely that there will be a trade deal this year. The Australian, New Zealand, Japanese and American trade deals are chimeras. They are not going to produce anything of great significance. For example, the Government's own figures on the New Zealand trade deal show that it will have zero financial impact to our benefit.

These are important issues, and they are being misrepresented by the UK Government. We must tell the truth about them.

Brexit (Financial Services)

7. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to evidence submitted to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee stating that over 320 financial services firms have taken steps to relocate to Europe before the end of the Brexit transition period. (S5O-04418)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell): That is a depressing figure. It indicates the need that those companies to move at least part of their businesses out of where they are presently located in order to continue to operate, and it is yet more damage to Scotland coming from the process of Brexit. In the face of uncertainty, I fully understand what companies are doing, but I regret it.

Joan McAlpine: The evidence on financial services was given to the committee by Professor Sarah Hall. She also warned that other services, including accountancy, architecture, management consultancy and the media industry, require freedom of movement and automatic recognition

of their qualifications post-Brexit. What discussions has the cabinet secretary had with representatives of those professions on their concerns about the state of the negotiations?

Michael Russell: I meet people regularly to talk about the negotiations, although that has not taken place nearly as regularly in recent months, because of the lockdown. I am renewing those discussions now in the light of the severe threat of a no-deal or low-deal Brexit.

The two issues that are involved are mutual recognition of qualifications, which is essential and is part the negotiations—although, like the negotiations overall, that part is not going well—and freedom of movement. Freedom of movement has been immensely beneficial for Scotland. How any representative in the chamber could argue for its end completely defeats me. It affects not only extremely important things such as labour in the soft-fruit industry, which my colleague Graeme Dey took me to see some time ago, but a whole range of the professions, as Joan McAlpine indicated. Those professions will suffer. Our academic reputation and universities will also suffer because of the effect on our involvement in research. It is highly to be regretted. Tory support for ending freedom of movement is self-harm for Scotland.

Brexit (European Union Relations)

8. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the impact of Brexit on European Union-United Kingdom relations, in light of concerns that any breakdown could have a detrimental impact, including in Scotland, on the response to issues such as the Covid-19 crisis. (S5O-04419)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell): My colleague Jenny Gilruth has referred to Covid-19 in response to another question.

Some actions by the UK Government have not been positive or beneficial on Covid-19—for example, the failure to take part in arrangements for buying personal protective equipment. Recently, the UK has failed to take part in a very innocent project that would have given people information about the state of lockdown, and of the openness or otherwise of borders, across Europe. The actions of the UK Government are not helping in that regard, and will not help EU-UK relations.

Just last week, I was talking to somebody in Brussels who said that there was a palpable sense of anger about the way in which the UK has behaved to date. That will not improve, and it is not good for our reputation.

Colin Beattie: What does the cabinet secretary make of the suggestion by Boris Johnson that a deal between the UK and the EU can be agreed by the end of July?

Michael Russell: I am very sceptical about that. Deals can always be done, but what sort of deal can be done by the end of July? The UK could suddenly say that it wants to be in the single market and the customs union. I would agree that a lot of work would have to be done, but what type of deal can be done by the end of July, and how long will it take to implement? If one did a really bad deal and could not implement it in anything like the period that exists, that would be very problematic indeed. No deal would be very bad, too.

The question is whether there could be a good deal for Scotland within that timescale, which could also be implemented by the end of the year. The answer to that is an emphatic and clear no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on the constitution, Europe and external affairs. Before we move to the next item of business, I say that we have gone quite a bit over time on that slot; we cannot do that on every occasion, so I ask members and ministers to reflect on the length of questions and answers.

Economy, Fair Work and Culture

14:27

Covid-19 (Safe Reopening)

1. **Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update of its plans to safely reopen sectors of the economy. (S5O-04420)

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): Our route map sets out points at which different types of work and workplaces are likely to get back up and running. We are working closely with industry, unions and regulators to produce sectoral guidance on how best to do that safely.

Earlier today, the First Minister's announcement set out how we intend to move to phase 2 of the route map. It included the next steps for businesses in key areas, including manufacturing and retail.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before Mr Cameron asks his supplementary question, Mr Hepburn, you were very difficult to hear. It sounded a bit bubbly. There may be something wrong with your microphone; you may be able to do something that could help.

Donald Cameron: This morning, I was contacted by the owner of a small, independent shop in a town in the Highlands, who is desperate at not being able to open right now. In the wake of the First Minister's statement, she has, at last, a date of 29 June to work towards. Nonetheless, she spoke earlier of her utter despair at not being able to open right away.

Does the minister understand the frustration of many small businesses, which have acted responsibly throughout this crisis, and yet face being closed for almost two further weeks—or, for those without an outdoor entrance to their premises, for even longer?

Jamie Hepburn: Yes, of course I understand the frustrations.

The point that is inherent in Donald Cameron's question is about how we go about opening up the economy safely. Everything that we are doing has been geared to that end. I understand the frustrations that businesses feel; however, we are moving forward on the basis that we want to get the economy going in a way that protects lives and reduces transmission of Covid-19. We are doing that in the correct manner. Mr Cameron's constituent can look forward with greater certainty to reopening in due course.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: May I have short supplementaries please from Rhoda Grant and Kenneth Gibson?

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Many small companies are not part of sector trade bodies and will need advice on how they can reopen safely. Has the minister given any thought to whether a body will be charged with giving that advice to small companies to keep them and their customers safe?

Jamie Hepburn: Yes, we are giving attention to that. One source of advice is Find Business Support, which is a website that the Scottish Government operates; I would prefer all businesses to use that as their first source of information. We work closely with the Federation of Small Businesses and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce to stay informed of practical steps that we can take, and we are cognisant of the issue.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Virtually every sector of the economy, from hospitality to transport and from local government to health, will need additional funds this financial year. Although figures cannot be precise at this stage, is there a minimum figure of additional resource that the Scottish Government will require to deal with the pandemic and the Brexit transition without having to cut services or impose austerity?

Jamie Hepburn: From the outset of responding to the crisis, we have expended significant

resource—more than £2 billion—to support businesses. We have looked for gaps in provision and rolled out wider forms of support, and we will keep those matters under review. Mr Gibson can be assured that we are alert to those issues and we continue to consider them.

Oil and Gas (Job Losses)

2. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to respond to the loss of oil and gas jobs in the north-east. (S5O-04421)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): Last week, we committed more than £60 million to an energy transition fund, which is north-east focused and will support businesses to diversify and support inclusive growth. The strategic leadership group on oil and gas and energy transition, which is chaired by the Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands, Paul Wheelhouse, has been refocused and is now meeting monthly and working with Oil and Gas UK, the Oil and Gas Authority, trade unions and employers to identify practical actions to support the sector, its supply chain and, most crucially, the workforce. The UK Government retains many of the key levers required, including delivery of an oil and gas sector deal. It is critical that both Governments are doing all that we can to protect jobs and retain vital skills.

Gillian Martin: The cabinet secretary will know that I am on record calling for a resumption of the transition training fund. Yesterday, at the COVID-19 Committee, I was joined by Scottish Renewables in that call to reinstitute the fund with a focus on retraining for redeployment to the renewables sector. What is the cabinet secretary's response to those calls?

Fiona Hyslop: It is very important that our recovery is green; that will require skills and, as part of that just transition, support for those who are reskilling into the area. I reassure the member that only yesterday, along with the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Richard Lochhead, and the Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills, Jamie Hepburn, we met the chairs and chief executives of Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council to discuss the support and training that will be required for what will be a substantial labour market response. Clearly, regional support for regional jobs must be identified as a key priority, and for the north-east that is definitely in the area that Gillian Martin describes.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will know that the Curlew floating production and storage vessel is

now to be decommissioned in Norway after sitting for several months in Dundee. Given that the work could have been done by a number of Scottish yards had they been given the opportunity to tender, can she tell us what engagement there has been with Shell and Exxon on decommissioning over recent months?

Fiona Hyslop: Paul Wheelhouse, as the energy minister, is actively engaged with all the oil companies and is considering some of those issues—particularly on the work sources. Those are some of the areas that the strategic leadership group on oil and gas and energy transition, which he chairs, has been looking at. Clearly, it is essential that we position ourselves to ensure that we can get the contracts that are available in relation to decommissioning and, as the relatively new economy secretary, I am determined to do that.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): My question follows on from the previous question. Although it is important that the workforce is reskilled and ready for new opportunities, what is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that decommissioning work comes to Scottish ports such as Lerwick?

Fiona Hyslop: Again, I refer the member to the transport and infrastructure portfolio; energy is part of that. Paul Wheelhouse is the lead in that portfolio area, and I will ensure that he can respond in more detail to those questions. However, because of our experience in the oil and gas sector, Scotland can and should be ahead in decommissioning and it is vital that we try and get the opportunities for that work. We need the supply chain companies and people with skills to ensure that the work can be delivered; therefore, a regionally responsive solution to a green recovery will be helpful for those who want to advance the decommissioning sector.

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): We welcome the £62 million energy transition fund from the Scottish Government; it will position the north-east as a hydrogen model region, which the Scottish Conservatives have been calling for for some time. When can we expect further detail of when that money will be distributed and how the projects will be funded?

Fiona Hyslop: When I announced it just over a week ago, we set out the areas that the fund will support, including the energy transition zone, oil and gas technology, a net zero solution centre, a global underwater hub, and hydrogen and carbon capture utilisation and storage projects. The member will recall that, in 2015, the Conservative Government cancelled the carbon capture utilisation and storage project at Peterhead; had the project gone ahead, we would be far ahead in renewable energy and, most important, in the area

of hydrogen. It is important that the Conservatives get behind the fund; let us see proposals coming forward from the United Kingdom Government for an oil and gas deal.

Covid-19 (Shared Premises)

3. **Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what the economic impact of Covid-19 has been on businesses occupying shared premises. (S5O-04422)

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): Covid-19 is having an unprecedented economic impact on businesses across all sectors of the economy. We are doing all that we can to provide support for businesses to protect jobs, prevent business closures and promote economic recovery.

As part of that, in response to feedback from business, on 8 June we expanded the coronavirus business support fund. Small businesses that lease or rent space—such as shared office space, business incubators and shared industrial units—from a landlord that is the registered ratepayer for the property, can now apply for a small business grant. Businesses that meet the eligibility criteria can apply to their local authority until 10 July 2020.

Annie Wells: Again, the Scottish Government has moved the goalposts.

“Are they actually trying to help? This is pathetic.”

That is what a small business owner at the Forge Market who wrote to me said about the Scottish National Party’s false promises on grant support. Numerous others have been in touch to ask why they are having to jump through hoops that other businesses did not have to jump through, including providing evidence that they have multiple staff members and use of a business bank account. What does the minister have to say to the businesses at the Forge Market who feel let down?

Jamie Hepburn: I object to the suggestion that we have moved the goalposts. We have engaged with business organisations clearly about the need to fill a gap that existed before that announcement.

In relation to the difference in approach, of course this is about a different cohort of businesses. Previously, the matter was more straightforward, because the process applied to businesses that were registered as eligible for the small business bonus scheme. Now that the fund has been expanded, that is not the case, so it is necessary that people provide evidence in order that we can prevent people from drawing down support to which they are not entitled. I recognise that that creates a step that businesses have to take, but it is the proportionate and sensible thing to do, because we are talking about public funds.

Covid-19 (Support Grant)

4. **Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the economic impact on retail, hospitality and leisure businesses, what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the £51,000 rateable-value ceiling on eligibility for the £25,000 support grant. (S5O-04423)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): We have always been clear that we are passing on every penny of consequential funding that has come to Scotland. The package of support in Scotland now exceeds £2.3 billion, which is more than the consequentials that we have received from the UK Government.

I raised the issue of the £51,000 rateable-value threshold, which is the same in England, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer in an economy meeting several weeks ago. Last week the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Tourism wrote jointly to the chancellor on the issue.

Christine Grahame: I am not doing much better. I have written to the Secretary of State for Scotland—it is Alister Jack, in case people do not know who he is—asking him to lift the £51,000 rates barrier to accessing the grant, and to provide the consequential funding for Scotland. That was in order to protect iconic rural hotels, such as the Peebles Hydro. I am yet to receive even an acknowledgement.

Should I continue to pin my hopes on Alister Jack helping the hospitality sector in Scotland, or should I resign myself to the fact that he is not Scotland’s man in the UK Cabinet but the UK Cabinet’s man in Scotland?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was a Deputy Presiding Officer showing everyone how to ask a short question. [*Laughter.*]

Fiona Hyslop: My frustration is shared by people in the hospitality industry. That was a clear route to support businesses that have who had a £51,000 rateable value. In the meantime, we have identified specific funds that are unique to Scotland—the creative hospitality and tourism fund and the pivotal enterprise resilience fund—which have provided funding to many hotels the length and breadth of Scotland, including the Auchrannie resort in Kenneth Gibson’s constituency, and the Selkirk Arms.

However, if we do not we get some additional support from the UK Government, that will become increasingly problematic. An extension of the

coronavirus job retention scheme would help the hospitality sector and tourism in general, including hotels such as the one that was mentioned by Christine Grahame.

Christine Grahame's remarks on the Secretary of State for Scotland focused on whether he is actually standing up for Scotland's interests. If he were, he would be pressing the interests of tourism and hospitality and getting results. So far, there have been no results.

Green Economic Recovery (Priorities)

5. Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what priorities will guide its plans for a green economic recovery. (S5O-04424)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): A green recovery is one that is aligned to our ambitious climate change targets and our vision of a just, sustainable and resilient Scotland. It will seek to address the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Our plans for a green economic recovery will be informed by advice from several groups, including the advisory group on economic recovery, the UK Committee on Climate Change, the just transition commission and the sustainable renewal advisory group.

Maurice Golden: A genuinely green recovery must mean that associated manufacturing jobs stop going abroad instead of to Scottish workers. The Scottish National Party has been planning for a deposit return scheme for more than a decade. Can the cabinet secretary say whether the deposit return scheme reverse vending machines will be built in Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: The deposit return scheme is the responsibility of my colleague Roseanna Cunningham. We know that there are some concerns about roll-out of the scheme in relation to retail and hospitality, so there have been pauses in that. I do not know the details of who will manufacture the machines. I will ask my colleague Roseanna Cunningham to write to Mr Golden on that.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Why is constructing the huge jackets for the Seagreen offshore wind farm cheaper on the other side of the planet than building them here is? What are we not getting right in this country that allows that to happen?

Fiona Hyslop: The contracts for the Seagreen project have yet to be announced. However, we are determined that Scotland should have a supply chain that can compete.

One of the real issues that we have, however, is the current UK Government's reliance on the contracts for difference scheme, which does not allow us to position Scotland's manufacturing base as competitively as those in countries that have far more opportunities to subsidise or support their industry to produce jackets cheaply, as Willie Rennie described. He will know that in the Chinese economy, for example, the steel industry is heavily subsidised. Steel is a major component, and contracts that involve steel are cheaper with manufacturing in some countries.

National Collective Bargaining

6. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it takes to encourage employers and unions across major economic sectors to engage in national collective bargaining. (S5O-04425)

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): We have been working with the Scottish Trades Union Congress and other stakeholders to promote collective bargaining. We are focusing initially on the social care, early learning and child care, hospitality and construction sectors. A mapping exercise is under way to determine current collective bargaining and national and sectoral agreements across Scotland, which will inform further work to increase Scotland's collective bargaining coverage. Our commitment to promoting collective bargaining is demonstrated through the inclusion of an employee voice indicator within the national performance framework.

Neil Findlay: Everyone will know that trade unions have played a vital role in maintaining jobs throughout the Covid crisis, in negotiating business and employee support, and in keeping workers and customers safe. It is now time to move proactively to establish frameworks in sectors where the Scottish Government has major spending power and influence.

During discussion of emergency Covid legislation, the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs said that it was impossible to set up collective bargaining in the social care sector—which was, of course, rubbish. However, we passed that Covid legislation, so will the minister now commit to moving beyond discussions and papers going back and forward, to hard practical steps to establish a system of national collective bargaining in the social care sector?

Jamie Hepburn: I concur with Neil Findlay's view of the vital role that the trade unions have played throughout the current period. Along with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture, I have been working very closely with the

STUC in meetings over the period. Those meetings have been essential.

On Neil Findlay's question, I have just laid out concrete steps to take the matter forward. We are working closely with trade unions to understand the gaps that exist in terms of collective bargaining, and we will continue that. That is a sincere and genuine commitment.

There are clear limitations, in that we do not have control over employment law, but we are not letting that act as a barrier. We will get on with the work to increase collective bargaining across the country.

Theatres (Covid-19 Support)

7. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what support is being provided to the theatre sector during the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-04426)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government has made available a range of funds, including £120 million through the pivotal enterprise resilience fund and £30 million through the creative, tourism and hospitality enterprises hardship fund. The approach that is taken by those funds is unique to Scotland, and a number of theatres have received support through those routes. I met the Federation of Scottish Theatre on 11 June and pledged to continue to work with it to consider the best way to continue supporting the sector through the crisis.

Claire Baker: The cabinet secretary will have seen the report this week from Oxford Economics on the projected economic impact of Covid-19 on the creative industries, which stated that Scotland will be the hardest hit in relative terms, with Scottish respondents the most pessimistic about the 2020 outlook. The Lyceum Theatre and Pitlochry Theatre are proposing redundancies, and many theatres are cancelling their Christmas programmes, which are often a financial lifeline. I am pleased that the cabinet secretary has met the Federation of Scottish Theatre recently. Will she commit to working with others to deliver a medium and long-term creative arts recovery package for the performing sector, recognising that the challenges that it faces are longer lasting and potentially devastating?

Fiona Hyslop: I thank the member for raising this critical issue. As I have announced, we have provided support in the short term, but what the theatre sector particularly needs is support for the medium to long term, because it has to look far forward in terms of its programming and what it can do. Individual theatres that are independent will have to take their own steps. In fact, the ones that have suffered the most are those that have

been the most commercially supported rather than those that are supported by public funds. It is not only about the buildings; it is about how people can come back to them safely, and we are already working on guidance in those areas, for the creative sector in particular.

There are also issues for people who work in the sector. Freelancers are very much attached to the theatre world, and there are ways that we can help them in the longer term until the point at which they can be re-employed. I have already raised with the UK Government thoughts about having some kind of freelance retainer scheme for the theatre sector that would stretch beyond October, because, although some organisations can take advantage of the job retention scheme, we are looking at an autumn re-opening for many sectors. I want to work with everybody and anybody—including Claire Baker—on this issue, because we have a particular interest in it.

The creative industry is a very successful part of Scotland—probably disproportionately so in comparison with the situation in the rest of the UK, with the exception of London—which is why this has hit us even harder. We were very rapid in our response, but I acknowledge that more will have to be done in the medium to long term.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Many artists, performers and venues have been adversely affected as a result of the Edinburgh fringe festival being cancelled this summer due to coronavirus. This is the first time that a cancellation has taken place since the festival began, more than 70 years ago. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to mitigate the impact?

Fiona Hyslop: Cancelling this year's fringe was a great disappointment to many. It was obviously a very difficult decision, and the fringe will be sorely missed.

We have provided a £1 million interest-free loan to the fringe, which has been warmly welcomed. The festival has also received funding from the pivotal enterprise resilience fund and support from the City of Edinburgh Council. It is really important that we provide flexibility in existing funds. For example, the existing expo and platforms for creative excellence funds have been used not only by the fringe but by other festivals to ensure that they can maintain their sustainability.

The rapid decisions that we took have helped to ensure that those festivals will return next year. In the meantime, I thank everybody involved in them for helping to keep Scotland safe by—unfortunately—cancelling this year's festivals, including the fringe.

Music Festivals (Support)

8. **Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is offering to the live music festival sector to support the return of such events in 2021. (S5O-04427)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): The Government recognises that the restrictions that are required to control the virus have had a devastating impact on live music festivals and, indeed, the entire events sector in Scotland.

Businesses in the music festival sector have been able to apply for support from the resilience and creative hardship funds. However, we recognise that those support packages cannot help everyone, and we are working with the events industry advisory group, which represents the festival sector, to identify what additional support would help with recovery.

The sector provides a major contribution to Scotland's cultural life and economy, and we are determined that it will rebound strongly from the current crisis.

Iain Gray: I ask the minister, as part of her considerations, to ensure that support is available not only to high-profile national musical festivals but to important local ones such as fringe by the sea in North Berwick, Haddstock in Haddington and the Lammermuir festival, which takes place across East Lothian.

Fiona Hyslop: We cannot underestimate the power of culture to drive us through this very difficult time, and local festivals are particularly important.

Creative Scotland has ensured that regularly funded organisations—many of which are involved in small local festivals—have had their funding extended for 2020 to allow them to return in 2021. It is also encouraging local festivals to honour contracted payments to freelance performers who were booked for 2020. Some are negotiating part payment now and part payment for 2021. However, as Iain Gray pointed out, not all festivals will be funded by Creative Scotland; therefore, we have to look at things in the round.

As I expressed in a similar answer to Claire Baker, the entertainment and culture sector is one of the sectors that will be hit hardest and longest, so it needs more longer-term support. The temporary support that is in place now will help for this summer. However, there is a longer lead-in period for festivals and some do not take place in summer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on economy, fair work and culture. I allowed it to run on a bit because an awful lot of very important questions have come

up. I thank the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills for his forbearance at our lateness.

Education and Skills

Home Education (Covid-19 Support)

1. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what support it is providing to young people and parents across Dumfries and Galloway to assist with education at home during the Covid-19 lockdown. (S5O-04428)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Responsibility for education rests with local authorities. However, the Scottish Government has published a range of Covid-19 guidance documents to assist local authorities during the current period. We provide practical advice and support through the Parent Club Scotland and Parentzone Scotland websites, through Education Scotland's new Scotland learns initiative and through Education Scotland's support for glow, the online learning platform.

Pupil equity funding is available to address the poverty-related attainment gap. Schools in Dumfries and Galloway will receive £137,343 in 2020-21 via the attainment challenge schools programme.

Emma Harper: Some families in Dumfries and Galloway—particularly in lower-income areas—do not have access to the internet at home and are struggling to educate their children at home, which is causing a lot of stress to the young people and to their parents. What options is the Scottish Government able to put in place to allow for internet access? Those might include the British Telecom scheme that allows six months' free access to the internet in England.

John Swinney: A lot of good work has been undertaken by individual schools to support young people who do not have digital access and to enable them to do so. There have been numerous examples of that around the country.

We understand the challenges that learners may face while they are learning at home, including the challenges with internet access that Emma Harper referred to. The Government has announced that it is investing £9 million to deliver 25,000 laptops, with internet access provided where that is required, for children who experience disadvantage. That will support their learning outside school and is part of our £30 million commitment to support digital inclusion.

The Government guidance about education during term 4 places a heavy emphasis on the importance of directly supporting the core

elements of the curriculum to assist young people in sustaining their learning during this period of disruption.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): In Dumfries and Galloway and across Scotland, plans have been put in place for blended learning. That will mean teachers teaching one cohort for part of the week and another cohort for the rest of the week while pupils from the first group study at home. Teachers will not be available to support home learning in the way that they so far have been. Is there not a role here for Education Scotland to become far more engaged in providing and delivering a national curriculum?

John Swinney: I learned earlier today that Mr Gray has announced what I do not think is his retirement but is his decision not to seek re-election to Parliament. I wish him well and acknowledge the formidable contribution that he has made to Parliament. He and I were elected to the first Scottish Parliament on the same day, in 1999, and he has made a distinguished contribution since then. I am sure that he will continue to do so until the election next spring.

I agree with the substance of Mr Gray's question. Education Scotland is working with e-Sgoil, the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar digital learning platform, which the Government has funded for some time to enable learning to be shared across the challenging geography of the Western Isles. We are now working across Scotland with e-Sgoil to create the availability of learning, particularly for the senior phase, that will enable any young person in Scotland to access digital learning in a number of different areas. That will enhance the in-school learning that we are working to maximise.

Education Scotland is working on that. It is also delivering the Scotland learns provision, which is contained in the Education Scotland website and which provides weekly educational materials to support digital learning at home.

Digital Exclusion (Young People)

2. **Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what work is being undertaken to ensure that young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds are not digitally excluded while learning from home. (S5O-04429)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): We recognise that digital technology will play a key role in delivering continuity of education and that that is likely to be a key issue for some of our more disadvantaged families, children and young people.

We do not want children and young people in any part of the country left without access to usable devices or connectivity solutions in these exceptional circumstances. We have committed to investing £30 million in digital devices and connectivity to provide that extra help to young people who do not have access to appropriate technology.

Stewart Stevenson: In yesterday's COVID-19 Committee meeting, we heard about Highland Council's provision of Chromebooks for, I think, all its pupils. Given their key part in delivering educational provision, how is the Government working with councils across Scotland to ensure in particular that, when pupils return to school in August, they are ready for the blended learning that will follow?

John Swinney: The Government is working closely with local authorities. They are joint partners with us in the education recovery group and have designed the approach to blended learning that schools around the country are pursuing.

Currently, the plans that have been developed by local authorities are being assessed by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education to ensure that all opportunities to maximise face-to-face learning have been taken and that the models in place are appropriate. That dialogue is on-going. Flowing from that work will be the identification of the requirement for resources to ensure that that capacity can be maximised. The Government will engage constructively in that exercise.

On digital learning, which was at the heart of Mr Stevenson's original question, the Government is engaged with local authorities to identify young people who will benefit from access to digital resources, devices and connectivity. That work will influence how we distribute digital technology.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Digital learning needs more than laptops—it needs lessons. Earlier this week, the cabinet secretary participated in a question and answer session that was held by the National Parent Forum of Scotland. In the NPFS's poll of parents in that session, only a third said that their children had received live or recorded lessons and 60 per cent had had no virtual contact with teachers during the past three months. How can we have any faith in blended learning if we have not got it right so far?

John Swinney: That was a poll of the particular gathering of people who participated in that Q and A session. Connect, which is a parents organisation, has published other evidence, which indicates that there has been a growing level of satisfaction among parents about the volume and quality of the learning support that schools are delivering to young people during lockdown.

Indeed, in its previous survey, only 8 per cent of parents indicated dissatisfaction with the level of support that was available.

That figure is too high for my liking, but it is an indication of the fact that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, schools have worked extremely hard to put in place the learning materials, support and lessons to support young people's learning when they are at home.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Questions 3 and 4 are grouped.

Racism (Education System)

3. Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how issues relating to racism are addressed within the Scottish education system. (S5O-04430)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Helping children and young people to develop as responsible global citizens is a key feature of the curriculum in schools in Scotland. Learning about current and past attitudes and values and historical events, and their impact on society today, is a key element of the curriculum.

We all need to be vigilant in challenging any racist and abusive behaviour in our schools. Where it occurs, it must be challenged through educating children about all faiths and belief systems, and ensuring that they learn tolerance, respect and equality, and about healthy relationships.

Keith Brown: The cabinet secretary will be aware that there is substantial strength of feeling in Scotland following the Black Lives Matter protests and the highlighting of the need to face up to our colonial past. Many schools are making efforts to introduce anti-racism learning. An example of those is Alva academy, in my constituency, which has been awarded the status of a vision school for Holocaust education.

I understand that dealing with the coronavirus pandemic must be the Scottish Government's overriding concern at the moment. However, will the cabinet secretary consider how the Government might encourage further diversification in the curriculum, so that Scottish children are fully aware of Scotland's history, not least its shameful roles in slavery and colonisation?

John Swinney: I congratulate Alva academy on the prestigious award that it has received on achieving the status of a vision school for Holocaust education. On Tuesday I had the pleasure of discussing a range of educational issues with headteachers from the

Clackmannanshire local authority area and Scott McEwan, the headteacher of Alva academy, was one of the participants. It is a great credit to the school that it has achieved that status.

While Scotland's curriculum is not prescriptive, it provides teachers with a flexible framework through the experiences and outcomes contained in the curriculum for excellence. Such a framework allows teachers and schools to teach what is appropriate for the learners in their own classrooms, schools and local authority areas. Education Scotland's national improvement hub contains materials to support teaching about slavery. The experiences and outcomes in social studies offer opportunities to teach black history. However, I acknowledge the significance of the issues that have been raised by the Black Lives Matter movement, so I intend to look afresh at our materials to ensure that the guidance and the experiences and outcomes adequately address the point that Mr Brown has raised.

Racism and Slavery (School Education)

4. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the Black Lives Matter campaign, how dealing with racism and Scotland's links with slavery are taught in schools. (S5O-04431)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Diversity, equality and respect for others are at the heart of policies supporting school education in Scotland. Learning about current and past attitudes, values and historical events and their impact on society today forms part of the curriculum in Scottish schools.

The curriculum for excellence experiences and outcomes provide opportunities to teach black history by exploring a variety of issues, including slavery, human trafficking and exploitation. In addition, the study of slavery can form part of national 5, higher and advanced higher history national qualification courses.

John Mason: At the weekend, I was listening to someone speak about his experience of growing up in Scotland as a mixed race or biracial young person. Some of those folk can face particular challenges in our schools and elsewhere. Does the cabinet secretary think that there is adequate support on such issues for young people in our schools?

John Swinney: The fundamental answer to Mr Mason's question must lie in the application of the values that are at the heart of our curriculum and which are also engraved on the mace that sits in front of the Presiding Officer: wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity. We look to each

individual school to ensure that such values are instilled and reflected in its ethos.

Although I am not doing so just now, for obvious reasons, I usually spend a vast amount of my time in schools around the country. What I see there, at first hand, is the translation of those values from our mace here in the Parliament into the ethos and the values of our schools. Many of the questions that Mr Mason has, fairly, raised with me can be confronted there, to ensure that young people have an experience that educates and equips them to address, handle and respect the diversity that exists in our society. That must be part of the ethos of individual schools, because it must be part of the ethos of our society.

Learning about what leads to and prompts the disgraceful events that we saw in George Square in Glasgow last night is an important part of the current appreciation that young people in our education system must understand.

Young People (Employment after Shielding)

5. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to provide targeted support to 16 to 24-year-olds who have been shielding during the Covid-19 lockdown to help them gain employment. (S5O-04432)

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): I recognise that this is an extremely challenging time for young people—particularly young people who are in the most vulnerable categories, including those who are shielding as a result of Covid-19—who are considering their options, and whether to remain in education or training or to enter the labour market.

We have a strong track record of reducing youth unemployment through our internationally recognised developing the young workforce programme. In the coming weeks, we will outline a series of measures that have been developed in partnership with employers, which will support all young people to make informed decisions regarding their employment options.

Pauline McNeill: A mother in my constituency wrote to me this week about her 17-year-old son, who is shielding. He works in a Glasgow hotel and is likely to be made redundant, but the important point is that he cannot attend a job interview and is unlikely to be able to do so any time soon because he is shielding. Paul Johnson of the Institute for Fiscal Studies has highlighted that periods of unemployment for young people can have long-term effects.

I hope the minister does not mind too much if I am direct. Previously, I received answers that said that the budget for Skills Development Scotland will increase by £30 million and so on. That is quite meaningless to a young person who is in the

situation that I described. I ask the minister to think seriously about taking a different, more helpful approach, for example, by writing to all young people who are shielding. Right now, they are an extremely vulnerable group. Aileen Campbell said that she would feed back that point when I raised it last week. I wonder whether she has had time to do so, and whether the minister has any comments.

Jamie Hepburn: I am sorry to hear about the young person whose mother has been in touch with Pauline McNeill. I say to Pauline McNeill clearly and directly, as she spoke to me, that I recognise the scale of the challenge that confronts us. In utilising the significant resource that we deploy in our skills and education system, we recognise the need to do things differently to make sure that we have an ever more person-centred, person-focused approach to the provision of skills and training. That has always been my ambition for our system, and the necessity of taking that approach has been exacerbated.

Pauline McNeill makes a very good suggestion, which I will take away and consider. If we are able to act on it, I would be happy to take it forward.

Scottish Qualifications Authority (Grading Process)

6. James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that the SQA grading process is fair and transparent for all pupils. (S5O-04433)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): In the absence of the 2020 exam diet, fairness has to be delivered for all learners, and the chief examiner has set out that fairness is one of the three core principles on which the SQA is basing its approach to the award of qualifications in this extraordinary year.

The SQA has reaffirmed its commitment to transparency and fairness, and has committed to publishing its completed equality impact assessment and the details of its approach to certification this year.

James Kelly: As the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills will appreciate, for many young people throughout Scotland, the process of grading is a stressful and worrying time. It is important that our young pupils are able to achieve the maximum grades possible, consistent with their abilities.

For pupils who stay in areas of social deprivation or attend schools whose performance has previously dipped, will the cabinet secretary give a categorical assurance that the grading process will not have a detrimental effect on the grades that they are awarded?

John Swinney: Mr Kelly raises important points. The examination and certification process in any year is stressful for young people, and I accept that in the current conditions it is even more stressful for them. It is absolutely essential that the issues that Mr Kelly has raised are properly and fully taken into account in the approaches that the Scottish Qualifications Authority is taking to ensure that no young person is disadvantaged because of where they come from and what their circumstances have been. Young people should be judged on their ability and talents, and I am assured by the SQA that that is what the certification system will do this year.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): What are the cabinet secretary's expectations on the volume of appeals and the potential for delays that may result? He will be aware that timing will be important for university and college admissions. Is he confident that there will be sufficient capacity to deliver on the appeals on time?

John Swinney: It is difficult for me to predict the volume of appeals, because the certification process has not yet been completed. However, the SQA has developed the appeals process. Obviously, it will rely on the contribution of teachers to that process, which is an essential part of the work that is undertaken. Capacity must be in place to ensure that, as I said in answer to Mr Kelly, no young person suffers any disadvantage as a consequence of the circumstances that we face.

Blended Learning (Families with More than One Child)

7. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how blended learning will take account of families with more than one child. (S5O-04434)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The Scottish Government maintains a strong focus on excellence and equity for all children within the necessary constraints of the Covid-19 response. Learning will be developed locally by schools, taking account of the local circumstances of children and their families to ensure that the needs of every learner are met in the circumstances that we face.

Mark Griffin: Families want schools to return full time as soon as safely possible, but while blended learning is in place, what guidance will the Scottish Government issue to ensure that families with more than one child have all their children in school on the same days, which would give parents certainty that they will be able to return to work at least part time?

John Swinney: I agree with the first point that Mr Griffin made. The desire to return to full-time formal schooling is at the heart of our plans and expectations, and we will get to that point as early as we can safely do so.

The second part of Mr Griffin's question is an important point. Local authorities are trying to ensure that siblings who are at the same school can be placed in the same cohorts so that there is certainty and assurance for individual families. That work is being taken forward at a practical level by local authorities to ensure that the points that Mr Griffin has raised are fully and properly addressed.

Blended Learning (Support for Local Authorities)

8. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what additional guidance and resources it is providing to local authorities to support the implementation of blended schooling. (S5O-04435)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): The Scottish Government has set up the Covid-19 education recovery group to bring together partners and stakeholders to ensure that delivery of education, including a model of blended learning, maintains a strong focus on excellence and equity for all, within the necessary constraints of the Covid-19 response. Education Scotland is providing a range of guidance and resources to teachers, schools and local authorities to support the implementation of blended learning.

As I indicated in earlier responses, the Government is discussing issues of financial resources with local authorities as a consequence of the models that are being developed.

Maureen Watt: I have been contacted by parents who are concerned about how the model may affect key workers and their ability to care for their children on the days when they are not at school. Can the Scottish Government give assurances that it is aware of those challenges and that it will continue to work with key organisations such as the National Parent Forum of Scotland as we navigate through the lockdown?

John Swinney: I can give that assurance. The Government appreciates the challenges that parents face. That is why we have put in place the resources that we have and it is why we are trying to ensure that all measures are taken to restore formal schooling as early as we possibly can.

We work actively with the National Parent Forum of Scotland, which has produced a lot of good materials and contributions. It is, of course, a partner in the education recovery group to ensure

that parents' views, concerns and issues can be properly and fully addressed in the model that we take forward

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on education and skills.

Decision Time

15:20

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): There are no questions to be put at decision time, so I close the meeting.

Meeting closed at 15:20.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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