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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 1 July 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

National Citizen Service

1. **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What progress he is making on increasing the number of places on the National Citizen Service. [900655]

3. **Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): What progress he is making on increasing the number of places on the National Citizen Service. [900657]

5. **Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): What progress he is making on increasing the number of places on the National Citizen Service. [900659]

The Minister for Civil Society (Mr Rob Wilson): With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, may I first congratulate the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) on the birth of her son in May? I am sure that it is the reason for her absence today, as she normally shadows me.

More than 135,000 young people have benefited from the National Citizen Service in recent years. In 2015, more young people than ever will have the opportunity to take part. I have written to all Northern Irish and English MPs encouraging them to visit an NCS programme near them this summer.

Stephen Metcalfe: I have seen at first hand how the NCS programme can give young people greater confidence, help them work in their community and build long-lasting relationships. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government will continue to back the NCS into the future, so that we can give increasing numbers of young people the skills they need to get on in life?

Mr Wilson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in his assessment, which is why I am delighted that more than 1,100 people took part in his constituency and the surrounding area last year and why I am committed to continuing the rapid expansion of the programme. He will be pleased to hear that 92% of participants say that the NCS helped them to develop useful skills for the future and 76% feel more confident about getting a job in the future.

Martin Vickers: I welcome the Minister's answer. I am a tremendous supporter of the NCS programme, having seen the work done in north-east Lincolnshire, where the programme is delivered by Grimsby Town

Sports and Education Trust. Does he agree that encouraging football clubs and similar organisations in this area encourages our young people to get even more involved in the programme?

Mr Wilson: I join my hon. Friend in thanking Grimsby Town for the part it played in supporting nearly 200 young people taking part in the NCS in his constituency and the surrounding area in 2014. In particular, I pay tribute to Graham Rodger and Lee Stephens for leading an excellent team. I understand from my hon. Friend that it contains a former Grimsby Town goalkeeper, so it could be said that the NCS is in safe hands.

Alan Mak: In my area, 831 young people participated in the NCS last year. Does the Minister agree that the NCS reflects this Government's one-nation values by bringing together young people from all backgrounds so that they develop greater self-awareness and responsibility?

Mr Wilson: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend on that. That view is supported by consecutive independent evaluations, which have demonstrated the effectiveness of the programme for people from a range of backgrounds. For instance, in 2013, 16% of NCS participants were in receipt of free school meals, which compares with a figure of about 8% of 16 to 17-year-olds in the general population. Despite this great success, I still want to go further in reaching out to more young people who face big challenges in life.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): One of the Minister's predecessors, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), said that he was "obsessively" monitoring the backgrounds of people taking part in the NCS. Can this Minister reassure the House that he is monitoring with equal enthusiasm? Are people from deprived backgrounds taking part in the programme to the same degree as others?

Mr Wilson: I think I just answered that question, as the hon. Gentleman would know if he had listened to my previous answer. As he is aware, we have a manifesto commitment on guaranteeing a place on the NCS for all young people. That requires commitment from across government. I am working with Ministers across government to ensure that the NCS benefits as many young people as possible, no matter where they live, what school they went to or what their circumstances in life have been.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The Minister will be pleased to hear that I will be visiting an NCS scheme in my constituency over the summer recess. Given that youth services in England have experienced cuts almost three times greater than overall cuts to local authorities, what is he doing to make sure that young people have valuable activities all year round, not just through the NCS?

Mr Wilson: The NCS is complementary to, not a replacement for, local government services. The NCS consistently demonstrates its positive impact on participants and value for money. I find it very disappointing that local councils are making the choice to cut youth services, but we in the Cabinet Office are supporting local authorities through programmes such as the Centre for Youth Impact and Delivering Differently for Young People.

Voter Registration

2. **Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What funding is provided to local authorities with low rates of voter registration to improve rates. [900656]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr Oliver Letwin): May I begin by wishing the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David), who is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench, many happy returns on his birthday?

In answer to the question, as well as giving more than £50 million to enable local authorities to carry forward the individual electoral registration system, we have also given more than £10 million to enable them to take proactive steps to increase voter registration.

Catherine West: What actions will be taken against local authorities that have coasting rates of registration—those that have registered fewer than 98% of eligible voters?

Mr Letwin: I am happy to tell the hon. Lady that the Minister for constitutional reform—my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose)—is proactively stepping in to try to ensure that those local authorities do take further action. The Electoral Commission has also reported on this, and we are keen to see that every local authority ensures right away that it no longer has large groups of people who are unregistered and that it cleans its register.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge the positive impact on voter registration of civil society campaigns and the campaign by the Church, Have Your Say, before the last election?

Mr Letwin: Yes, my right hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. I am glad to say that we see a pattern of local authorities in many parts of the country doing what she describes and working with civil society partners to reach those people who might not otherwise be reached by more formal means to persuade them to register.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I think that we can all agree that electoral registration is desirable and that one factor that will affect that is the degree of faith and confidence that people have in our electoral system. One measure that could enhance that is the ability of people to recall their Member of Parliament in between elections. When will the Minister bring into force the remaining provisions of the Recall of MPs Act 2015?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has indulged in what might be called an elastic interpretation of the question on the Order Paper. But just as I have been indulgent of him, I feel sure that the Minister will be similarly indulgent.

Mr Letwin: I am delighted to answer that question. The Recall of MPs Act, to which the hon. Gentleman refers, was passed just at the end of the previous Parliament. Two things now need to be done: one is to issue the commencement order, which is relatively straightforward;

and the second is to issue the regulations that govern the conduct of the petition, which is more complicated. All of us in this House have a considerable interest in ensuring that that is done right. However, we are doing it at pace. I intend to bring the provisions before the House in September, when we return from recess.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Two weeks ago, the Electoral Commission published a report on the transition to full individual electoral registration. It expressed concern about the numbers that could fall off the electoral register if the Government brought forward the date of full IER to December 2015. Will the Government follow the advice of the Electoral Commission?

Mr Letwin: The shadow Minister is absolutely right that the Electoral Commission has made observations about that matter. We are now considering them very carefully, and we will think through the Government's response before we inform the House what it is. In response to earlier questions, I should say that the Electoral Commission report has also indicated that we now have an increase in the total number of people registered compared with the situation before individual electoral registration was introduced.

Civil Service Pensions

4. **Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve the administration of civil service pensions. [900658]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): We have reformed the delivery of civil service pensions by setting up MyCSP, which is part-owned by employees who administer the scheme. That will reduce costs and ultimately deliver a better service.

Stephen Phillips: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his answer. I know from corresponding with him on numerous occasions that he is aware of certain problems with MyCSP, but I am still receiving letters from constituents who feel that they are being let down. Will he assure the House that every effort is being made to ensure that MyCSP offers a good service to those who rely on it for the administration of their pensions?

Matthew Hancock: Yes, I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for bringing the matter to the House's attention. Work is under way to improve the performance of MyCSP. There has been a year-on-year productivity improvement of it since it started in 2012, but there is much work to do to ensure that we get everybody's pension administered in exactly the right way.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): The problem is that these problems have been going on for a long time. I have written to Ministers over the past 12 months about problems with my constituents and only last week I had a constituent who was given a pension estimate that proved to be completely inaccurate. They had based their future plans on that estimate. May I ask the Minister again to try harder to ensure that we get this sorted out? It has been going on for far too long.

Matthew Hancock: Yes, I agree that this needs to be sorted out. When we brought the delivery of civil service pensions from an external provider in 2010, there was a larger backlog than anticipated. That means that there is an awful lot of work to do, but we are pushing it through.

Senior Civil Servants (Social Background)

6. **Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that people from all social backgrounds are able to become senior civil servants. [900660]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): Background should be no barrier to success and we are committed to ensuring that the most senior ranks of the civil service can be reached by all.

Rehman Chishti: Although 10% of the civil service is from a black and minority ethnic community, only 4% are in senior positions. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that each and every one of them can achieve their true potential without their background being a hindrance?

Matthew Hancock: My hon. Friend raises an important point. This is true not just about ethnicity in the senior civil service but about gender and people with disabilities. We need to ensure that the senior civil service represents the country that it serves. Steps are under way to ensure that that happens and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend to reach that conclusion.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): We welcome the Minister to his place and the Opposition support genuine efforts to increase the diversity of the civil service. He will be aware that 58% of permanent secretaries were privately educated, as were 53% of senior diplomats and 45% of public body chairs. Would he therefore support targets to increase the numbers from state education at the top of our civil service?

Matthew Hancock: I certainly strongly agree that it is important that as well as considering gender, ethnicity and other characteristics we ensure that people from all backgrounds—whichever school they went to and whichever part of the country they come from—can get to senior levels in the civil service. We have a programme under way to ensure that that happens.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment as Minister for the civil service and assure him that the now Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee will look forward to working with him on civil service reform, as we did with his predecessor, who did so much during his term of office. May I also give my fullest support to his objective of achieving diversity? That is a vital part of having an agile civil service and requires the challenging of attitudes and habits of behaviour as much as setting targets.

Matthew Hancock: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his re-election—unopposed—to the Chair of the Select Committee. I very much look forward to working

with him, although I say that with some trepidation, knowing his depth of understanding of these issues. I entirely agree that this is about culture and agility in the civil service as much as it is about tick-box targets.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): One of the biggest barriers to accessing some senior civil service jobs is where they are located. What more can be done to ensure that jobs are located outside the south of England? Why not start by moving the Department for Transport to the north, which might bring some of the money it spends down here up there, as well?

Matthew Hancock: As my hon. Friend knows, we are investing a huge amount in transport systems across the nation, not least in the north of England and in his area. It is crucial that we proceed in an efficient and cost-effective way. There are civil servants who work across the land, and we should not forget that, and we must ensure that they represent the whole country, too.

Franchise for London Elections

7. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the effect of the inclusion of EU citizens in the franchise for elections to the Greater London Assembly and the Mayor of London on voter engagement; and if he will make a statement. [900661]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): EU citizens resident in London are eligible to register and vote in local government elections and elections for the GLA and Mayor. I am sure that both I and the hon. Gentleman would encourage them to do just that. So far I have made no assessment of the effect on voter engagement, but if the hon. Gentleman has thoughts or insights he would like to share, I am very happy to hear them now.

Patrick Grady: The Mayor of London, now also the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), once claimed that London was the sixth biggest French city in the world. Why does the Minister believe that it is right that all those French citizens who have made London their home should be allowed to vote for the Mayor's successor, but not for whether this country should stay in the European Union?

John Penrose: The vote for staying in or leaving the EU will be based on the parliamentary constituency franchise, which is based on people who are eligible to vote for this place. British nationals living in EU countries elsewhere in the EU are not allowed to vote in equivalent referendums elsewhere—for example, in the Dutch referendum in 2005.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Does my hon. Friend share my fear that, with an air traffic control strike and transport workers on strike in France at the moment and massive unemployment in France owing to its socialist republic and with all these people coming over here, we could end up with a French-speaking Mayor?

John Penrose: Anecdotally, quite a lot of people are commenting on the fact that many of the French who choose to come to live in London do so because they

prefer it here; they think that it is a more advantageous business environment and a better place to live and work. Therefore, perhaps they have imbibed and imbued themselves with some of the local colour and flexibility, rather than with the attitudes that my hon. Friend describes.

Electoral Register

8. **Grahame M. Morris** (Easington) (Lab): What recent estimate he has made of the number of eligible voters not on the electoral register. [900662]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): As we have heard, the Electoral Commission recently published an analysis, and I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that it shows that parliamentary registers have over 400,000 more entries than a year ago. The last full assessment of the completeness and accuracy of electoral registers was published in July, and it showed that the decline in registration between 2000 and 2010 had stabilised since 2011. The next full assessment will be undertaken when the transition to individual electoral registration is complete.

Grahame M. Morris: I thank the Minister for that response, but the number of eligible voters who are missing from registers is a concern. I draw his attention to two specific groups: private rented tenants and the rising 18s. In my constituency, the rising 18s are down 50%. What action is he taking to try to address that issue?

John Penrose: As we heard earlier, almost £10 million has been spent on registration activities and drives since the start of this year, and we have made it a great deal more convenient and easier to register through individual electoral registration. We are looking at the report and recommendations produced by the Electoral Commission. In due course, when we respond to them, I am sure that we will have more to say.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): What recent assessment has the Minister made of the number of ineligible electors on registers—namely, EU citizens who find themselves registered for parliamentary elections?

John Penrose: One of the benefits of individual electoral registration is that it has a built-in check for validity, which dramatically improves the quality of registers as a result. As more and more of the roll is completed using individual electoral registration, we expect it to have a beneficial effect in weeding out people who are incorrectly registered in the way that my hon. Friend describes.

10. [900664] **Ian Lavery** (Wansbeck) (Lab): Since March 2014, there has been a reduction in young people about to turn 18 registering to vote. Will the Minister not commit the Government to rolling out the Northern Ireland schools initiative, so that schools and colleges can work with local authorities to make sure that those people register to vote?

John Penrose: A number of interesting initiatives are under way to persuade and allow students to vote. Some interesting examples are going on in Sheffield. So there are a range of possibilities, many of which are

very promising. We want to ensure that we have analysed them all properly, so that we can choose the best and most cost-effective.

Topical Questions

T1. [900685] **Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): The Cabinet Office is responsible for efficiency and reform, transparency, civil society, digital technology, cyber-security, constitutional matters and the delivery of the Government's agenda.

Danny Kinahan: I and many others are concerned about the Union. A convention or congress has been ruled out quite emphatically. With Scotland wanting more and more and Wales and Northern Ireland excluded from the process and, indeed, England threatened by it, too, what mechanism is the Minister's office putting in place to properly preserve and plan the future of the Union?

Matthew Hancock: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's passionate support for the Union, which we on this side of the House wholeheartedly share. Like him, we seek a lasting settlement that strengthens the United Kingdom, and I look forward to further eloquent contributions from him to that debate and to working with him to make it happen.

T5. [900689] **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend update the House on his plans to deliver efficiency savings across Whitehall?

Matthew Hancock: As we try to bring the books back into balance and reach surplus, making the Government more efficient is crucial in ensuring that as much money as possible gets to front-line services where it is needed. We have a widespread efficiency and reform plan, which we are driving through as part of the spending review to ensure that every taxpayer pound is spent as wisely as possible.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): May I welcome the new ministerial team to their places? The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is being a little sheepish and, if he does not mind me saying so, a bit disingenuous about the numbers on the electoral register. We all know that the last election was the high-water mark with people automatically put on the register, but with the Electoral Commission saying that nearly 2 million people will fall off that register, will he say today whether he will accept its recommendations on the early bringing forward of the IER scheme? Does he really want this Government to go down in history as the first to reduce the franchise in this country?

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr Oliver Letwin): As I have already told the House, we will look at the Electoral Commission's recommendations seriously and come back to the House when we have made our decision on them, but there is a clear distinction between those people who are on the electoral register who should not be on it because they are not resident in the

place that they are registered for—that is what the cleaning is about—and what I take it is our joint endeavour to get all those people, estimated by the Electoral Commission at 7 million, who should be on the register but are not, on to the register. That is why we are spending money and helping local authorities to attract those people on to the register.

T6. [900690] **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): A new cyber-security institute in Nelson in my constituency, sponsored by Training 2000, is due to be launched in the autumn. What support is the Cabinet Office offering to education providers to ensure that Britain is equipped with the cyber-security skills we need for the future?

Matthew Hancock: My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point. To defend Britain from cyber-attack, we need to ensure that we have the cyber-skills in the future. That involves not only university-level skills, which we are putting money into expanding, but cyber-apprenticeships and entry-level schemes to ensure that, at all levels and from all parts of our country, we can recruit people to work in that important defence of our nation.

Mr Speaker: It would assist us if the Minister looked towards and spoke into the microphone. That tends to assist amplification in these circumstances.

T2. [900686] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The importance of students' electoral registration was recognised by the Cabinet Office in allocating welcome if belated funds to the National Union of Students to get people on the register in the run-up to the general election. Will the Minister commit to providing similar funds to boost student electoral registration at the start of the new academic year to ensure that they are represented properly on the register on which the parliamentary boundary review will be based?

Mr Letwin: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious question about student registration. As he will know, we now have a system of individual registration, which people can do in about three minutes on an iPhone. We are going to make that even easier, and we will work with the NUS and others to try to encourage students to do exactly as he suggests.

T7. [900691] **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): With the help of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), on St George's day this year I launched a petition calling for English votes for English laws. I am therefore delighted to see a firm commitment by the Government to right this historic inequality once and for all. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on when we can expect the Government to introduce that important constitutional change?

Matthew Hancock: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. As she says, we are absolutely going to right this wrong, and there will be further details shortly.

T3. [900687] **Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): A report published today by Children's Rights Alliance for England points to a dismal failure by the Government when considering the best interests of children and young people in their decision making.

Bearing that in mind, does the Minister agree that giving 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote in the EU referendum would be a first, positive step towards greater inclusion of young people in the democratic process?

Matthew Hancock: We have improved the life chances of millions of children by introducing 2 million apprenticeships in the previous Parliament, by having 2 million more jobs and by turning our country around. The consideration of whether voting should start at 16 or 18 is a balanced one. We think 18 is the right age, but, frankly, the best thing we can do for the future of the children of this country is improve and strengthen our economy.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): Will the Minister for the Cabinet Office undertake to visit the Major Projects Leadership Academy in Oxford and see the excellent work being done to develop senior civil servants?

Matthew Hancock: Not only will I undertake to visit the academy—I have heard very good stories about it—but I understand that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has visited it, and he has just told me that I had better go too, so I will get there pretty shortly.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Q1. [900670] **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 1 July 2015

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I am sure the whole House will wish to join me in congratulating the England women's football team on reaching the semi-finals of the world cup in Canada and wishing them well for their match against Japan this evening.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others and, in addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Angela Crawley: The Prime Minister's plans for English votes for English laws will reduce my rights and the rights of other Scottish MPs in this House—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must and will be heard.

Angela Crawley: The Prime Minister's plans for English votes for English laws will reduce my rights and the rights of other Scottish MPs in the House of Commons, but the real issue is my ability to protect the interests of my constituents. Will the Prime Minister guarantee today that, under his plans, a Bill that has a direct or indirect effect on Scotland's budget will not be certifiable as England-only?

The Prime Minister: First, let me welcome the hon. Lady to her place. We will publish our proposals shortly and Parliament will have plenty of time to consider and

vote on them, but let me be very clear: we are not creating a system of two tiers for MPs. All MPs will still vote on all Bills, but what we are saying is that laws which apply only in England should pass only if they are supported by a majority of English MPs. That seems to me—in a devolved system where Members of the Scottish Parliament can determine their own future on health, housing and an increasing number of subjects—to provide fairness across our United Kingdom.

Q15. [900684] **Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): Yesterday the National Audit Office called for the introduction of a fairer schools funding formula so that it is

“related more closely to their”—

that is, pupils’—

“needs and less affected by where they live.”

Can the Prime Minister confirm from the Dispatch Box that the additional and very welcome £390 million awarded last year as a first step towards a fairer funding system will be incorporated into the baseline for future years?

The Prime Minister: I can say that we will implement the pledges in our manifesto on this issue because we need to make funding fairer across the country. If we look at the figures today, it is clearly unfair that a school in one part of the country can receive over 50% more funding than an identical school in another part of the country. We have already made some progress on this, but I want us to go further.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in his congratulations to England’s women’s football team. With only a fraction of the resources that the men get, they are showing the men how it is done.

Sadly, we now know that 22 British citizens have been confirmed dead in the Tunisia attack. Our thoughts are with the bereaved and injured, and the help they and their families will need. The bereaved and those who have experienced life-changing injuries and trauma will need long-term practical and emotional support. The experience after 7/7 was that to really help those affected families, there needs to be co-ordination across Departments and agencies, so will the Prime Minister establish a dedicated taskforce reporting to a Minister to support those who have suffered in that terrible attack?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can give the right hon. and learned Lady that assurance. Let me update the House, because I am sad to say that the confirmed number of British citizens killed in this appalling attack is now 27 and, as we have said, we expect it to rise still further. Today we are repatriating eight bodies from Tunisia on an RAF C-17 plane. The plane is now in the air and will land at RAF Brize Norton this afternoon. Every family of a victim now has a dedicated Foreign Office liaison officer, but—I can confirm what she asked—I have asked the Cabinet Secretary for advice on creating a ministerial committee to ensure that work is properly co-ordinated right across Government to provide all the support that the victims of this appalling attack deserve and to ensure that, as a nation, we mark and commemorate this event appropriately.

Ms Harman: That is a really important step that the Prime Minister has taken. We fully support it and thank those who will be working in that respect. Reports over the past few days have suggested that it was not just a lone gunman who perpetrated the attack, but an organised cell. Following the Home Secretary’s visit to Tunisia and the deployment of 50 police officers, will he update the House on the progress being made to help identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice?

The Prime Minister: On that specific issue, there is still a lot of work to be done to identify all the circumstances of this appalling attack and the support that the gunman received. As we get that information and confirm it, I will ensure that the House is regularly updated. I can confirm that the discussions between my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Tunisians went ahead and were successful. As I have said previously, that is looking at everything, from the protective security in hotels and resorts to intelligence co-operation at the highest levels between Britain and Tunisia, so that we can help with its capacity to combat such appalling events. It will need a lot of long-term work between our two countries, but the French, the Germans and the Americans are also willing to help, and we need to co-ordinate between ourselves how best to support that country on its road to democracy.

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister has rightly said that this was an attack on our values and everything we stand for, and there is radicalisation in this country, too. Last November the Intelligence and Security Committee said that the Prevent programme had not been given sufficient priority and that counter-radicalisation programmes are not working. Today a new statutory duty to challenge radicalisation comes into effect. Will there be sufficient training and support for those covered by the duty, and will he look again at the concern that the Prevent programme has not focused sufficiently on engaging with the communities?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Lady raises very important issues. Let me answer them as directly as I can. First, we have now put more money and resources into the Prevent programme. Secondly, on her point about the statutory duty on public sector bodies, I think that is very important, because we are saying to schools, universities, local authorities and others that they have a duty to deal with radicalisation and to confront extremism, because this effort is not just for the police and security services, or indeed just for the Government, it is an effort for us all. On her specific question, which goes back to whether it was right to split the Prevent work into work that is done to deal with extremism under the aegis of the Home Office and the programmes to encourage integration, which should be done by the Department for Communities and Local Government, I maintain that that was the right decision. It followed a review in 2011 by Alex Carlile, who found that

“there have been cases where groups whom we would now consider to support an extremist ideology have received funding.”

As we discussing in the House on Monday, it is very important that that does not happen. Yes we should work with community groups, but not those that encourage an extremist narrative.

Ms Harman: It is important that the Prime Minister does not just defend the decisions he has made, but continues to reflect on this and really tries to make absolutely sure that he gets it right. If he does that and gets the right outcomes, we will strongly support him on that.

Let me turn to another issue. With all-party support, the Prime Minister commissioned the Davies report to look at the question of airport capacity. Now that the commission has recommended a third runway at Heathrow, does he agree with us that, subject to key environmental tests being met, there should be no further delay and that it should go ahead? Will he now take that forward?

The Prime Minister: First, let us all thank Howard Davies and the team for the very thorough piece of work they have done. I think that there is a lot of common ground across almost all parts of the House that there is the need for additional airport capacity in the south-east of England, not least to maintain this country's competitiveness, but it is important that we now study this very detailed report. I am very clear about the legal position; if we say anything now before studying the report, we could actually endanger whatever decision is made. The guarantee that I can give the right hon. and learned Lady is that a decision will be made by the end of the year.

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister says there is common ground, and there is common ground across the House; the worry is the lack of common ground on his side of the House. He gives the impression that there is going to be a proper process, but something very is different coming out of No. 10, because it is briefing that it is not going to happen. It looks like the Prime Minister has been overruled by the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson); he should tell him that he is not the leader of the Tory party yet. Will the Prime Minister stand up for Britain's interests or will he just be bullied by Boris?

The Prime Minister: I would have thought that with all her years of experience, the right hon. and learned Lady would know not to believe everything that she reads in her morning newspapers. It would probably be good for her blood pressure, as well as for mine, if she did not. Let me give the mildest warnings about jumping to a conclusion before seeing the results, because we had a classic example of that last week when the shadow Health Secretary warned the Government that the poverty figures would make us all hang our heads in shame. That was of course before the poverty figures were published, showing that relative poverty was at its lowest level since the 1980s.

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister seems to be keen to get off the issue of airports. It seems like he is in a holding pattern above Heathrow and Boris will not let him land. Our economic infrastructure is essential for future jobs, for growth, and for our productivity, but this week the Government have pulled the plug on electrification of the railways and seriously undermined the renewable energy sector, and now they are backing off over airports and risking losing the opportunity for Britain to be at the heart of the global economy. If the Prime Minister makes a swift decision on the Davies

report, we will support him and there will be a majority in the House, so will he put Britain's national interest first?

The Prime Minister: It is an interesting day when the leader of the Conservative party wants to talk about child poverty and the Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about an airport report that none of us has yet had time to read. I seem to remember that the last leader of the Labour party—although we have been churning through a few recently—had a totally different position on airports to the one that the right hon. and learned Lady is now putting forward. What I can say to her is that we will all read this report and a decision will be made by the end of the year.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): My constituents in rural North Dorset look increasingly to superfast broadband to help in education, agriculture and business. Will the Prime Minister commit the Government to do all that they can, with sufficient energy and resources, to ensure that the 5% black hole is filled as quickly as possible?

The Prime Minister: First, let me welcome my hon. Friend to his place. Before coming here, he was a very successful district councillor in an area I am familiar with, where he helped to achieve the second lowest council tax in the country. I am sure that he will bring that sense of good housekeeping to this place. He is absolutely right to raise the issue of superfast broadband and how we fill in the last 5% to 10% of homes, particularly in rural areas. We are providing extra funding and we are looking at all the different sorts of technology that can help to deliver this.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I associate myself and the Scottish National party with all the tributes and condolences to the families and friends of everybody caught up in the tragedy in Tunisia.

Because of the way the United Kingdom is structured, decisions on health, education and much English legislation have an impact on the Scottish budget. Will the Prime Minister confirm that he plans to exclude Scottish MPs from parts of the democratic process at Westminster that will have an impact on Scotland?

The Prime Minister: The point I would make to the hon. Gentleman is that English MPs are entirely excluded from any discussion of Scottish health, Scottish housing or Scottish education. What we are proposing is actually a very measured and sensible step which says that when there is a Bill that only affects, for instance, England, the Committee stage should be composed of English MPs, but then the whole House will vote on Report and, indeed, on Third Reading. What this will introduce, as it were, is a system for making sure that the wishes of English MPs cannot be overruled. That, I think, is only fair in a system where the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Parliament and, indeed, the Northern Irish Parliament have increased powers.

Angus Robertson: On overruling MPs, it is very interesting that 58 of 59 Scottish MPs have voted for the Scottish Bill to be strengthened, but they have been outvoted by English MPs. Not content with outvoting Scottish MPs elected on a mandate to strengthen the Scotland Bill,

the Prime Minister is now going to introduce second-class status for MPs elected from Scotland on issues that can have an impact on the Scottish budget. He is even planning to make the membership of the Scottish Affairs Committee a minority pursuit for Scottish MPs. Is that what the Prime Minister means when he says he has a respect agenda?

The Prime Minister: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman what I mean by a respect agenda: every single thing Lord Smith represented in terms of welfare has gone into the Bill. Is it not interesting that the hon. Gentleman objects to a vote in the UK Parliament on a UK issue, which is what has happened? Let me tell him again: instead of endlessly talking about the process, is it not time that the SNP started to talk about how they are going to use these powers? Why do they not tell us? Which welfare benefits do they want to put up? Which taxes do they want to increase? Why do they not start to tell us? I have been following the debate very closely and have noticed that none of Scotland's 59 MPs is arguing that the state pension should be devolved. In other words, the principle of pooling and sharing our resources and risks across the United Kingdom, which I believe in as leader of the United Kingdom, is apparently shared by the Scottish National party.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): My constituent Paul Short from Wooler showed great courage during the Tunisian massacre last week by helping to save the life of an injured victim with first aid skills he had learned as a member of the Territorial Army. Will the Prime Minister set out how the new measures in the extremism Bill will tackle extremists and stand up for our values of democracy, equality, free speech and respect for minorities?

The Prime Minister: First of all, let me take this opportunity to praise my hon. Friend's constituent and the skills that were used on that dreadful day in Tunisia. The Bill will reinforce the work we have already done to increase funding for counter-terrorism and counter-terrorism policing; make sure there is a duty on public authorities to combat radicalisation; and go after the fact that there are groups and individuals who are very clever at endorsing extremism but then stopping one step short of actually condoning terrorism. That is what the new banning orders we are looking at aim to achieve, because we are clear that people who support the extremist narrative have no place in our public debate.

Q2. [900671] **Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): Given regional wage profiles, many families in the north of Ireland will identify with the concerns raised today by the four children's commissioners about tax credits. Further to heeding those wider warnings, will the Prime Minister have the Chancellor take particular care to ensure that no supposedly more targeted changes to child benefit or tax credits will end up being misdirected against natural, everyday, cross-border working families in my constituency and its hinterland?

The Prime Minister: When we talk about cross-border working families, it is still the case that welfare arrangements in the United Kingdom are far more generous than what is available in the Republic of Ireland. Our view is clear: the right answer is to create jobs, cut taxes, raise

living standards and reduce welfare. I want an economy that has high pay, low taxes and low welfare, instead of low pay, high taxes and high welfare.

Let me share with the House one important statistic. Under the last Labour Government—[*Interruption.*] I know that Labour Members do not want to talk about the last Labour Government. [*Interruption.*] Well, under the last Government, inequality and child poverty fell. Now for the history lesson: let us go back to the last Labour Government. Under Labour, the number of working-age people in in-work poverty rose by about 20%. That was at the same time as welfare spending on people in work went up from £6 billion to £28 billion. What that shows is that the Labour model of taking money off people in tax and recycling it back to them in tax credits has not worked. It is time for a new approach of creating jobs, cutting taxes and having businesses that are creating the livelihoods we need.

Q3. [900672] **Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Having led a campaign and authored a letter signed by over 120 Members of Parliament from across the House to the Prime Minister and to the BBC against calling the so-called Islamic State "ISIL" or "ISIS", I thank the Prime Minister for not calling it "Islamic State", but an issue remains with calling it "ISIL". Will the Prime Minister lead the way by officially calling it "Daesh", as do France, Turkey and other countries in the middle east, which is acceptable to Muslims in this country and around the world?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend, who has spoken about this a lot, makes a very strong point. The argument I would make is that "Islamic State" is inappropriate, because it is neither Islamic in the true meaning of the word nor, indeed, is it a state; it is a bunch of terrorist thugs. I am happy for people to use "Daesh". I think ISIL is an alternative because it does not confer such authority. I am pleased that the BBC seems to have moved its position, because until yesterday it was calling it "Islamic State". It looks like it is going to change its approach, and I really welcome that.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Given the vital importance of Parliament and Members from both sides of the House and from all parts of the United Kingdom being able to hold the Government of the day to account properly and effectively, will the Prime Minister confirm whether he intends to try to reduce the size of the next House of Commons to 600 Members?

The Prime Minister: I am committed to what is in the Conservative manifesto, which is to complete the work that should have been done in the last Parliament so that we have equal-sized constituencies in a smaller House of Commons and cut the cost of politics.

Q4. [900673] **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Owing to ongoing issues with the Post Office's Horizon software accounting system, I believe that many honest, decent, hard-working sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses have lost their reputations, their livelihoods, their savings and, in the worst cases, their liberty. This is a national disgrace. Will my right hon.

Friend consider the requests from Members across the House for a judicial inquiry into this matter and bring it to a conclusion?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has done a real service in campaigning tirelessly on this issue, and I know that he has led a debate in the House on it as well. The Post Office's answer is to say that it set up an independent inquiry which has not found evidence of wrongdoing, but, clearly, that has not satisfied many Members on both sides of the House who have seen individual constituency cases and want better answers.

What I think needs to happen next is for the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), to convene a meeting involving Members of the House, the Post Office and representatives of sub-postmasters to discuss their concerns and see what should happen next. I would hope that it would not be necessary to have a full independent judicial inquiry to get to the bottom of this issue, but get to the bottom of it we must.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 is a closed question.

Prime Minister's Question Time

Q5. [900674] **Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): If he will hold discussions with his Cabinet colleagues to review the effect on voters' perceptions of Parliament of Prime Minister's Question Time.

The Prime Minister: I regularly reflect on Prime Minister's questions with Cabinet colleagues and others. For all its faults, and there are many, I would say that it has two important points: it puts the Prime Minister on the spot to the public, but it also puts the Government on the spot to the Prime Minister—needing to know issues right across every Department before coming to the House at 12 o'clock on a Wednesday is an important mechanism of accountability.

Mr Allen: Given that Parliament may be moving out of this place in 2020, will the Prime Minister take that opportunity to share the joys of Prime Minister's questions, which he has just outlined, and this federal Parliament by convening it in each of the nations of the United Kingdom and thereby symbolise his Government's and this Parliament's commitment both to the Union and to devolution?

The Prime Minister: As I said in an earlier answer, I am committed to trying to cut the cost of politics, and I am not sure that that would help. It is important that we take our politics and issues to all the different regions of the country, and that is something the Government are very committed to do, not least with our regional economic plans for every region of our country. As for the future of this House of Commons and where we stand and where we debate, that is a matter for the House of Commons, but I have to say that I have a slight emotional attachment to this place—the place at this Dispatch Box specifically.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): The brass fittings on that Dispatch Box are worn paper thin by the sweat from the palms of Prime Ministers and Ministers down the ages. That is a visual example of parliamentary accountability. Although our constituents rightly feel

that, at times, this session is a little absurd, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be a great pity if senior members of the Executive were not held to account in that way?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. I remember taking some constituents on a tour when I first became a Member of Parliament and hearing for the first time something I had not known—namely, that after this Chamber was bombed some of Winston Churchill's most important speeches and parliamentary occasions took place in the other place rather than here. I do not want to start a complete fight between both Houses, so I think I will leave it at that.

Engagements

Q6. [900675] **Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The Prime Minister has been asked repeatedly about his plans to exclude Scottish MPs from decisions that will directly and indirectly impact on Scotland's budget and my constituents in Airdrie and Shotts. Will he finally tell the House and the people of Scotland whether it is right to create a second-class status for Scottish MPs through the back door, or is he content to press ahead with plans that will bring about the break-up of Britain?

The Prime Minister: I am quite baffled. I thought the whole point of the SNP is that SNP Members want to exclude themselves from the UK Parliament forever. I thought that was the whole point. What we are putting in place is a fair and balanced system that is fair to all parts of our United Kingdom. Long may it stay together.

Q7. [900676] **Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): Over the past five years, increasing numbers of people in the east midlands and the UK have decided to take the courageous and important step to set up their own businesses and become self-employed. What steps will the Prime Minister and the Government take in future further to support those entrepreneurs in my constituency and beyond who represent and personify aspiration and hard work?

The Prime Minister: Let me welcome my hon. Friend to his place. I agree with him that people taking that step to become self-employed and start their own business has been a very big part of the jobs and enterprise revolution in our country over the past five years. Things such as start-up loans have made a real difference, which is why we are increasing them in this Parliament, but when we look at helping self-employed people, it is important to look at all the aspects of being self-employed—how people interact with pensions, benefits, maternity leave, public authorities and social housing rules. That is why I am asking Julie Deane, the founder of the fantastic Cambridge Satchel Company and a model for how self-employed people can achieve great things, to lead a review for the Government. Let us look at all the ways in which we can help self-employed people to get going.

Q8. [900677] **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Given the Prime Minister's commitment to localism, will he stand by and respect the decision made by Lancashire County Council this week to reject fracking, yes or no?

The Prime Minister: Those decisions must be made by local authorities in the proper way, under the planning regime we have. Personally, I hope that, over time, unconventional gas sites will go ahead, whether in Lancashire or elsewhere, because I want our country to exploit all the natural resources we have. I want us to keep energy bills down and I want us to be part of that revolution, which can create thousands of jobs. I also want to ensure that we can exploit our own gas reserves rather than ship gas from the other side of the world, which has a higher carbon footprint. We should do that, but if the Labour party wants to paint itself into a background of not wanting any unconventional gas at all, it should say so.

Q9. [900678] **Alok Sharma** (Reading West) (Con): Labour-controlled Reading Borough Council recently received a damning report from Ofsted for not doing enough to help struggling schools under its control. Will the Prime Minister tell us what the Government intend to do to ensure that systemically failing local education authorities such as Reading do not continue to ruin the life chances of our young people?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that. Frankly, one extra term in a failing school is too long for our children. In the past, Governments and LEAs have been too tolerant in allowing schools to continue to fail year after year, so this Government have set a very testing regime for failing schools and for those that are inadequate. As my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary set out this week, we will do similar things to schools that we would define as coasting and that could be doing better. We can now see the model of academy chains taking over a failing school, changing some of the leadership and putting in place the things that are necessary. We can see radical increases in the results, which is what we want. We will today talk about how we tackle poverty in the long term. Tackling sink schools and educational underachievement is vital to the life chances of our children.

Q10. [900679] **Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): After four opportunities, the Prime Minister still has not answered the question regarding the impact of English votes for English laws. May I strongly urge him to finally reassure the people of my constituency that their elected MP will not be given minority status in matters affecting the Scottish budget and, consequently, the lives of the citizens of Dundee? Moreover, last night 58 out of 59 Scottish MPs—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are very grateful. We have got the gist of it.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has had a very clear answer. It may be that the Scottish National party does not like the answer, but the proposals we discussed at great length in the last Parliament for solving this issue will now be introduced. The absolutely key point is that if, in some future Parliament, there is disagreement between English MPs who want one thing and the House of Commons as a whole which wants another, there would have to be a way of resolving the deadlock. This is effectively a block for English MPs. It is not the ability to legislate willy-nilly. He would know that if he read the manifesto.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Does the Prime Minister feel comfortable with the fact that the Conservative Government have implemented a spending target for foreign aid, but will not commit to a target of a minimum of 2% of GDP for defence? Does he realise that this is damaging the relationship with our key strategic ally, the United States, and risking our credibility with our NATO allies?

The Prime Minister: What I would say to my hon. Friend, who I know cares deeply about this issue and has in his constituency some of the most important defence manufacturers in our country, is that we have in every year met that 2% target. Many countries in the European Union do not even meet 1% for defence investment. The commitment we have made already is to invest £160 billion across 10 years into our equipment programme, with real-terms increases every year. That is why we can say the aircraft carriers, the C-17s and the new aeroplanes will all be coming forward. We will obviously make final spending decisions in the spending review this autumn.

Q11. [900680] **Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): For a man who seemingly is never away from Europe, why is it that he has never taken the opportunity, when he has been there, to put in a claim for state aid to save British miners' jobs? He is the man who, during the election campaign, masqueraded as the workers' champion but he has not got the guts to help those miners. He took £700 million out of the mineworkers' pension scheme and he has not given a penny back. No wonder they call him "dodgy Dave". The man that went to Eton: educated beyond his intelligence. [Interruption.]

The Prime Minister: It is very good to see the Labour party in full voice cheering on Jurassic Park. I would stick to the movie.

There is a serious point here. The Government have offered £20 million to the owners of Hatfield colliery to keep it going. We have been prepared to put forward money. Unlike the previous Government, we have been prepared to make ministerial directions, because we have some courage when it comes to these things.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): There is a very strong sense that the Airports Commission began life three years or so ago with a conclusion and then spent £20 million backing up that conclusion. The Prime Minister is going to have to make a decision on the back of those recommendations shortly, but what assurances can he give the million or so Londoners who stand to be affected by Heathrow expansion that he will engage with the real arguments in a way that Sir Howard Davies has not?

The Prime Minister: Let me pay tribute to my hon. Friend for how strongly he campaigns on this issue. I know how strongly he cares about it and how strongly his constituents feel about it. The promise I can give him is that this very thorough report, which landed on my desk yesterday afternoon, will be studied properly. This really does matter. If you make some precipitate decision or rule out one particular option, you will actually make the decision you would like to make impossible to achieve because of judicial review. We may not like that in this House, but those are the facts and those are the ones we need to operate on.

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, I call Clive Lewis.

Q12. [900681] **Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Mental Health Trust, which serves my constituency, is refusing to publish the so-called Alexander report on its operation. The report, which I have seen, raises serious questions about patient safety and care owing to cuts to services. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that the duty of candour should apply to NHS management as it does to NHS front-line staff? If so, will he join me in the call for the report's publication?

The Prime Minister: First, let me welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House. I make no apology for the

Care Quality Commission's rigorous inspection regime, which is identifying areas that need improvement. I would argue that the two things we need here are to uncover bad practice and turn it round, and then to back it up with the resources the NHS needs, including those recommended by the Stevens plan. As things stand, only this party is backing the extra £8 billion into the NHS—and not the Labour party.

Chris Law: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Points of order come after statements, and we have a couple of statements, so I am saving the hon. Gentleman up for later.

Davies Commission Report

12.36 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): With permission, I would like to make a statement about the airports commission's final report, published earlier today. I received a copy yesterday evening, and I have had copies put in the Library of the House and the Vote Office. First, I will review the commission's process to date; secondly, I will describe the next steps.

In September 2012, the Government appointed Sir Howard Davies to lead a Commission to consider how the UK could maintain its status as an international aviation hub and, in particular, provide capacity in the south-east. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Sir Howard for his leadership. I thank, too, his fellow commissioners—Sir John Armit, Ricky Burdett, Vivienne Cox and Dame Julia King—for their hard work over a long period. I acknowledge hon. Members from all sides of the House who have campaigned vigorously on behalf of their constituents, and I am sure they will continue to do so.

There are strong opinions on this issue. It is not easy to resolve. For the Government, the task is to balance local interests against the wider, longer-term benefits for the United Kingdom. This report is part of that process. Over 50 different propositions were considered. In December 2013, the commission shortlisted three schemes for further consideration: two at Heathrow, and one at Gatwick. It also made recommendations for improving our existing airport infrastructure, including upgrading transport connections. We are acting on those interim recommendations. We are working with Gatwick airport to upgrade the station there; Network Rail is leading a study to improve the rail link between London and Stansted; and Crossrail will soon provide a new direct route to Heathrow.

The Commission has also sought views from across the country because the UK's other airports, such as Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow, play a big role in our aviation success story. Connectivity to all parts of the UK is something that the commission has rightly considered.

The UK has the third-largest aviation network in the world after the United States and China, but it is congested and a lack of capacity holds our country back. Since 1990, 12 UK airports have lost their direct links to Heathrow. As Sir Howard Davies says in his foreword to the report:

“Good aviation connectivity is vital for the UK economy. It promotes trade and inward investment.”

The report states:

“About half of the British population has travelled by air within the last twelve months.”

It also states:

“While London remains a well-connected city its airports are showing unambiguous signs of strain.”

Meanwhile, hub airports such as Dubai and Istanbul are growing fast.

The commission found that all three shortlisted schemes were credible options for expansion, but that the Heathrow airport north-west runway scheme offered the strongest solution. According to the report,

“Heathrow offers a stronger solution to the UK's aviation capacity and connectivity needs than a second runway at Gatwick.”

The report recommends action to address the impact of any expansion on the local environment and community. The recommended action includes a limit on night flights, greater compensation, controls on air quality, and a guarantee that there will be no fourth runway.

Let me turn to the Government's response. There are a number of things that we must do now in order to make progress. First, we must study the substantial and innovative evidence base that the commission has produced. Secondly, we must decide on the best way of achieving planning consents quickly and fairly if expansion is to go ahead. Thirdly, we will come back to Parliament in the autumn to provide a clear direction on the Government's plans.

This is a vital moment for the future of our aviation industry. Our aviation sector has been at the heart of our economic success and quality of life. All those with an interest in this important question are expecting us to act decisively. This is a clear and reasoned report which is based on evidence, and it deserves respect and consideration, and we must act. I commend my statement to the House.

12.41 pm

Michael Dugher (Barnsley East) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me advance sight of his fairly brief statement, and I join him in thanking Sir Howard Davies and his team for the vital work that they have done since 2012 in producing what is a very important report. I also pay tribute to both Heathrow and Gatwick for the impressive campaigns that they have run.

The report constitutes a substantial piece of evidence-led work. Sir Howard Davies has proceeded in a calm, open and assured manner throughout, and we welcome the fact that he has now produced a clear recommendation. The report states:

“A new Northwest Runway at Heathrow delivers more substantial economic and strategic benefits than any of the other shortlisted options, strengthening connectivity for passengers and freight users and boosting the productivity of the UK economy.”

It also states that the recommendation is

“a fundamentally different proposition from previous proposals to expand at Heathrow.”

Sir Howard Davies added this morning:

“The proposal in place then was a deficient proposal; it did not offer the economic advantages of this proposal.”

As the Secretary of State has said, aviation plays a massive role in our economy, and has the potential to play an even greater role in the future. The sector employs hundreds of thousands of people, contributes more than £50 billion to our GDP, and pays the Exchequer more than £8 billion in tax every year. However, as we know, the ongoing growth of our aviation sector is now at risk. Heathrow has been full for 10 years, and Gatwick is set to reach capacity within the next five.

A decision on aviation expansion should have been made many years ago. That was a failure on the part of all previous Governments, but failing to act this time is not an option. Just a few weeks ago, a report by the Independent Transport Commission revealed that if a decision was put off yet again, we would face a significant loss in productivity and inward investment, with the UK economy potentially losing up to £214 billion over the next 60 years. The evidence is clear: more airport

capacity is vital to our economic success, and we need action if we are to maintain our status as Europe's most important aviation hub.

As I have said, the report is a significant and substantial piece of work, and, like the Government, we will take an appropriate period of time to analyse and scrutinise its findings carefully; but will the Secretary of State assure me that, if the report and Heathrow can demonstrate that the main recommendation meets a number of key tests, the Government will make a swift decision to proceed? Those tests include, first, that there is robust and convincing evidence that the increased aviation capacity that is required will be delivered by Sir Howard's recommendation; secondly, that the recommended expansion in capacity can go hand-in-hand with efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions from aviation and allow us to meet our legal climate change obligations, which is absolutely crucial; thirdly, that local noise and environmental impacts have been adequately considered and will be managed and minimised; and fourthly, that the benefits of expansion will be felt in every corner of the country, including any infrastructure, employment and supply-chain benefits, and that regional airports will be supported, too.

The public and businesses across the UK have been clear that they do not want any further dither or delay. Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that, no matter how tempted the Government might be, he will not kick this into the long grass? The short-term interests of the Conservative party must not take priority over what is in the best long-term interests of the country.

This is the biggest decision for UK plc this decade. The message from the Labour Benches is clear: we will study the report carefully and, if our key tests are met, we will back the report and a decision that is in the long-term interests of the country. I know there are profoundly difficult issues within the Conservative party on this issue. The Secretary of State has my deepest sympathies, as always, but there is a majority in the House of Commons willing to do the right thing by the country. The Government will have our support, but they must make the right decision—and they must make it quickly.

Mr McLoughlin: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his response. It was calmer than the response I usually get from him on transport issues.

Michael Dugher: Business as usual next week.

Mr McLoughlin: I do not think I will have to wait that long.

The hon. Gentleman says that there are difficulties on the Conservative Benches, with colleagues having strong views, but I beg that he looks just behind him, because certain of his colleagues oppose an expansion of airports, not least one of the leading contenders for the nomination of Labour candidate for London Mayor, the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), who said this morning:

“This is a bad decision. All Londoners should know if I'm elected mayor I will do everything in my power to stop this health and environmental catastrophe blighting London.”

Rather than trying to make it seem as though there is opposition just on the Conservative Benches, the hon. Gentleman and other Members should recognise the very big concerns that a number of people have and will have on any expansion of major infrastructure. That is

something that I have been always careful to do as Secretary of State for Transport, whether in dealing with this subject or other subjects that cause local people a lot of inconvenience. Sometimes a scheme is basically unacceptable to them. I assure him that we will study the Davies report in great detail. It is a very good, well researched report. I will come back and inform the House further later this year.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm, so that there can be no misunderstanding, that although this is a report to the Government, they are not necessarily bound by its recommendations?

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question. As I said earlier, Sir Howard has come forward with the report. We have to consider all the implications of that. It is up to the promoters of these schemes to speak to the local residents who are most directly affected to see whether they can achieve consensus on what they want and what they will accept.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for the early sight of the airports commission report and confirm that there are no problems on the Scottish National party Benches with this. I thank Sir Howard and his team for their work.

The report, while continuing to keep Gatwick as a “viable option”, provides a clear direction. All those involved would expect clarity from the Secretary of State on his position as soon as possible. People should not have to wait until the autumn for the Government's view. Indeed, the Prime Minister suggested today that the wait could be even longer. There is a huge amount at stake for everyone who may be affected.

For too long, in common with other parts of the UK, Scotland has not had its needs addressed in relation to the provision of fair pricing, sustainable landing slots and the power to reduce or remove air passenger duty. We hope the decisions taken will finally provide a fairer deal for Scotland's people and one that will provide a significant boost to our economy.

In line with the report's recommendations, will the Secretary of State confirm that there will be substantially more support on connectivity for long-haul to and from Scotland? Further, will he confirm that such connections will be put on a statutory basis? Will he also guarantee that internal route connections to Scotland will be given permanence through public service orders, to remove the “Here today, gone tomorrow” service so often suffered by the Scottish public?

Mr McLoughlin: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his points. I take it that there is no division whatever in the SNP on Sir Howard's proposals, although I may wait a little and see how the debate develops. The hon. Gentleman is right about regional connectivity and the slots needed by Scottish airports and other airports that have lost them, and I hope we can address that. I want to reflect on that point while considering the whole report.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): It is disappointing to hear the Opposition dismiss the concerns as being about the internal problems of a political

[Zac Goldsmith]

party. Heathrow is already the biggest noise polluter in Europe, and increasing that by 50% will only make the problem worse.

The Airports Commission raises air quality as an issue. My view is that there is not a single air quality expert or organisation anywhere in this country or Europe, or indeed the world, who believes we can reconcile Heathrow expansion with any air quality targets. If that is the case, I presume that the Government's decision is very, very easy?

Mr McLoughlin: I am not entirely sure that I agree with my hon. Friend that the decision is very easy, but he has been very open in the points he makes, the way in which he has campaigned and his own position on Heathrow expansion. He will be able to make those representations in the same way that other Members may make other representations.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Davies commission's recommendation for Heathrow, which follows the findings of the Select Committee on Transport in its detailed report published two years ago. Does the Secretary of State agree that now is the time for a swift decision, with the key national decision to be based on the importance of connectivity both to international markets and the regions of the UK?

Mr McLoughlin: I have outlined the way in which the Government will come to their decision. On such a big issue, coming back to the House by the autumn constitutes a swift decision.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): I accept that my right hon. Friend's duty, both in law and following good governance, is to study the report carefully and to consider respectfully every one of the representations that will come from every quarter, particularly from those who represent home counties constituencies. Does he agree, however, that the Government were elected to deliver a modern, competitive economy for future generations, and that in the end decisions on major infrastructure projects—fracking or whatever else—should be taken on a clear judgment of the national interest of the country as a whole? As he is a fellow representative of what the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise, my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), calls the midlands machine, I hope he will confirm that that will be his guiding principle in reaching his conclusion.

Mr McLoughlin: In all my time in the House of Commons, I have always found it much easier to agree with my right hon. and learned Friend on such issues. He makes a number of points that we must bear in mind, and it is in a way a pity that progress has not been made on some of these subjects sooner.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): The Secretary of State started his statement by outlining the history, beginning with the Davies commission. There was a stage before that, however, when the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr Cameron)—now the Prime Minister—said to my constituents, “No ifs, no buts,

there will be no third runway.” Now, 10,000 of them are at risk of losing their homes, their local community centres, their schools and their places of worship. Today the air pollution levels were double the EU legal limits. If the runway goes ahead, the noise will extend to 1.5 million people. Does the Secretary of State think the onus is now on the Prime Minister to come to my constituency and meet my constituents whose homes and whole community are now at risk?

Mr McLoughlin: What the Prime Minister was talking about initially was a proposal put forward by his own party, which was basically not a proper proposal and would not have answered the capacity question. The Prime Minister certainly ruled out that option, and set up the commission so that we could make a reasoned and proper judgment, which is exactly what we will do.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Sir Howard Davies has produced a serious and extremely important piece of work and that he deserves the credit of the whole House? Does he also agree that what Sir Howard has done is go overseas to check best practice and make sure his proposal is fortified by such calculations? Does my right hon. Friend further agree that what matters is that this decision is taken solely in the national interest, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said?

Mr McLoughlin: Indeed, and the commission points out that all three of the options are well worth considering.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): A new runway at Heathrow would blight the lives of thousands as well as increasing climate emissions, yet new research shows that a small number of very wealthy people flying very regularly—not families taking an annual holiday—is driving demand. Will the Secretary of State agree to look seriously at a new proposal for a frequent flyer levy as a way of tackling the health and environmental impacts of growing aviation?

Mr McLoughlin: In fact, Sir Howard suggests in his report that there should be an extra levy particularly to compensate people who are affected by noise, so those who fly more frequently would pay more towards that levy. It is also worth pointing out to the hon. Lady that, as I said in my statement, half the population used a plane last year.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): Any courageous and difficult decision that the Government make will take time to implement. My right hon. Friend has already indicated that the UK is losing business to overseas airports. Does he agree that it is desirable and possible for airports such as Manston in Kent to be used immediately to relieve the pressure on Heathrow and other airports while the long-term decisions are being taken?

Mr McLoughlin: I did not think that my hon. Friend would miss out on the opportunity to mention Manston airport. The commission looked at more than 50 proposals in coming to its recommendations, and it is those recommendations that the Government are now considering.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): The Secretary of State referred in his statement to surface transport improvements to our airports, but did not refer to western rail access to Heathrow. Is he still committed to that, and does he agree with the Davies commission, which says:

“Further delay will be increasingly costly and will be seen, nationally and internationally, as a sign that the UK is unwilling or unable to take the steps needed to maintain its position as a well-connected open trading economy in the twenty first century”?

Mr McLoughlin: I think the right hon. Lady has managed to read the first part of the report, but it goes into a lot more detail on some of the proposals—I fully accept that she has not yet had time to consider all of that, and neither have I. I will say, however, that the connectivity and the connections up to Crossrail will make a huge difference to Heathrow, and the western rail access will be one thing that Sir Peter Hendy, in his new role of chairman of Network Rail, will be looking at.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend pay particular attention to the contradiction at the heart of Sir Howard’s recommendation: that London’s ostensibly hub airport should have a third runway but not a fourth? Does that not add emphasis to the need, as part of the northern powerhouse, for a major airport development there?

Mr McLoughlin: I realise that my right hon. Friend has not had time to read the whole report—as I have said, I have not managed to read it all yet either—but I draw his attention to page 34, where it says:

“If new capacity was found to be necessary and feasible, a wide range of options should be considered. This could include airports previously assessed as part of the Commission process, for example Stansted and Gatwick, and airports outside London and the South East, such as at Birmingham or Manchester.”

I have been very keen to ensure that airports outside London such as Birmingham and Manchester play a full role in the aviation availability for the country.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): When the right hon. Gentleman was appointed, it was taken as a signal that the Government—certainly the Conservative part of the coalition—were having a fresh look at aviation capacity, because his predecessor, who does a great job as International Development Secretary, had campaigned against any capacity increase. Will he assure the House that as Transport Secretary he will act as an advocate for the Davies recommendations within Government?

Mr McLoughlin: Many interpretations were put on why I might have got the job in 2012, so I will leave the hon. Gentleman’s interpretation to his own imagination.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): When the Secretary of State is looking at this report over the summer, will he pay particular attention to pages 289 and 290, and think about my constituents? There is talk of mitigation and compensation, but there is already too much noise pollution and, as has been said, the air pollution this morning is twice what it should be. Will he acknowledge that that there is no alleviation possible for Twickenham residents? Page 290 refers to the issue,

but I do not want all our schools having fancy little pods in the playground because the noise pollution is too much for the children.

Mr McLoughlin: I know that my hon. Friend will want to make those points to me. She will want to look at the whole report in detail, although she has done a fairly good job by getting up to page 289 already, and I will want to look carefully at the points she makes. As I say, in part of the recommendations there is talk of a new levy on passengers so that some noise insulation and better noise insulation could be provided, as well as mitigation, particularly for some schools. I know that this issue is a particular problem in her constituency.

Sadiq Khan (Tooting) (Lab): The Transport Secretary will be aware that the commission recommends but the Government decide. The Government will be aware that London’s air quality has been getting worse and worse. A few weeks ago, the Supreme Court ruled that the quality of air in London was unlawful. The impact of noise is felt during the day as well as during the night, making the lives of thousands of people in London a misery. The local infrastructure cannot cope at the moment, let alone in the future. We all want jobs and growth, so will he seriously look at plans to expand Gatwick to create additional capacity and have a high-speed link between Heathrow and Gatwick, so that we could have jobs and growth without causing the misery that the third runway would cause?

Mr McLoughlin: Of course we will be looking at all those things before we come to a final decision, but I believe that when the right hon. Gentleman was a Transport Minister he supported a third runway.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend is handling this matter with great wisdom and has rightly praised the excellent report that Sir Howard Davies has completed, with its compelling and well-written argument. My right hon. Friend will be aware that the taxpayer has invested £20 million in this report, which is absolutely critical to our future economic well-being. To govern is to choose, so will he make the right decision as quickly as possible and bring it back to this House as soon as he can?

Mr McLoughlin: I have outlined exactly the scenario that the Government are going to follow, and when I come back to the House I hope that I can count on my right hon. Friend’s support.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): The Secretary of State referred to the role that other UK airports play in our aviation success story, and I am sure he would want to add Belfast City and Belfast International to the list. For us, regional connectivity is key; the air links between London and Belfast are vital to grow our economy. The prospect of 5,000 new jobs in Northern Ireland alone as a result of this proposal is very welcome, but will he look carefully at the issue of guaranteed slots at Heathrow for Northern Ireland, because it is essential for our economy that those slots are maintained and indeed increased?

Mr McLoughlin: That follows on, in a way, from the points made by the Scottish National party earlier about the importance of slots available to airports, not just in Scotland, but in Northern Ireland. When I

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appeared before the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs in the previous Parliament that was one of the important issues its members wished to raise with me, and obviously we will want to consider it.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend look carefully at the Howard Davies proposals? If there is to be expansion at Heathrow, one key issue is that there must be environmental benefits for the surrounding area, which has been adversely affected by the operation of Heathrow for decades. I suspect that my constituents would have mixed views on the expansion of Heathrow, but one key issue for those who live closest to it is the extent to which their quality of life deteriorates because of heavy goods vehicle movements, congested roads, car parks and grubby and ill-controlled activities, which are probably far more deleterious to their standard of living than the noise from the aircraft themselves? [Laughter.]

Mr Speaker: I call the Secretary of State, on grubby and ill-controlled activities.

Mr McLoughlin: That might need to be a private conversation with my right hon. and learned Friend outside the Chamber. However, I well appreciate the point he makes and I would want to see those sorts of issues addressed. As he rightly points out, local residents have had to put up with them for a considerable time.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): This is perhaps the classic conundrum of sustainable development, with the Government and the country caught between an economic rock and an environmental hard place. The Environmental Audit Committee will want to examine it in detail when considering the report. What are the Secretary of State's initial thoughts on the report's conclusion in paragraph 9.120 that Gatwick performs "best" on minimising carbon emissions, and on paragraphs 9.92 and 9.93, which make clear

"the Commission's objective to improve air quality consistent with EU standards and local planning policy requirements"

and that the scheme

"could, without mitigation, exceed the Air Quality Directive limit values and delay compliance with the EU limit value for the Greater London agglomeration"?

I do not envy the Secretary of State's decision and the country's decision, but we need to get this right in terms of those stringent warnings.

Mr McLoughlin: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on being elected Chairman of the Environmental Audit Committee; he has probably just shown us why. I am sure that that Committee, along with the Transport Committee and other Committees of the House, will want to look at these issues and cross-question both me and other people on their implications.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): My right hon. Friend will not be too surprised to hear that I am fully supportive of Sir Howard's position, particularly as I recognise the huge economic benefits of Heathrow over the somewhat weak plan for Gatwick. Will my right hon. Friend reflect on his points about speeding

up the process? He was one of the Ministers responsible on HS1 and is now watching HS2 creep down the railway tracks. Once he has made his decision, which we hope will be the sensible decision for Heathrow, will he speed up the rest of the procedure, even if we have to remove, with a forklift truck, our friend who is currently Mayor of London?

Mr McLoughlin: I think we are making good progress on HS2, but there have been delays on large infrastructure projects. I would like to see a consensus build on some of these issues, but it is very difficult.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My constituents are very divided on this issue, not least because thousands of households depend on Heathrow for employment but are also very affected by noise and by air pollution. One area where there is unity is on the need for the future of Heathrow to be secured. Will the Secretary of State rule out today any future proposal by the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) that we should close Heathrow and that there should be a Thames estuary island, or any other similar measure?

Mr McLoughlin: Those things were looked at by the commission. It produced its report and recommendations and it is on that report and those recommendations that the Government will take action.

Mr Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): I welcome the clear recognition that Britain needs a hub airport at the end of this process. This debate has raged for more than 50 years. I urge my right hon. Friend to ensure that he is the Secretary of State who brings it to a conclusion.

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. I have outlined the way in which we will address what the commission has said, and I look forward to coming back to the House later this year.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) has already mentioned the 2009 "no ifs, no buts" statement, which I am beginning to think was made with an eye more on marginal seats on the flight path, such as my own, than on anything else. However, what I really want to ask the Minister is this: how many Cabinet resignations does he predict if the Davies recommendations are enacted?

Mr McLoughlin: I expect to be able to have good conversations with all my colleagues right across the House on what is a very important infrastructure project for the United Kingdom.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): As the Secretary of State said in his statement, the commission has taken views from right across the United Kingdom. Sir Howard said this morning that those views, including those from Scotland and Northern Ireland, were firmly and overwhelmingly in favour of Heathrow. I assume that that will be taken into account in his consideration of the report.

Mr McLoughlin: We will be looking at the whole report. As Sir Howard said, the three options to be considered are all viable ones.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Today, on what promises to be the hottest day of the year, many of my constituents will be enjoying their gardens. Will the Secretary of State confirm, no ifs, no buts, that they will be able to continue to enjoy that amenity in years to come and that their lives will not be blighted by increased noise and reduced air quality as a result of any decisions that he will make later on this year?

Mr McLoughlin: Let me gently chide the right hon. Gentleman. The no ifs, no buts matter was something that he signed up to when the previous Government commissioned Sir Howard to compile this report, because the decision commanded the support of the whole Government at the time. Certainly, we must address the whole issue of noise pollution and other pollution in this report. That is one of the things that Sir Howard Davies has done. It is one of the reasons why the commission was broadly based, and actually had a member of the Committee on Climate Change as one of the commissioners.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I welcome the publication of the Airports Commission report. It reached the best conclusion, independently arrived at, for both economic growth nationally—for this great trading nation—and this great global city of London. I also welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to come to a swift decision this calendar year on the future and final option. May I also seek assurances that the ministerial code will apply in this decision?

Mr McLoughlin: I can definitely confirm that the ministerial code will apply to all Ministers in the way in which we deal with this issue over the next few months.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): In looking at the report over the coming months, will the Secretary of State consider the livelihoods of many in the UK—the 190,000 potential jobs, the 76,000 livelihoods of those currently working at Heathrow and the 10,000 apprenticeships—and not just the livelihoods of the hon. Members for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith)?

Mr McLoughlin: The right hon. Gentleman had a good question there, but spoiled it at the end. As I have already said, there are other mayoral candidates from the Labour party who have a similar position to that of my hon. Friend, the present Mayor of London. That is an issue that we shall consider and take forward.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): May I add my congratulations on the recommendations in the Davies report and the clear indication that a third runway is required at Heathrow? As a north-west MP, may I seek assurances from the Secretary of State that north-west connectivity will only continue to improve as a result of this decision?

Mr McLoughlin: Those are the issues that we will have to address. I am sure that the Transport Committee will want to review them at some stage as well, and I know that my hon. Friend is about to join that Committee.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The increase in carbon emissions from any airport expansion will have to be contained within the overall carbon budget set by the Committee on Climate Change. What discussions is the Secretary of State having in Cabinet about offsetting from other areas of his portfolio to ensure that those emissions caps are not breached; and what discussions is he having at European level to ensure that a European emissions cap is put in place, as this country has unsuccessfully argued for previously?

Mr McLoughlin: We regard our obligations under the Climate Change Act 2008 very seriously indeed, and we tried to reflect that when we set up the airports commission and made Dame Julia King a member. That is certainly something that the commission has addressed in its work.

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. As a long-term public supporter of Heathrow expansion, I have already welcomed the Davies commission findings. Will he consider, as soon as possible, giving the National Air Traffic Services a statutory responsibility to mitigate noise? NATS currently does not have that responsibility, the consequence of which is that holding patterns, approach and take-off from Heathrow are unnecessarily noisy. Will he also consider allowing Heathrow airport to fine airlines if they use old planes that are particularly noisy, and if their pilots are unnecessarily noisy when they fly planes in and out of Heathrow?

Mr McLoughlin: I will certainly consider those points. One recommendation is to have an independent noise commission, which would partly address my hon. Friend's points. He is right to point out the great advances that have been made by the aircraft manufacturers in reducing noise levels from planes. I know that a lot of work continues to be done in that area.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): Implementing these proposals quickly is clearly in the national interest, and I support the proposals. It has never been in the national interest that such a disproportionate amount of public money has gone into capital expenditure on transport in the south-east of England. Will the Secretary of State reassure the House that the necessary capital works—paid from the public purse—to support a third runway at Heathrow will not disadvantage the north of England and the other regions of this country?

Mr McLoughlin: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the proposals should be implemented quickly, but they should be implemented quickly and properly and with the proper procedures. The whole process would be slowed down dramatically if we were to be challenged in the courts, and to lose, but he makes a good point about investment in transport infrastructure across the United Kingdom. I am proud of the Government's record and of our plans for investment right across the country, including the northern powerhouse.

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that now we have these recommendations, the people of my constituency, particularly on the Isle of Grain, can be assured that there will no longer be an airport proposal for the Hoo peninsula and that it is finally off the table?

Mr McLoughlin: I think that I said to my hon. Friend when I was in her constituency a few months ago that that was one of the 50 proposals that was considered by the commission, but it has now been ruled out. What we have today are the three proposals that the commission has endorsed.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): The Secretary of State quite rightly mentioned Newcastle airport in his list of regional airports in his statement. As he is probably aware, there is another regional airport in the north-east of England, which is Durham Tees Valley airport. Part of the runway runs through the constituency of the hon. Member for Stockton South (James Wharton), the Minister with responsibility for the northern powerhouse. It is imperative that we have connectivity to Heathrow. We have it with Schiphol, but there are not so many destinations from there as there are from Heathrow. We really need a quick and positive decision on this matter to ensure that the economy in the north-east grows in the future.

Mr McLoughlin: It would have been wrong of me to try to read out every single airport in the country that would want such connectivity, and I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not mentioning his airport. I have tried not to call these airports regional airports: they are airports that serve their local communities incredibly well.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend rightly referenced the growth of airports such as Dubai and Istanbul. Does he agree that that demonstrates the challenge we face in maintaining our status as a global aviation hub? Does he further agree that we should make a decision sooner rather than later in the interests of our international competitiveness?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I referenced those two airports in my statement, but others are trying to get the advantage that they see the United Kingdom has. We must ensure that they do not get that advantage.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Secretary of State and Sir Howard can go on all they like about mitigating the effects of a third runway at Heathrow, but for hundreds of thousands of Londoners it just means more noise, pollution and congestion. What is the Secretary of State's message for them, and will he answer, as he has not so far, the question about what the Prime Minister meant when he said that a third runway at Heathrow was not going ahead, no ifs, no buts?

Mr McLoughlin: He was talking about the proposal at the time, which the hon. Gentleman supported—

Andy Slaughter *indicated dissent.*

Mr McLoughlin: Perhaps he was not a Member, but his party supported that proposal in government. We asked Sir Howard to consider and address some of these issues, which is what he has done. Some of the changes that he would make as far as the noise and the levy on passengers are concerned are very important. As I say, the report has three options and we are considering all three.

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Chancellor the Exchequer has made clear this Government's commitment to regional economic development through his announcement of the northern powerhouse. Although I note the comments on page 34 of the report about Birmingham and other airports, does my right hon. Friend not agree that this is potentially a wasted opportunity to promote not only regional economic growth but sectoral economic growth, such as the great manufacturing sector of the midlands?

Mr McLoughlin: I am sorry that my hon. Friend so easily dismisses page 34, which I would have thought gives him and the people who run Birmingham airport, which he has spoken about in the House on occasion, some encouragement. Those airports—Birmingham, Manchester, and Tees, just to ensure I get them all right and do not upset anybody—are all incredibly important for people around those areas and we want more flights from them.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher) says, but Birmingham international stands ready for expansion with international flights to JFK in New York and Beijing that are cheaper than from Heathrow. Will the Secretary of State seriously take into account the fact that Birmingham has a strategic position in the UK and its connectivity to HS2?

Mr McLoughlin: Yes, I will certainly take that seriously. The hon. Lady will know that the recent runway expansion at Birmingham has been very important in trying to attract more business and offer more opportunities to fly to other destinations. She is absolutely right about how important HS2 will be for that airport.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Has not the commission made an unequivocal recommendation, finding that Gatwick would deliver fewer benefits—half the economic benefits of Heathrow—has poorer transport links, especially to the north, and, crucially, would not deliver the hub solution that this country needs? In taking a decision swiftly, will the Secretary of State be mindful of the fact that it might be inconsistent to talk about a long-term economic plan and the national economic interest while going for a suboptimal solution that has not been recommended by the commission?

Mr McLoughlin: I think my right hon. Friend is trying to prejudge the decisions we will take. I shall not get caught in that trap. We will consider all parts of the report and I assure him that we are committed to seeing the United Kingdom and its long-term economic plan grow and succeed.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Davies commission report will clearly repay close study. The economic benefits of the third runway at Heathrow are understood, but does the Secretary of State appreciate that for millions of people, including millions of Londoners, the economic benefits are outweighed by the clear environmental disbenefits, such as carbon emissions, noise, and, above all, air pollution?

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. She is absolutely right and she mentions some of the considerations that we must seriously take on board. There is no easy answer, which is slightly different from what was said from the Opposition Dispatch Box at the start of the statement.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Although London Heathrow might be operating at virtually full capacity, Manchester airport is not. Whatever is decided, it will clearly be many years before new capacity becomes available in the south east, so will the Secretary of State look into ways of helping Manchester airport to attract new operators and groups to Manchester?

Mr McLoughlin: Manchester did get its extra runway. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: I want more services to be available to the public from airports outside London.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): With 40,000 of the extra jobs that a third runway would generate set to be in London, and given that Sir Howard Davies has looked in detail at the environmental concerns that were raised with him and is clear that they can be addressed, quite apart from the national interest, will the Secretary of State accept that it is certainly in London's interest for a third runway to go ahead?

Mr McLoughlin: Like others, the hon. Gentleman is tempting me to prejudge the Government's consideration of the report. The simple point is that, as he will have heard from various other Opposition Members, there are other considerations to take into account. I shall not therefore prejudge the decision we shall take.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the whole of the United Kingdom and, in particular, my constituents in Yorkshire are to benefit from these ambitious airport expansion plans, we need good conductivity, which means a good rail network with modern rolling stock and electrification?

Mr McLoughlin: Yes, I do. I am very proud of the huge investment in this Parliament, with £38.5 billion being spent on upgrading our railway network. I am very pleased to say that under this Government the Pacers will stop running in my hon. Friend's constituency and will be replaced with better trains, which never happened under the previous Government.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I am sure that the Secretary of State agrees that we need extra airport capacity. We also need a major hub airport in this country. Will he agree that, for connectivity to the north, locating capacity and that hub several miles to the south of London would be completely illogical?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman, who has been in this place for a fair amount of time, tries another little trick to get me to prejudge what I have said several times I will not prejudge—nice try, but he failed.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to moving this issue on as quickly as possible for the sake of connectivity, the economy and the loss of business we are suffering.

When he considers the local factors in west London, which he must do, will he consider the fact that Heathrow is geographically situated very conveniently for the majority of people and that if they were forced to travel further that would add to congestion and air quality problems?

Mr McLoughlin: I think I might have to refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave just a few minutes ago. Again, he tries to get me to prejudge where we are on this issue, and I am not prepared to do that.

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): We have heard quite a lot about the balance between jobs and the environment. We have already spoken about further investments in roads and transport, but there are many schools and families under the flight path. I hope that the Secretary of State will take account of the future of those generations, whose education will be disturbed by noise and other pollution, whenever the final decision is made.

Mr McLoughlin: Yes, I understand exactly where the hon. Gentleman is coming from, and it is interesting that in the report Sir Howard and the commission talk about a noise levy to be paid by passengers, with the money being spent on things to alleviate noise. In fact, new modern planes are not as noisy as some of the older ones that are still flying.

Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know of the strength of support for Gatwick's second runway in my constituency of Eastbourne and Willingdon and across East Sussex from every chamber of commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses—connectivity is so important for coastal communities such as mine. He highlighted in his statement capacity and connectivity in relation to the Heathrow proposal, but will he confirm that deliverability and affordability, where Gatwick arguably has the stronger case, will also be at the heart of decision making?

Mr McLoughlin: Again, my hon. Friend points out some of the other things that we need to take into account when reaching a conclusion and returning to the House later this year to set out the proposals that we wish to follow. Deliverability will be an important consideration for us.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State undertake to return with specific and binding proposals for the air industry on emissions and minimising noise pollution when he announces his final conclusions?

Mr McLoughlin: That will be part of the issues that we want to address. We will look particularly at how Sir Howard and the commission have said that the issues can be addressed. As we heard in earlier questions, that will be debated by the Environmental Audit Committee and other Committees between now and the Government reaching a conclusion.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): My right hon. Friend has a strong track record for acting in the long-term, strategic interests of transport infrastructure. To help him to reach a bold and swift decision, may I direct him to page 76 of the report, which points out the £5 billion cost of delays if we do not take a decision? Is

[Iain Stewart]

there not also an environmental cost of not acting, given that capacity constraints cause planes to stack in ever-increasing numbers over London?

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am quickly looking at page 76, which he drew my attention to. I can assure him that we will go through all these points, but he is absolutely right: a plane stacked over London is neither economic nor good for the environment.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In 2015, Belfast City airport has returned to solid growth across all business sectors. Nine flights leave Belfast City airport for Heathrow every day—the busiest flights from Northern Ireland. Does the Secretary of State agree that ensuring that Belfast City airport remains a vital regional hub will bring extra passengers and create more travel and extra revenue as a key priority?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman points out that this is a matter of connectivity from London not just to other parts of the world, but to other parts of the United Kingdom. I accept the importance of Heathrow and those services to and from Belfast.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): I do not want the Secretary of State for Transport to prejudge the commission's report—I just want him to get on with it. He said he hopes for some consensus. I hate to break the bad news to him: it is simply not going to happen. Many businesses in Ribble Valley use Manchester airport and will be grateful for what he has said about it, but a lot of them connect to London and flights to about 40 new destinations will be available once airport capacity is expanded. Please will he—gently—get on with it?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend started by saying that he will not ask me to prejudge but urged me to make a decision here at the Dispatch Box. The answer to the first part of his question is no, I will not do that. The answer to the second part of his question, which relates to the importance of connectivity and Manchester airport, is that I accept it.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): According to the report, 60% of the benefits of Heathrow will be delivered outside London and the south-east, so will the Secretary of State support the call from Newcastle international airport not only to make a quick decision in favour of Heathrow, but to put in place the steps necessary to deliver this crucial project?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Lady points out that this issue is important not just for London but for the whole United Kingdom. We need to reflect that in our deliberations on the subject.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): May I praise Sir Howard Davies for the rigour of his report? Although I do not expect my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make a decision, will he expedite the many processes that this airport has to go through, so that we actually get a runway built and the UK can compete in the 21st century?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is correct, but we have a process that we need to go through. We do need to abide by that process. If we did not, we would simply find ourselves judicially reviewed in the courts and the whole process would take a lot longer.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's view that the Davies recommendation is not a missed opportunity to use the UK's runway capacity to the full, but I put it to him that he is contemplating staggeringly massive public sector subsidies to a western rail link, to the infrastructure work on runway 3 and to the completion of Crossrail, while pulling Leeds-Manchester electrification and midland main line electrification. He has to square that because those two projects would drive traffic to Manchester airport in my constituency.

Mr McLoughlin: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman thinks that we are pulling those projects. I have put that electrification on pause. I want the costs to be looked at. I do not want a repeat of what happened when the last Labour Government started the upgrade of the west coast main line: it was estimated at £2 billion, turned out at £9 billion and did not lead to the changes we needed. I am very proud of what we are doing with the northern powerhouse, and I am very pleased that this Government will actually see the abolition of the Pacers that serve his constituency and the rest of the northern area, too. If this statement was not just on aviation, I could roll out a number of other improvements that we are making to support the northern powerhouse, and I would have thought that he supported us.

Karen Lumley (Redditch) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that today's report will provide a great opportunity for extra investment in Birmingham international airport? Will he congratulate it on its brand-new route to China, which will bring investment to the midlands?

Mr McLoughlin: I certainly will congratulate that airport, and I hope to be part of the celebrations for that new service this weekend.

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): The North East chamber of commerce, Newcastle airport and businesses across the region have made it clear that Heathrow represents the best option for the north-east economy, for jobs and for growth. May I urge the Secretary of State to take into account when reaching this decision the impact on the north-east economy and other regional economies?

Mr McLoughlin: The answer to the hon. Lady's question is that we will take those things into consideration in reaching our conclusions.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): I hope that my right hon. Friend, who has been on his feet for nearly an hour and has listened to Members from right across the House, understands that London's airport capacity not only affects the south-east but the rest of the country, so may I sing the praises of Leeds Bradford airport? A third runway at Heathrow would more than double demand for travel between Leeds and London in the next five years, boosting Yorkshire's access to emerging markets, and we must not put that at risk.

Mr McLoughlin: I thank my hon. Friend for his representations, which will be taken into account.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I welcome today's announcement and all the work that has been done, because it means that Belfast international airport, which is in my constituency, should get a flight and direct route to Heathrow. Yes, we want it quick, but when the Secretary of State considers levies and such things into the future, will he keep it in mind that 52% of our passengers disappear down to Dublin because of air passenger duty? Any levy that is put in place might severely hurt the Northern Irish economy.

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his representations. Obviously, we have to be aware of that, but also part of a noise levy is considering how to put right the damage and how to try to soften or reduce the effects on those who are most disturbed by the noise. That is the right thing to do.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): My right hon. Friend said that the Government asked Sir Howard Davies how the UK could maintain its status as an international aviation hub. If that is the case, there might be a difficult decision ahead for my right hon. Friend. Does he not agree that we do not want to be "an" international aviation hub? London will probably almost always be "an" international aviation hub; we want to be "the" international aviation hub. We want to take on and beat the likes of Paris, Dubai and Amsterdam, for the economy of the future, in which case the choice might be quite simple.

Mr McLoughlin: Well, that is another way in which my hon. Friend might be trying to get me to prejudge our conclusions. I have made the point that we are the third largest aviation economy; aviation's contribution to our economy follows that made to the economies of the US and China. I am very aware of how important the industry is to the UK.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): My constituents, a third of whom are not under the current two flight paths, will be under the flight path towards a third runway at Heathrow, so as you can imagine, Mr Speaker, I am not exactly enthusiastic about the recommendations of the Davies commission, but I agree with the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher), the shadow Secretary of State, on the need for a speedy decision for the good of our economy, our communities in west London and the aviation industry.

In the light of the need for a speedy decision, will the Secretary of State start his analysis by looking at the risk factors in respect of further growth at Heathrow and a third runway being deliverable—the potential further breach of EU air quality legislation and the ability to deliver the carbon offsetting that other parts of the economy must address? I ask that that be done as a matter of urgency.

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Lady points out a number of issues that we have to consider and take on board. Those will have to be addressed, and satisfactorily addressed as well.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): My right hon. Friend has heard representations from around the House on the importance of connectivity from regional airports. For most air travellers, often the most frustrating part is getting airside. Therefore, prompting great relief, British Airways now runs a flight out of Leeds to Heathrow, allowing people to get airside without facing the congestion at Heathrow. However, they cannot run for the early flights in the morning because there simply is not the capacity. I am worried that the report rules out the possibility of further expansion, if needed, with respect to regional airports. With that in mind, will my right hon. Friend, as he considers the Davies report, give serious consideration to other locations such as Stansted to ensure that we have future ongoing capacity, as well as the solution being looked at right now?

Mr McLoughlin: I am not sure that the commission has ruled that out. I referred to a chapter in Sir Howard's report, which talks about other airports playing a role and seeing those expand too. The point I would make to my hon. Friend is that one issue that is often raised is the availability of slots into London airports.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): While I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, will he reassure me, in the context of the decision he will take in the autumn, that in considering the relative merits of the commission's report he will take into account the importance of airports such as Birmingham and regional economies such as the west midlands and the black country?

Mr McLoughlin: Yes, indeed. The last time I made a statement on aviation capacity, I think I had more questions about the future of Birmingham airport than any other airport we discussed that day. That is not lost on me.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): While I welcome the expansion in the south east and recognise that it is important to the national economy, my constituents will also note that it represents further concentration of resources in the south. As we seem to have been doing something of a tour of regional airports during the past hour, I cannot help but mention Humberside, which is located in an area where many international companies are based. Will my right hon. Friend give an absolute assurance that airports such as Humberside will receive the necessary infrastructure to expand the local economy?

Mr McLoughlin: I visited Humberside airport quite some time ago, when I was last in the Department, so it has been providing a service for many years.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker. I have been able to cancel my step aerobics class tonight.

I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments on the link to Heathrow airport from the great western main line. Adding to the list of regional airports that we have been talking about, will he commit to looking at Bristol international airport, giving me and my constituents the confidence that he will do so over the summer?

Mr Speaker: I am very glad that the hon. Gentleman has found his exercise therapeutic. The nation has been enriched in consequence.

Mr McLoughlin: Mr Speaker, you have the habit of keeping the best until last.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) that there has already been a lot of investment, including around Bristol airport. As has been made clear by everybody who has taken part in the debate on the statement, there is a lot more to look at than what is happening as far as London is concerned. That connectivity to all parts of the United Kingdom is important.

Mr Speaker: I am most grateful to the Secretary of State. We got through 60 Back Benchers in 56 Back-Bench minutes. It is not for the Chair to express any view on the content of answers—that is not a matter for me; such matters are the subject of much dispute in all parts of the House—but the Secretary of State could usefully conduct seminars for his Cabinet colleagues on the merits of pithy responses. If he is unwilling to court the unpopularity that such an offer would involve, it would be quite a useful deployment of the time of a Government Whip to circulate the relevant copy of the *Official Report* to other Ministers, because they would usefully profit from the instruction that it contained.

Mr McLoughlin: Mr Speaker, I think you are trying to get me into trouble.

Mr Speaker: Would I do such a thing?

Child Poverty

1.47 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): Over a decade ago, I demonstrated that the relative income measure of poverty was flawed, and that it was driving Government policy on an unsustainable path. In 2007, the Centre for Social Justice report “Breakthrough Britain” made this point:

“Many poverty analysts are concerned that setting this simplistic poverty threshold has warped government priorities.”

I shared that concern, and in 2011 I reiterated that message in a speech to the London School of Economics, calling for a rethink about the way we improve the life chances of the poorest in society.

How we measure things matters because it influences what Governments focus on and what we target. As the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) himself said,

“this income measure...drives...policy in a single direction which is in danger of becoming counterproductive.”

Even the current chair of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, Alan Milburn, made a point in its latest report, before the election, that there is a real challenge to all parties to deal with the issue of this measurement.

The problem with a statutory framework set around the relative income measure has become all too apparent to all people and to everyone who wants to be honest about this. At 60% of median income, if someone sits below the line they are said to be poor; if they sit above it, they are not. Asking Government to raise everyone above that set percentage often led to unintended consequences, although for good reasons. Most of all, it led to poorly targeted spending, pumping money into the welfare system and focusing more often on inputs than on what those outcomes meant.

For example, as I have said before, we saw massive spikes in tax credit spending in the run up to election years. In the two years before the 2005 election, tax credit spending increased by nearly £10 billion, and in the two years before the 2010 election, it increased by nearly £6 billion. From 2002 to 2010, spending on tax credits more than doubled and cumulatively rose to £258 billion by the 2010 election.

Spending on welfare overall increased by 60% in real terms under the Labour Government, driven by the legitimate and reasonable need to chase what became, after the early successes, a moving line. Despite all this spending, by 2010, under the Labour Government, the number of households where no member ever worked nearly doubled, in-work poverty rose, and the Government missed their 2010 child poverty target by 600,000 children. I allege nothing from this. The motives were good, but the figures did not work.

We reached the position where a growing economy, ironically, drives increases in the measure of child poverty, whereas if the economy crashes, as happened under the Labour Government, child poverty apparently falls. Even today, if we were to increase elements of the state pension, we would run the risk of increasing the median income and thus increasing the number of households that would then fall into poverty.

We consulted widely over a number of years during the last years of the previous Government. The challenge was and remains to get a better way of identifying what we measure and how we tackle the root causes of the problem. This is because the current Act does not do enough to focus Government action on improving a child's future life chances, to acknowledge the key role education plays, or to recognise that work is clearly a very important way, if not the real way, out of poverty.

Let me deal with the issue of work. I believe work is the best route out of poverty. It provides purpose, responsibility and role models for our children. Yet after more than a decade of welfare spending increases, by 2010 one in five households had nobody in work. During the previous Parliament we began to turn this around. There are now 2 million more people in work than in 2010. The number of children living in workless households is at a record low, and workless households are down to record levels as well. In this Parliament, I want to continue to press to improve that so that more parents get into work, stay in work and, importantly, progress when in work.

On education, the other aim that I just referred to, our ambition must be for disadvantaged pupils to be successful at school. We are committed to raising the bar among poor pupils as part of raising standards for everyone. This is because we know how important educational attainment is for improving their life chances. The Wolf report commissioned by the last Government showed that English and maths skills are vital for labour market entry, and continue to have a significant impact on career progression and pay. This is clearly shown by the staggering fact that 63% of men and 75% of women with low literacy skills have never received a promotion, remaining locked on the income on which they entered work. We are committed to ensuring that more poor pupils achieve excellent grades at GCSE, attend the very best universities, and do an apprenticeship or gain skilled employment, so that every child, regardless of background, is given an education which allows them to realise their full potential.

To that end, today I am announcing that we will bring forward legislation to remove the existing measures and targets in the Child Poverty Act 2010, as well as the other duties and provisions. However, the legislation will introduce a statutory duty to report on measures of worklessness and educational attainment. The worklessness measures will identify the proportion of children living in workless households, and the proportion of children in long-term workless households. The educational attainment measures will focus on GCSE attainment for all pupils and particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

The worklessness and education measures will reflect the agreed responsibilities in the devolution agreements. As with all our reforms, we will work with the devolved Administrations as we progress. They must make decisions about what they want to do. Alongside these reports we will continue to publish the HBAI—households below average income—statistics annually.

Alongside the statutory measures, we will develop a range of other indicators—I think this is very important—to measure the progress against the root causes of poverty. We know that in households with unstable relationships, where debt and addiction destabilise families, parents lack employment skills, and children are not ready to start school, these children do not have the same chances

in life as others. It is self-evident. They cannot break out of that cycle of disadvantage. We are currently developing these measures, including family breakdown, problem debt, and drug and alcohol dependency. We will report each year on these life chances measurements as well.

We will reform the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission to become the Social Mobility Commission. The commission will ensure independent scrutiny and advocate for improved social mobility. This approach will ensure that tackling the root causes of child poverty and improving future life chances become central parts of our business as a one nation Government. As the Prime Minister said:

“We need to move from a low wage, high tax, high welfare society to a higher wage, lower tax, lower welfare society.”

Governments will no longer focus on just moving families above a poverty line. Instead, we want to focus on making a meaningful change to children's lives by extending opportunity for all, so that both they and their children can escape from the cycle of poverty and improve their life chances. This process will, I hope, mark a shift from solely measuring inputs of expenditure to measuring the outcomes of children-focused policy. I commend this statement to the House.

1.55 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for early sight of his statement. What he read out today is the obituary notice for compassionate conservatism. It is the death knell for any idea that his party might one day be a party for working people.

It is only a week since we received the news that progress on child poverty has stalled, with most poor children now living in working households. The Conservatives' manifesto said that they would “work to eliminate child poverty”.

Instead, their solution is to change the definition—incidentally, at their second attempt; they tried this before and gave up—to remove altogether child poverty from the remit of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, and next week to announce cuts that will make the problems much worse.

The Child Poverty Act, which the Secretary of State, if I understood his statement correctly, now wants to repeal, received all-party support before 2010, and it put one of the most important duties on Government: to ensure that, in the 21st century, children do not grow up suffering deprivation or lacking the necessities that most of us take for granted. It has not just one, but four measures of poverty: absolute, relative, persistent, and material deprivation. The relative measure is the internationally accepted definition used by every OECD country.

Do the Government accept the importance of relative poverty? Will the Secretary of State clarify that? He told us in his statement that a decade or so ago he was arguing against the use of relative poverty. As he knows, at the same time the current Prime Minister was arguing for acceptance of relative poverty. In what he said today the Secretary of State echoed the words of the Prime Minister last week when he said:

“Just take the historic approach to tackling child poverty. Today, because of the way it is measured, we are in the absurd situation where if we increase the state pension, child poverty actually goes up.”

[Stephen Timms]

Of course, the Prime Minister was right. If the Government increase the income of better-off people, they make others relatively poorer. The Prime Minister last week described that as absurd, but that was not what he said when he was trying to re-brand the Conservative party in 2006. In his Scarman lecture he said that the Conservative party

“will measure and will act on relative poverty...poverty is relative and those who pretend otherwise are wrong.”

He went on to say:

“We need to think of poverty in relative terms—the fact that some people lack those things which others in society take for granted.”

That was the Prime Minister speaking in 2006.

So what is the Government's current view? Is it that focusing on relative poverty is absurd, as the Prime Minister said with conviction last week, or is it the diametrically opposite view that he set out with apparently equal conviction on behalf of his party before? Where do they now stand? The Prime Minister promised that a Government he led would “act on relative poverty”. Why is that promise being broken?

Why cannot the Secretary of State level with the House? He hopes nobody will notice this announcement or its significance because it coincides with the airports statement. Am I right in understanding that he proposes that in his legislation there will be no targets at all, or will he include some targets in it and, if so, will he tell us what they are? I remind the Secretary of State that he and his colleagues all voted for the Child Poverty Act in 2010.

When in government, Labour lifted more than 1 million children out of relative poverty and more than 2 million out of absolute poverty. A key success was raising lone parent employment from less than 45% in 1997 to more than 60% today, mainly thanks to tax credits. That was not about lifting a few people from just below a line to just above it; it was about a very substantial change in the way the economy works. Will the Secretary of State tell us whether next week the Government will announce big cuts to tax credits? That is not about making work pay; it is about making working families pay.

What we need is not a change in the definition of poverty, but a plan to deal with poverty and boost productivity. Ministers should be tackling low pay, but instead they are attacking the low-paid. The Children's Commissioners for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have today come together to warn that the Government's policies will push more young people into poverty. What happened to the long-term plan? Why have children been left out? Why is the party that promised in its pre-election manifesto to work to eliminate child poverty now planning to increase it?

Mr Duncan Smith: Let me deal with the points that the right hon. Gentleman has made. First, I thought that his comments were a little ridiculous. The idea that this is somehow an obituary for compassionate conservatism does him ill. He knows very well that the purpose of what we are doing is to get rid of child poverty, and that remains our central purpose. As I said earlier—and we are not alone in this—the problem is that if we lock two sets of measures that actually drive spending

to rotate people over that line, what we get is a process of churning, but not the real and deeper change in people's lives. That is the big reason why we want to do this.

The truth is that the previous Labour Government, on their own measure, failed to achieve their target—they failed to halve child poverty by 2010. Worse, in-work poverty actually rose. We could go through the list, but I would have thought that there was a better way of building some consensus than saying that Labour, if in power, could somehow embark on a massive spending spree and everything would be all right. Even Alan Milburn said that was unrealistic, and it remains unrealistic. We have to deal with the world as it is now, and we have to change the life chances of those children.

It is worth remembering that under this Government 74% of poor workless families who found work escaped poverty, and there was a higher poverty exit rate of 75% for children living in families who went from part-time to full-time employment. That has happened under this Government.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about international measures and suggested that we are somehow breaking away from everyone else. The reality is that no other country embarked on a plan to get rid of child poverty using that child poverty measure, and the reason is that other countries realised that it would lead to peculiar patterns of expenditure, with very little result for those who most need help.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether relative poverty is important. Yes it is, which is why we continue to publish statistics on houses below average income, and we will continue to do so, so everybody will still be able to comment on that. Our focus will be on turning around the lives of the poorest through education and ensuring that they get back to work through skilling, which my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary has been working on.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about the poverty figures published by the IFS last week. He knows very well that before last week most of his colleagues were running around saying, “It's going to be terrible. The IFS is predicting that child poverty will rise dramatically.” Actually, none of that happened. [Interruption.] Even on those measures, child poverty fell by over 300,000 under this Government.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to a well-respected body such as the IFS, which has all the means at its disposal, and we have enormous respect for its ability to predict things, but its predictions on child poverty have been wrong every single year that we have been in government. In its most recent prediction it was wrong again. Its original prediction was that child poverty would rise to 2.8 million, but that was out by over half a million.

I am not attacking the IFS—far from it—but simply saying that if a Government set a policy on something they find incredibly difficult to forecast or predict, they will end up chasing the error, as the previous Labour Government did. Well over £200 billion was spent on tax credits, but the key point is to turn lives around. That is why we will present this Bill, and why we will change this so that we can reach the poorest children.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Higher education standards, more apprenticeships and real jobs are what will drive down poverty, not borrowing large sums of money and spending it on benefits. Does my right hon. Friend agree?

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree. The whole point is that we want to eradicate child poverty. This is not a departure from that proposal. However, we want to ensure that we do that by changing the long-term life chances of those who live in the poorest families. I do not want to have to stand here year after year and pretend that rotating people over the line of median income somehow means that we have succeeded. I said three or four years ago that child poverty had fallen under us according to that measure, but I said that I made no claim to have done that. The previous Government crashed the economy, which is why child poverty fell.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Over 210,000 children in Scotland are living in poverty, which is more than one in five, and two thirds of them have working parents. The report published earlier today by the UK's Children's Commissioners makes it clear that this Government are failing to protect the most disadvantaged children from their austerity cuts. Why will the Secretary of State not back calls for powers over employment and social security to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament so that we can take more effective action there to tackle poverty?

Mr Duncan Smith: The devolved Administration in Scotland are getting powers over employment, because the Work programme and personal independence payments are being devolved, so they will have the powers to do that. In fact, the significant new powers in the Scotland Bill will give something like £2.5 billion-worth of new welfare powers to the devolved Administration, and they will be responsible for raising more than 50% of what they spend. On the basis of what I said earlier, I am happy to engage with the devolved Administrations on what measure they want to use, because they will have the capacity to decide either to continue with that measure or to change it in line with ours.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind colleagues that it is a very long-established convention in this House that if a Member wishes to be called in response to a ministerial statement, that Member must be present at the start of the statement; it is no good wandering in at some later point, even if it is only shortly afterwards. Any Members who came in late should please not carry on standing, because they will not be called.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Prior to 2010, when I was the party's child poverty champion, we discussed these changes, so I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. Does he accept that they represent a comprehensive approach to dealing with child poverty that is actually going to help?

Mr Duncan Smith: I am glad that my hon. Friend believes that, because so do I. The purpose of what I have set out today, after a great deal of consideration over the past few years and a full consultation on the matter, is to arrive at a situation in which we are able to help those children and families in the greatest difficulty

and try to move them out of poverty so that they sustain their lives out and beyond poverty.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. I re-emphasise his point that whatever definition we have will drive policy and resources, but might I make two pleas? First, when he fixes the life chances definition, he should not be too modest about his own contribution. Under the Labour Government, he and my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) published a report showing that the life chances for most children, particularly poor children, can be over by the age of five. We need to concentrate on that and not to be concerned immediately with technical education, however important that may be. Secondly, this Government and the previous Labour Government have been largely successful, through their welfare-to-work scheme, in moving people from benefits to work. The welfare-to-work mark 2 agenda should be about how we move many of those who are trapped on low pay up the pay scale so that they earn decent wages, with the dignity that comes from that, while also drawing less in tax credits.

Mr Duncan Smith: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's comments. He knows very well that, as I have already said to him, I am very happy to engage with him and his Committee on these matters. As he says, at the beginning of the previous Parliament, we called on him and the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) to do some work for us, and I have remained absolutely wedded to the proposals that they brought forward. In fact, the Social Justice Cabinet Committee that I now chair is tasked with ensuring that those early intervention measures are driven through all Departments. My right hon. Friend the Education Secretary is already acting on much of that with the early educational markers and by driving attainment much earlier on in areas such as maths and literacy, which will be part of our measure. The right hon. Gentleman will, I hope, note that I talked about publishing, alongside that, life-chances measures for areas such as debt, drug and alcohol abuse, and family breakdown. Those measures will help to guide us on when we intervene to make the changes necessary.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): In constituencies such as Wycombe, for far too long the combination of relative measures plus coarse aggregates has hidden real poverty in certain wards. Will my right hon. Friend focus on practical outcomes for families and individuals so that we can get out of the position where we complacently ignore those in need and real suffering?

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree. Apart from the two key areas that we are going to study very hard and put forward proposals on—the educational attainment and worklessness measures—we will have a duty to report on the pathways to poverty that I spoke about. Those will be the guiders that allow us to drive forward the change that is necessary, often in the very early years, in families suffering deprivation.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Is not this statement merely a justification for next week's cuts to tax credits for the working poor? Is it not also about avoiding the fact that the Government

[*Debbie Abrahams*]

have absolutely no hope in hell of achieving their Child Poverty Act targets? The fact is that low income is the cause of child poverty, so what is the Secretary of State going to do to address that, because this Government have absolutely failed to make work pay?

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree that low earnings are part of the problem, but that is exactly what we are trying to address in raising the thresholds and planning to raise them again to over £12,600. We have taken millions of people out of paying tax. We also targeted this by raising the minimum wage, which will rise again to £6.70. I have made it very clear that I personally want the minimum wage to rise even further. This Government are determined, through the mechanisms and interventions that I am talking about, to raise incomes and change life chances at the very earliest stage.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's determination to break the cycle of disadvantage and to focus instead on outcomes. As he knows, health inequality also traps children in disadvantage. He has touched on alcohol and drug addiction, but will he also look at the burdens of mental health inequalities, and obesity and tooth decay, because those too are having a massive impact on children's life chances? I hope that he will work across Government Departments to make sure that they are tackled as well.

Mr Duncan Smith: I am happy to work with my hon. Friend on this. I agree with her about poor health outcomes, which often involve mental health issues. Some of those are swept up within the work that we are already doing. We will bring forward further proposals on how we can improve outcomes for people with mental health conditions by getting them to treatment much quicker. I am happy to discuss those matters, in line with the areas that I spoke about earlier.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): In a recent answer to me, the Secretary of State admitted that the proportion of the social security budget spent on 18 to 21-year-olds on jobseeker's allowance in receipt of housing benefit is just 0.1%. When he enacts his nasty and punitive policy to remove that entitlement, what will happen to those people and their 2,400 dependent children? Does he simply not care that they are going to be thrown into greater poverty and homelessness?

Mr Duncan Smith: No. All those young people will always be supported by this Government. We are talking about getting the balance right between those who need support and can be supported by their families and those who have genuine and serious long-term difficulties. Part of the process I have announced today is to identify those families earlier. Universal credit helps enormously in identifying the families with debt problems, housing problems, and drug and alcohol problems. Getting to them and dealing with those problems is far better than the tokenism that the hon. Lady seems to be involved in.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, which will continue to build on the Government's work

to address the root causes of poverty in Mid Dorset and North Poole and elsewhere. Does he agree that this Government's work to support families and prevent family breakdown is critical in tackling child poverty and increasing children's life chances?

Mr Duncan Smith: I do believe that. One of the big failures of Governments is that too often they have been ambivalent about the whole concept of stable family structures and have simply chased the errors. Since we came to power, family life has stabilised, according to the latest reports. More than that, we are putting millions of pounds into help and support for those in danger of family break-up, and that never happened before.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Tory party members were the strongest opponents of a national minimum wage, and no doubt the right hon. Gentleman himself voted against it. Apart from those on the Tory Benches, most people will understand very clearly that the whole purpose of his statement and policy is to try to conceal the amount of poverty, child poverty and deprivation that exist in so many constituencies like mine. He should be thoroughly ashamed of himself.

Mr Duncan Smith: Those are the usual rather bitter and acrimonious remarks from the hon. Gentleman. I say to him, not for the first time, that I utterly disagree. More than that, I point out that all the figures that we would usually publish will continue to be published; there is no hiding anything in this report. If he is not going to be bothered to read them, I will direct him to exactly where he will find them. If we change life chances from the beginning rather than being obsessed about targets, as he is, we might change real lives rather than playing games.

James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con): In my experience as a small business owner, I was absolutely shocked to find that members of staff would decline pay rises that we offered them because they would lose so much in tax credits in this absurd system. May I assure my right hon. Friend that he will have strong support from my constituents in South Suffolk if he undertakes radical reform of tax credits, because they are a benefit trap and they hold back social mobility?

Mr Duncan Smith: We are already engaged in that. Universal credit is rolling out, replacing the current system. That will make it much easier for people to find work and then to work different hours, whereas at the moment, under tax credits, they are often penalised for making a decision to change their hours because they lose far too much of their earnings. That reform is under way, and it will change lives.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The UK Government's £12 billion of proposed welfare cuts will risk putting up to 100,000 more children into poverty in Scotland by 2020. Yesterday the Secretary of State and his colleagues walked through the Lobby to turn down the opportunity for Scotland to have greater power over welfare and employment. He said in his statement that "work is the best route out of poverty." Is it not time that Scotland had the power to tackle poverty, because his Government and his party clearly cannot?

Mr Duncan Smith: It will not surprise the hon. Lady to hear that I do not agree with almost every single word she said. I remind her that it is no good going on and on about the powers that one wants when one is not prepared to recognise or exercise the massive powers given under the Smith commission—£2.5 billion-worth of new welfare powers, the ability to raise more than 50% of what is spent, and powers over employment programmes. I am not quite sure what she actually wants, but I do know this much: under this Government, employment in Scotland has been better than it has been after previous recessions at any other time.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's thoughtful statement. Does he agree that, despite having figures for persistent poverty in the structure of the existing poverty targets, they have not hitherto succeeded in driving public policy change in Whitehall or in improving the life chances of those in persistent poverty in Blackpool and Cleveleys?

Mr Duncan Smith: That is exactly the point I have been making. One of the big areas that has been missing is educational attainment. By locking in educational attainment, we are at last going to be able to look at a balance of measures that ask whether people are actually seeing their life chances progress. The group of people I most constantly worry about are the families who never got near the 60% line, whose life chances were flat. I want them to be able to follow a trajectory that goes above that line and for them to be able to get ahead under their own steam as they take control of their lives.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): In west Cumbria, as in many other parts of the UK, the areas of greatest deprivation have not shifted for decades, so I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State say that we are now moving to a high-wage economy. We have heard a lot from hon. Members about wages and tackling in-work poverty. Surely the Secretary of State must agree that until we ensure that all businesses pay a decent living wage, we are never going to tackle in-work poverty and break that cycle.

Mr Duncan Smith: The hon. Lady should recognise that wages are rising faster and more strongly than at any time since 2007, so we have started that process. We have also raised the minimum wage—it is due to go up to £6.70—but if the hon. Lady wants to press me, I absolutely agree with her. I want businesses—and I have said this before—to recognise that they need to pay the people who work for them a decent wage and not rely on the Government to subsidise that wage so that they can have bigger profits. I am going to campaign for that and I hope we will drive it.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Unemployment in my constituency of Bury North has fallen by about half since 2010. Does the Secretary of State agree that the best way to alleviate child poverty is to have a growing economy, giving more parents the opportunity to work and enabling higher wages for those already in work?

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Opposition are concerned and angry that the measure is being changed, but it is worth relating the interesting fact that, even with all the money under the measure,

the number of working-age people in in-work poverty rose by 20% between 1998-99 and 2010. It beggars belief that some want a policy that is clearly not working to continue simply because it has become totemic to them. They are not looking at its actual effect.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): If I heard the Secretary of State correctly, he said that a quarter of those who move from unemployment into work remain in poverty. Is not there a problem, therefore, of short-term working, zero-hours contracts and low wages? Is not there also a problem, particularly in London and the south-east, of excessively high rents, which are driving so many people into poverty? Any interested observer of the Secretary of State's statement would say that it was a study in obfuscation to avoid examination of what he is really doing, which is damaging the life chances of millions of young people in this country. Child poverty is a terrible thing and he should address it rather than run away from the facts.

Mr Duncan Smith: The hon. Gentleman and I should be at one, because we are addressing the facts. That is what today's announcement was about. The hon. Gentleman mentions the number of those who are in work but who have not risen out of poverty. The figures I read out earlier show that, of those who fail to get proper maths or English qualifications at school and make it into work—they are in the minority—some 75% of the women will never progress because of their failure to get qualifications. Does not the hon. Gentleman think that I am answering his charge through educational attainment—driving change for those children and getting them into work so that they can progress?

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): As a former director of a credit union, I am deeply concerned about the level of indebtedness that is endured by and has blighted the lives of many low-income families. Would the Secretary of State care to expand further on the Government's plans to address this very difficult problem?

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend should know that in the last Parliament we put a significant amount of money into credit unions. It is our plan—we are determined about this—to get credit unions to expand and to work with them so that they become the key element for people on low incomes and others to be able to get decent support, including financial support. I recommend that all hon. Members set an example by making sure that they are members of credit unions.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I note that the Secretary of State will remove any Government ambition to eradicate child poverty. On behalf of the hundreds and thousands of children who go to school having not eaten breakfast or who after the summer holidays turn up thinner because they have not eaten properly—many of whom actually come from working households—may I ask the Secretary of State what he will do to make sure that no child in our country is going hungry?

Mr Duncan Smith: We have provided universal free school meals and childcare measures allowing mothers to go to work. I say to the hon. Lady that under her party's Government, in-work poverty actually rose, so she needs to look at her figures before lecturing us.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not intend any unkindness to the hon. Lady and I want to be fair, but I do not think she has been present throughout the exchanges or that she was here at the start. Did she leave at any stage during the proceedings?

Heidi Allen *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: She did not. I will take that from her. If that is what she tells me, I am content with that.

Heidi Allen: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was here towards the end of the transport statement.

I want to draw on my own experiences as a business owner. It is important that, however we choose to describe the measures, we tackle child poverty head-on. During the early days of one particular employee's employment, it felt like I had to drag him to work. He was a young man aged 21 with three small children and it was clear that nobody, including his peers and parents, had brought him up in the world. When I gave him employment and put his money up, he was still culturally unable to find the mental drive to go to work. We have to tackle child poverty by getting to people when they are young, through education, giving them hope and making sure they have food in their bellies—whatever it takes—and we have to achieve that together. I have seen it at the other end—you can drag a horse to water—so I welcome what the Secretary of State is trying to do.

Mr Duncan Smith: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place and her experience of running a business and trying to get people from difficult backgrounds into work. My right hon. Friend the Education Secretary is already engaged in driving schools to help inculcate and teach character resilience and key characteristics such as understanding what it is to go to work and to get up in the morning. Under this Government, average weekly earnings have been rising faster than for a considerable time.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): The Secretary of State has told us that he will remove the current child poverty targets and replace them with a number of measures. I am uncertain, however, about whether there will be any other targets. If not, how will we be able to measure his success? Clearly, success is needed because, as he knows, 37% of London children live in poverty and unless he is successful they will continue to be poor.

Mr Duncan Smith: We are going to be very open and publish all the elements I mentioned earlier, including those relating to educational attainment, workless households, the new life chances measures and the figures for households below average income, so the hon. Lady and anybody else will be able to see them. We are not hiding from anything. We want those HBAI figures to fall and for the educational attainment and working household figures to improve. That will all be evident and if we are not achieving that, the hon. Lady can be the first on her feet to say so.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The Secretary of State referred to universal credit in response to an earlier question. It is acknowledged that universal credit will be a vital support to families and children.

What is being done to ensure that people in rural areas without high-speed broadband connections will not be disadvantaged in this process?

Mr Duncan Smith: That is a very good question, and the hon. Lady is right to say that universal credit will help enormously. The Government have a massive programme to roll out superfast broadband to every area of the country. I will take the hon. Lady's question to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport so that it can tell her how soon it will arrive in her area. Even if people are unable to do it online, we have made full provision for them to do it, if necessary, by paper exchange, as they would at the moment.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Secretary of State has announced that he will report on measures of worklessness and educational attainment. Will he take care to make sure that those figures are broken down by race and ethnicity, because there are complex factors at work? It is not necessarily the case that all groups of black children do worse than all groups of white children. Although we might disagree on the remedies, without sound data we cannot plan to help all of our children.

Mr Duncan Smith: I give the hon. Lady that absolute assurance.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Regardless of the fiddle the Secretary of State is carrying out on the measure of poverty, does he not accept that if his Government press ahead with cuts to tax credits without raising the minimum wage to at least the living wage, he will plunge many more of my constituents and their children into poverty?

Mr Duncan Smith: The purpose is to get people into work and to help to drive up their hours so that they end up in full-time work and beyond the benefit system. I believe the reforms we have carried out and those we will bring forward will aid that. He should be reminded that his devolved Administration has the capacity and power to decide what measures they want to employ.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): One of the proudest and best achievements of the previous Labour Government was the roll-out of 3,600 Sure Start children's centres. If, as the Secretary of State says, this is all about outcomes, not inputs, why has his Government slashed the budgets of local authorities, which pay for Sure Start, to such an extent that more than 800 have closed and many more are now hollow shells of their former selves? To use his very words, they are now unable to make "meaningful change to children's lives".

Mr Duncan Smith: We gave local authorities responsibility and the money. We did not ring-fence the money, but we told them that their priority should be to make sure that that early years work takes place. My view across the board is that, as all the studies I have seen show, the quality of that work is as good if not better than it was before. I was and remain a great supporter of such support, and I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education will ensure that it continues.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): London is the sixth richest city in the world and it produces a fifth of the GDP of the United Kingdom; yet four out of 10 of its children are in poverty. Does the Secretary of State accept that businesses recognise those facts by paying a London weighting? Is it time that he considered a London weighting both in relation to the minimum wage and the benefits cap in London?

Mr Duncan Smith: As a London MP, I am only too well aware of the peculiar difficulties faced by London. Even after all the years of very high expenditure through tax credits, we still have the situation that the hon. Gentleman mentions. Certain particular facts about London make that a reality. I would simply say that my purpose in all this is to look at all measures to have a better way of making certain that the support goes to such individuals. I am very happy to discuss with him the matter he raises to see whether we can make any progress.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Mr Wood, were you here at the start?

Mike Wood: I certainly was.

Mr Speaker: Good. Let us hear from Mr Wood.

Mike Wood: Despite the progress that has been made during the past five years, too many children of disabled parents remain in poverty. Will my right hon. Friend assure us that the Government will continue to work to help more disabled people into work—and well-paid work—so that such children can look forward to better outcomes?

Mr Duncan Smith: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. The Government rightly spend significant sums of money on support for disabled people throughout the UK. In fact, I think the amount we spend on disabled people, as a proportion of GDP, is more than is spent by America, Germany and France together. I am proud of that. It is the right thing to do, and we should continue to do it. However, many people who have disabilities are desperate for work. We have now increased the proportion who are in work to record levels, but that is not good enough. I want to get it up to the same level as for the rest of society.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State please explain how redefining child poverty and removing targets will in practice give help today to a child living in poverty in a family who are in work?

Mr Duncan Smith: We continue to support families who are in work through the various mechanisms we have. As universal credit rolls out, it will add to those mechanisms, and there are additions for families with children. Including the measures I am announcing today, we will address that by ensuring that the children in such families have improved life chances through improved educational achievement. We have already done a huge amount through free school meals, support through childcare—there are massive amounts of new childcare—and the involvement of parents in further work. We are doing more to help those families than was ever done before.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Would the Secretary of State care to comment on a recent policy proposal from the Resolution Foundation, which has pointed out that if one really wants to target help to working families on low and middle incomes, the best way to do it is to increase or boost the working allowance as opposed to giving them tax cuts?

Mr Duncan Smith: I have never seen such things as either/or. A well-balanced Government will decide how they can help certain specific groups with support where necessary. We have done that in a variety of areas, including through the tax credits we inherited from the previous Labour Government and now through universal credit. I am a great believer in this: if, as we have done, we give people incentives by raising the threshold and taking millions of low-paid people out of tax, that has got to be good because now that they do not pay tax, they can hold on to more of their money.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): The Secretary of State will no doubt want to join me in welcoming the Welsh Labour Government's moves to tackle the deep roots of poverty, whether relative or absolute poverty, including schemes such as the Flying Start programme. He will also welcome the news that Labour-controlled Rhondda Cynon Taf Council intends to move all its workers on to the living wage. Does he agree with the concern that cuts to in-work benefits that happen too soon and are not commensurate or simultaneous with rises in the minimum wage or a move towards the living wage will inevitably impact on absolute poverty in working households?

Mr Duncan Smith: I am not altogether acquainted with the programmes that the hon. Gentleman mentions, but I have talked at length to the devolved Administration in Wales. We have endlessly discussed how we can interact. I would like us to interact more; they are sometimes a bit resistant to doing so. My purpose is to help people to get back to work and out of poverty. Wales is seeing a bit of a renaissance in terms of people going back to work, which is good news. As far as I am concerned, we want to help people through work, and I want employers to pay their people a decent wage. I have ensured that the Department for Work and Pensions in London pays the London living wage to all, including the cleaners.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Higher educational attainment and improved job prospects are important goals, but they are long-term ones. In the meantime, child tax credits are absolutely vital. Indeed, they are a more precise way of targeting help to children in low-income families than normal rises in the tax threshold. The majority of such families are of course in work. What assurances will the Secretary of State give us that there is no plan to reduce child tax credits for these hard-working families?

Mr Duncan Smith: We have brought forward these particular measures because they allow us to identify families better. We now have to do the work to identify families who are stuck on low trajectories and are unlikely to break free of such a position on the measure by which we have always measured poverty in the past. I would simply say that that is the best way to give

[Mr Duncan Smith]

workless families more opportunities now. In the longer term, educational attainment will help to ensure that their children do not repeat what has happened in the past. I believe that the reforms we are making and those we will bring forward will help children more and will help parents to get back into work faster.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): The Secretary of State has not actually addressed the questions asked about tax credits by my constituency neighbour. If I may say so, his statement skirted around the issue of children living in households where the parents work but are still in poverty. How can it possibly be fair, in next week's Budget or at some point in the future, to cut the tax credits for those families? All he has said today about these measures and everything else will not help the parents of those households to pay the bills when he cuts their tax credits overnight.

Mr Duncan Smith: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman ever reflects on the fact that people can best get out of poverty by progressing through work. In discussions with Labour Members, I tend to find that they are still wedded to the idea that only through constant and high Government spending can anyone move beyond the status of being in poverty. That is the difference between us: Conservative Members believe that helping, encouraging and getting people back to work and reducing the tax burden on them is likely to get them out of poverty; Labour Members think that only Government spending succeeds.

Point of Order

2.40 pm

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Today it has been announced that, tragically, a couple from Leeds, Christopher and Sharon Bell, who were taking a holiday, were among the victims in the Tunisia massacre. I should like to place on record the condolences of the House.

I seek your advice, Mr Speaker. As the days pass, we know that further victims will be identified. Is there a way in which the whole House can offer condolences to the families at this tragic time?

Mr Speaker: The ingenuity of individual Members can sometimes enable that to happen, as the hon. Gentleman has just demonstrated with some piquancy. He will be aware that the Prime Minister periodically updates the House on losses of life that occur as a result either of tragedy or of evil. I think we will leave it there for today, but I note the concern the hon. Gentleman has expressed, which I am sure is shared in all parts of the House.

Owing to an administrative error, a notice of presentation of Bill did not appear in this morning's Order Paper as first printed. That has since—I am pleased to say—been corrected.

BILL PRESENTED

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Caroline Lucas, supported by Dr Philippa Whitford, Cat Smith, John Pugh, Hywel Williams, Jeremy Corbyn, Mr Michael Meacher, Dr Eilidh Whiteford, Rob Marris, Kelvin Hopkins, John McDonnell and Mr Roger Godsiff, presented a Bill to re-establish the Secretary of State's legal duty as to the National Health Service in England and to make provision about the other duties of the Secretary of State in that regard; to make provision about the administration and accountability of the National Health Service in England; to repeal section 1 of the National Health Service (Private Finance) Act 1997 and sections 38 and 39 of the Immigration Act 2014; to make provision about the application of international law in relation to health services in the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 March, and to be printed (Bill 37).

Opposition Day

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Equal Pay and the Gender Pay Gap

Mr Speaker: It may be for the convenience of the House to be informed—I believe I have been advised correctly—that the second of today’s scheduled Opposition day debates has been pulled, which is to say it has been postponed, and so there will simply be one debate. That is in consequence of the two ministerial statements. We now come to that Opposition day debate and to the motion in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. To move that motion, I call the shadow Minister responsible for these important matters, Gloria De Piero.

2.42 pm

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes that, 45 years after the Equal Pay Act 1970, women still earn on average 81 pence for every pound earned by men; welcomes the fact that pay transparency under section 78 of the Equality Act 2010 will be introduced in 2016; and calls on the Government to ensure that this results in real progress to close the gender pay gap by mandating the Equalities and Human Rights Commission to conduct, in consultation with the Low Pay Commission, an annual equal pay check to analyse information provided under section 78 on pay gaps across every sector of the economy and to make recommendations to close the gender pay gap.

The motion stands in the name of my hon. and right hon. Friends. May I take this opportunity to welcome the new Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice? I hope she will put her heart and soul into it and I wish her well in the role.

It gives me great pleasure to have called the debate today on the subject of equal pay. If we boil it down, we see that the cause of equal pay is a matter of simple workplace injustice. It is about people’s basic right to be paid fairly for the work they do, to have the opportunity to move up, and to be able to improve life for themselves and their families, regardless of whether they are a working man or a working woman.

Equal pay is a fight that colours the history of the Labour party and movement, from women tram and bus conductors who went on strike in 1918, to the women machinists in the Ford Dagenham plant. The House first pressed for equal pay in 1944, in relation to equal pay for men and women teachers. The Conservative Member for Islington East, Thelma Cazalet-Keir, inserted a clause in the Education Bill but it was not to be. Churchill was so incensed that he pressured her to withdraw her amendment, telling her, “Now, Thelma. We’ll have no more of that equal pay business.”

Thelma withdrew her proposal, but Churchill agreed to set up a royal commission on equal pay. Four years later, that commission warned that paying women the same as men

“may prove disastrous in the long run even to young and strong women by heavily overtaxing their nervous and muscular energy”.

Thankfully, times changed, and in 1970 Labour’s Barbara Castle ignored those apocalyptic predictions and passed the Equal Pay Act 1970. Until that time, it was commonplace for jobs to be advertised with one rate of pay for a man, and another for a woman. The Equal

Pay Act outlawed discrimination in pay and is still used today by women to challenge such discrimination, but it is not enough. Forty-five years on, women still earn on average 81p for every £1 a man earns.

Throughout our history, my party has fought for equality. We fought for the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, which outlawed maternity and sex discrimination; child benefit; the national minimum wage; a year’s maternity leave and the doubling of maternity pay; 15 hours’ free childcare; and the right to flexible working and paid paternity leave. I am proud that my party cut the pay gap by a third during our time in government, but we did not eradicate it.

I am sure the Secretary of State will say in her speech that the gender pay gap is the lowest on record, but I hope she will also concede that, in the past five years, the pace at which the pay gap is closing has slowed. That is why pay transparency is important. When companies publish data on pay, they are often surprised by how few women are in senior positions or earn the same as their male colleagues, and they usually act to change it.

Last summer, we launched a campaign for pay transparency, which called for a small but important action: that the Government implement section 78 of the Equality Act 2010 and mandate big companies to publish their gender pay gap. It is fair to say the Government put up some resistance, despite an excellent private Member’s Bill from my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). There was a rally outside Parliament led by a truly unusual and exotic coalition—I am not talking about the Prime Minister and the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg). Ex-Bond girl Gemma Arterton joined the wonderful Dagenham machinist women, Unite the union members and Grazia magazine readers to call for pay transparency. The Government changed their stance, and I thank them for having the courage to change their mind, because, after all, pay transparency is a pretty humble measure: the simple act of companies that employ more than 250 workers publishing their pay gap. That simple step can help us to take huge strides towards closing the gender pay gap once and for all.

For that to happen, however, the information provided by around 7,000 businesses must lead to change. Transparency is effective only when firms act on the information revealed.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a powerful speech and some very important points, but she has not touched on a critical factor: for full-time workers, the gender pay gap for women under 40 has all but disappeared.

Gloria De Piero: I will come to the way in which full-time and part-time gender pay gaps are measured. I believe there is a flaw in the measurement. An hour at work is an hour at work, no matter whether someone is part-time or full-time. I for one find it peculiar that the Office for National Statistics makes that distinction. Is it because most women are in part-time work? I fear that that is exactly why.

Friends Life, the big insurance company, was one of the first big companies to publish its pay gap. It said that

“what gets measured, gets managed”

[*Gloria De Piero*]

and that

“what gets publicly reported, gets managed better”.

In other words, transparency can lead to real and lasting change. We believe it is time to take that principle and apply it to the whole country.

The purpose of the motion is to propose that the independent Equality and Human Rights Commission should be tasked with analysing the information and producing a report to the Government and Parliament each year. It will monitor progress and make recommendations for action. It will act as an equal pay watchdog. An annual equal pay check would be a tool used to measure progress towards the goal of eliminating the gender pay gap in this generation.

By analysing the information, the EHRC could compare progress in different sectors, highlight areas where the gap is unusually high or widening, and identify companies, professions or industries where the gender pay gap is a thing of the past. We recommend that the EHRC draws on the expertise of the statisticians at the Low Pay Commission, because the disproportionate number of women in low-paid jobs is a major factor in the pay gap. Crucially, the EHRC should make recommendations for action, based on its analysis. It could do that by highlighting the best practice it finds in industries and individual companies, because there is not just one reason for the gender pay gap.

Discrimination still happens. I have spoken to women who are senior executives in investment banks and women working as council care assistants who have suffered because of it. Their stories are real and human.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The hon. Lady is making a very good speech and an important point, but does she agree that it is unacceptable for Labour-controlled North Lanarkshire Council, which encompasses my constituency, to have dragged the equal pay claims of its hard-working staff through the courts for years at great cost to the taxpayer?

Gloria De Piero: I am not an expert on North Lanarkshire Council, but I would say, in relation to Scotland, that the pay gap has increased while the Scottish National party has been in government. That is a worry and it goes against the trend.

One woman who works in childcare won her equal pay claim after years of being paid less than men working in jobs that required fewer skills. She told me:

“I’d got a fair amount of money through the payout, but all of those years I struggled to pay my bills and the debt I was in as a low-waged woman worker...all those years I was in debt to credit card companies, even though I had been to college for two years. I’d got qualifications; it was a vocation not a job. And I think what would my life have been like if I’d been paid a fair wage?”

Winning an equal pay claim has never been easy. Equal pay claims make up only a fraction of employment tribunal claims. The Government have made the task even harder with the introduction of tribunal fees, which have led to a 69% fall in equal pay claims. Fewer women are accessing justice to challenge pay discrimination.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is crucial that cost never acts as a barrier to justice?

Gloria De Piero: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Indeed, our manifesto stated that the whole system needs reform, so that nobody is priced out of seeking justice at work.

Pay transparency has never only been about pay discrimination. The causes of the gender pay gap across business and across Britain are far more complex. Why is most low-paid work today done by women? Women do 59% of all minimum wage jobs: a quarter of working women earning less than the living wage, compared to a sixth of men. Why are only 9.6% of executive directors on FTSE boards women?

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The hon. Lady is making a number of very good points and I have a great amount of respect for her. Will she join me in congratulating our female First Minister, the first female First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, who topped the “Woman’s Hour” international influencers poll today? She has instilled one of the first 50:50 gender balance Cabinets and has done a huge amount to champion the cause of equality for women and young girls in Scotland and across the UK.

Gloria De Piero: I always welcome and applaud senior women in our politics. I do not want to be too churlish, but I will put on record that the Labour Benches still have more women MPs, despite the fact that we left office, than all the other parties put together.

By monitoring and assessing the evidence, the annual equal pay check will help us to determine whether the continued existence of the pay gap is driven mainly by a lack of women in top jobs, and enable us to identify the industries in which women are paid less because they are mainly employed in flexible or part-time work.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): The number of women in top jobs is an important issue. I had the privilege, in my business career prior to coming to the House, of working with top female executives such as Angela Spindler and Libby Chambers—people I really respected. Good progress has been made to increase the representation of women on boards. Does the hon. Lady believe that this will help to tackle the challenge that she is rightly putting to the House today?

Gloria De Piero: I am delighted that we have more women on boards, but we have so much further to go. We want women to take decisions and to be in executive roles on boards. I am afraid progress on that is really not good enough.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): While we are talking about the kind of industries that do not have women at the top, will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the first woman Bishop of Hull, who will be ordained in York Minster on Friday? Alongside her will be our first female chief constable of Humberside police. Indeed, I will be there too, as the first woman ever to represent a constituency in Hull. This is about increasing young women’s chances of having those types of careers, as well as others.

Gloria De Piero: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Those moments of progress are indeed reasons to celebrate. What happens in schools is really important.

The decline of careers advice and work experience will take us backwards in challenging stereotypes in career choices.

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a very powerful and thoughtful speech. I ask this question in the interests of genuine debate and gaining information. We have heard that we do not have enough women in senior positions. It is possible that that is because we have not reached a tipping point where more women feel it is perfectly normal to be on a board of directors. Does the hon. Lady think we should employ more positive discrimination to reach that tipping point, so that senior roles become much more acceptable for younger women coming through?

Gloria De Piero: That has certainly worked for non-executive positions on boards. My experience, and the experience of friends and colleagues, is that when in work, women want to progress, take decisions and move up the ladder to executive roles. It is therefore important for us as a country to ask why more women are not in senior positions, because it is not credible that there are simply not enough talented women who could rise to the top of their professions. I think it is fair to say that something else is going on. Nobody wants their daughters, wives or girlfriends to miss out on those kinds of opportunities. This is not just a women's issue; it is an issue for Britons.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is being most generous in giving way. Does she share my disappointment that, rather uniquely, the debate has twice as many women MPs in the Chamber, listening to her excellent remarks, as men? There are only half as many men in the Chamber.

Gloria De Piero: That is why I am so delighted that my hon. Friend has made that intervention. This cannot be seen as a women's issue; it is a family issue. If women are not paid what they are due, all families are poorer and we are all poorer. It is for that reason that those of us on the Labour Benches have long argued for the gender pay gap to be measured in the difference in hourly wages among all male and female workers—full-time and part-time workers combined. The ONS and the current Government use the figure for full-time workers when referring to the gender pay gap, but that masks the true extent of the pay gap across our economy. An hour at work is an hour at work.

As I am sure everyone in this House would recognise, the gender pay gap in Britain is not simply about the difference between those performing the same work for different pay. It is about the dominance of women in low-paid work, and the lack of highly paid, high-quality flexible and part-time positions at the top of companies that allow parents to balance work and family life.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I probably should declare that I have an outstanding equal pay claim against my former employer. It is clear that a number of public bodies have a number of employees—thousands, in fact—with outstanding pay claims. How does the hon. Lady think that should be settled? Should the Government step in and discuss with public bodies how to settle these outstanding claims?

Gloria De Piero: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. It is my understanding that many of the claims in the public sector were resolved under the Labour Government through various means, such as “Agenda for Change” in the NHS and other workplace agreements. If there is further work to do, then of course it should be completed.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Following on from the point on the numbers game made by the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), will the hon. Lady comment on the fact that there are more Conservative male Members on the Benches today than there are Labour?

Gloria De Piero: Well done! [*Laughter.*]

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Not proportionally.

Gloria De Piero: Not proportionally—the shadow Education Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt), is performing the role of Carol Vorderman. It is a delight to see my male colleagues on the Labour Front Bench today.

Some 41% of female jobs are part-time jobs, yet on an hourly basis this part-time work is paid a third less than the full-time equivalent. So, to get a real picture of the extent of pay inequality in Britain between men and women, we have to recognise this full-time/part-time pay gap. Otherwise, we will never take the steps needed to encourage the creation of higher-paid, flexible working at every level in our economy.

Jo Cox (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that this is a matter of deep concern affecting young women? Since 2001, there have been, on average, 130,000 more young women a year not in education, employment or training than young men—that is currently 418,000 18 to 24-year-old women. Does she think we need to address that issue specifically, and does she support what the Young Women's Trust is doing in setting up an inquiry chaired by Sian Williams into female NEETs?

Gloria De Piero *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Before the hon. Lady continues, let me remind Members, especially those fairly new to the House, that interventions have to be short, because it is otherwise not fair for people who sit here all day waiting to make their speeches.

Gloria De Piero: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and the Young Women's Trust is doing fantastic work, with Deborah Mattinson at the helm. What my hon. Friend mentioned is, of course, a cause of real concern. Women's participation in further education over the past five years has almost halved, so I hope that the Government will address those important points.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I hope my hon. Friend will agree with me. She mentioned women in part-time work, and it was a fantastic and proud moment when the Labour Government enabled councils to get capitalisation to provide equal pay for local authority workers. Does she also agree about the current threat from deregulation and the accompanying rhetoric on legislating to change employment law?

Gloria De Piero: The Labour Government did some fantastic work on equal pay. My hon. Friend will know that we Labour Members never stop fighting for progress and never stop challenging. That is why today is part of the overall journey; we must monitor what happens to make sure that we do not go backwards.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The hon. Lady is generous in giving way. I have to say that I have never had any difficulty in being short. The last Labour Government might have done a great deal in this area, but one thing they did not do was indicate that they would bring into force section 78 of the Equality Act 2010. It has taken this Government to do that, so will she explain why the last Labour Government did not consider transparency important?

Gloria De Piero: Gosh—let me explain what happened. Just before we left office, we introduced—led by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), the acting leader of the Labour party—the Equality Act 2010. We passed the Act and section 78 merely needed to be implemented, but the coalition parties decided to ditch that section. *[Interruption.]* Yes, that is what happened, so I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for enabling me to remind the House of what happened.

It is extraordinary that even in professions dominated by women—hairdressing, catering, cleaning—the pay gap still exists, while women in skilled trades, including plumbers and mechanics, suffer the biggest pay gap of all. They are paid close to 30% less than their male colleagues. That is an astonishing statistic.

The information that companies will start publishing next year will provide the most comprehensive account of the gender pay gap in this country. It can tell us where progress needs to be made—sector by sector, industry by industry—but only if a central independent watchdog is tasked with ensuring that that happens.

Today, girls are outperforming boys at school and university, but even at ages 18 to 21, women are paid less on average than young men of their age. When women hit their 20s, they are already 5p behind male colleagues. This gap continues to widen throughout women's working lives, peaking when women reach their 50s when they can expect to earn just 73p for every male pound.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): In later life, one of the issues is child rearing. Does the hon. Lady agree that what the coalition Government did in bringing in shared parental leave will help ease that burden and enable more women to be equal partners in the workplace?

Gloria De Piero: When it comes to parental leave, I welcome any progress. We need to ensure that more dads take paternity leave. That is why at the last election, the Labour party said that we would double the number and increase the funding. Sadly, we are not able to implement what we wanted.

Let me provide a few more figures before I close my speech. If a woman is working in sales or the care industry, the pay gap means losing more than £100,000 over the course of a working life. A woman working in finance or law will stand to lose over £200,000. We do

not fight against this injustice for women alone, because no man wants his wife, daughter, sister or mother to be earning less simply because they are a woman. Women should not have to wait another 45 years—or another 70 years, as the UN has estimated—for equal pay in Britain. I hope that today's motion will be viewed as uncontroversial in many ways, and that the Government will be happy to vote with us.

I understand that the plan is to consult over the summer, so this is about setting the ambition high and securing an annual equal pay check that will use the information soon to be published to drive forward progress and end this injustice once and for all. Labour Members have a long and proud history of campaigning for equal pay. This motion represents the next step on that journey. I commend it to the House.

3.5 pm

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): I start by thanking the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) and her colleagues for securing this important debate on the gender pay gap. I am delighted that we will have almost a full afternoon's debate in the Chamber on this issue. My hope for the debate is that there will be a real consensus on the causes of the pay gap and on the solutions, some of which the hon. Lady has already set out. I hope, too, that there will be recognition—I think there has been—that this Government are committed to reducing the gender pay gap and to ending pay discrimination.

The gender pay gap is not just a measure of inequality that affects women's income and ultimately their pensions; it is a measure of lost productivity and lost talent, too. Women make up half the population, but too often their skills are under-utilised in our economy. We need to address this mismatch and optimise the potential for the UK's economic growth.

The House will be aware of our manifesto commitment to require companies with at least 250 employees to publish gender pay information. I intend to launch a consultation imminently, with a view to making regulations at the earliest opportunity. I know these regulations will have support from all sides and are endorsed in the motion. The consultation will not focus solely on the regulations, but will look at the full range of actions needed to close the pay gap and consign it to history. I hope that that is an ambitious enough target for the hon. Member for Ashfield, who laid down a challenge to me at the end of her speech.

Before I proceed further, I want to be clear on what we mean by the gender pay gap. I know that there is frequently confusion about the relationship between equal pay and the gender pay gap, and that campaigners, the media, and even Members can use these terms interchangeably—but they are not interchangeable. This debate should not focus narrowly on equal pay for equal work, which is already illegal and constitutes unlawful pay discrimination. The gender pay gap measures the difference between men and women's average salaries. This difference is driven by a number of factors, notably the different careers women tend to enter, and the levels of seniority to which they progress. I will deal with each in turn. It is important to be clear that unlawful pay discrimination is only one driver of the gender pay gap, and not the most significant one.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): One of the real problems is getting girls to study STEM subjects and to access those highly paid and highly skilled jobs. For example, only 19% of girls who achieved an A* in GCSE physics went on to study the subject at A-level. That compares to 49% of boys. Until we tackle that gap, we will not be able to tackle the gender pay gap.

Nicky Morgan: I know that my hon. Friend has been participating in debates in the House for a number of weeks now, but I would like to welcome her to her position. She is absolutely right in what she says, and I am going to come on to deal with it in more detail, because it is relevant to my work both as Minister for Women and Equalities and as Secretary of State for Education.

As I have said, one of the most substantial causes of the pay gap is the fact that women are still far less likely to work in more highly paid industries. As Education Secretary, I am very conscious of the fact that that begins with the different choices that children make at school. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) has just made the same point.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State is advancing some powerful and valid arguments. One possible way in which people can tackle the pay gap is to take their employer to a tribunal, but the Government have introduced tribunal fees, and, as a magistrate, I have observed that that has deterred many women from taking their employers to court. The number has fallen by 68%. How does the Secretary of State think we might change that statistic?

Nicky Morgan: I respect the hon. Lady's experience as a magistrate. The fees were introduced during the last Parliament to reduce a £71 million burden on the taxpayer, but, as she may know, on 11 June the Government announced the start of a post-implementation review. We will consider how successful the policy has been in achieving its original objectives, which include the maintaining of access to justice. Of course, those whose claims are successful can recover the fees.

The important question that we shall discuss today, however, is how we can prevent the need for employees to go to tribunals. There should be no discrimination in the first place, in the context of both equal pay for equal work and closing the gender pay gap. I think that the hon. Lady should wait and see how our review progresses.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State mentions a review, but is it not already clear from the 68% drop in the number of claims that the fees are not working?

Nicky Morgan: One reason for the introduction of fees was to ensure that people did not have to go through the tribunal process, which, as I suspect we all know from our constituents, is costly, time-consuming and stressful. There are other ways of resolving disputes such as mediation. I do not think it right for us to prejudge what the review will find, and I am not sure that this is the right debate in which to focus on the economic situation with which the Government have had to deal, but the £71 million of taxpayers' money that we have saved will go towards paying off the deficit and debt that was left to us.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): The Secretary of State referred to alternative ways of dealing with the situation. When she conducts her review, will she take another look at the short-form questionnaire, which enables a woman who believes that she has been discriminated against to ask her employer for certain facts and figures before even going to a tribunal and taking legal action?

Nicky Morgan: The point of the review is take account of questions of exactly that kind. It is being conducted by the Ministry of Justice, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice, who is also a Minister in the MOJ, has heard what the hon. Lady has said.

Girls often do better than boys at school overall, but evidence shows that their subject choices have a direct impact on their future careers and earnings, and that that imbalance can feed directly into our labour market. A proportion of the gap is also due to differences in years of experience of full-time work, or the negative effect on wages of having previously worked part time or—as was mentioned earlier—having taken time out to look after a family. That highlights the important role that employers can play in supporting women in the middle phases of their working lives by providing effective talent management, facilitating access to affordable childcare, and championing flexible working.

We also know that the gender pay gap is higher for older women. For many of them one of the major challenges is keeping their skills updated, but for others the main challenge is the need to reduce their hours to accommodate increased responsibilities to care for children, grandchildren and ageing parents. Again, employers have a key role, namely to provide a supportive working environment that will enable them to get the best out of all their staff. That will include flexible working.

Mrs Miller: The Secretary of State has mentioned older women. I recently looked at some statistics relating to women graduates. For more than 25 years more than 40% of university graduates have been women, and today there are female undergraduates in 53% of the Russell Group universities, which are the best in the country. Given those figures, is the Secretary of State as surprised as I am that fewer than 10% of executive positions in FTSE 100 firms are taken by women?

Nicky Morgan: I am delighted that my right hon. Friend is to be the first Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee. Yes, I am surprised, but I suspect that we all have friends who, although they were just as capable as us at university, did not decide to pursue a career for some reason, or are not as far up the career ladder as we might have expected them to be. I also suspect that that does not apply to all the men whom we may have known at university.

Diana Johnson: May I return the Secretary of State to the issue of the decisions that young people make at school, and the subject choices that they make? Are we not missing a trick? Should we not look to primary schools to make young girls, in particular, aware of the opportunities that may arise from studying science, technology, engineering and maths?

Nicky Morgan: I entirely agree. I shall say more about careers shortly, but, while we want to get the absolute basics right—the reading, writing and arithmetic—there is no doubt about the importance of inspiring young people, particularly girls, and interesting them in STEM subjects. The week that my son spent touring other classrooms and conducting science projects was one of the most exciting weeks that he had experienced. If we can persuade young people—again, particularly girls—to think about careers that they might not otherwise have thought about, such as engineering, we can all be very proud of that.

Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks) (Con): I am blessed to be the father of two young daughters. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on the initiative “Your Daughter’s Future”, and explain how it is helping parents like me and, perhaps, many other Members to enable our children to make subject choices that will give them access to the best possible careers?

Nicky Morgan: We launched that programme just before the election. It enables parents to have conversations with their daughters about the types of career that might be out there, the subjects that interest them, and the subject choices that they may need to make in order to secure fulfilling careers. I am delighted to hear that my hon. Friend is the father of two daughters. While it is lovely to have him here, I hope that one of the careers that he might advise them to consider is politics. As we all know, we need more women in the House.

Simon Hoare: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Nicky Morgan: Yes, if my hon. Friend wants to take up that point.

Simon Hoare: I am the father of three daughters, although I am not entirely sure that “blessed” is the word I would always use.

On a serious note, will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Blandford school, which is in my constituency? Last Friday, for the third year in a row, not just existing but retired business men and women allowed young pupils at the school to draw on their experience. For instance, they told them how to deal with job interviews and prepare job applications. That is exactly how we should go about abolishing the pay gap.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I want to enable all Members to speak. May I say to new Members that if they make short interventions, every speaker will have between eight and nine minutes. If they can stick to that, everyone will be well served.

Nicky Morgan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I congratulate Blandford school, in my hon. Friend’s constituency, on its initiative. There are indeed many people who can inspire pupils of all ages by telling them about the career choices that are available to them. I know my hon. Friend’s three daughters well, and I know exactly who wears the trousers in his household.

Let me now make some progress. I was talking about seniority. As we know, women are still less likely to progress up the career ladder. They represent 47% of the work force, but only 34% of managers, directors and

senior officials. We also know that women are sometimes not as well paid as male colleagues even when they do achieve similar seniority. That may, of course, be the result of direct discrimination—which, as I have said, is already illegal—or it may be more subtle, and reflect, for example, men’s greater willingness to negotiate pay rises. Either way, on this issue, the existing legal protections have a clear role to play. However, I hope that I have made it clear that the causes of the pay gap are complex. The response from Government and employers must therefore reflect that complexity and avoid over-simplifying the issue, which unfortunately does still happen. That is precisely why under this Government we are taking action on all fronts. It is why we are taking action to raise girls’ aspirations, to support women with childcare and to get more women up the career ladder.

Our efforts must start early. I am passionate about the work we are doing to raise aspirations in schools and to ensure that no child, regardless of their gender, race or background, thinks that some careers are not for them.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): On that note, does my right hon. Friend think we should provide more careers advice in schools, particularly through businesses and engineering companies? Should not more advice be provided on science, especially in relation to the STEM subjects? We can then help women to progress up the career ladder in those areas where we do have a gap, and perhaps role models would be helpful.

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. She might have seen an advance copy of my speech, because I am going to talk about careers advice. Perhaps I should just press-release it and then we could move on with the debate.

We are broadening the career aspirations of girls and young women by encouraging them to get into STEM-related careers through the “Your Life” campaign. As we have already discussed, we have also published new guidance for parents, “Your Daughter’s Future”, which we will continue to promote.

As hon. Members have said, support with careers is vital. That is why in December last year I announced a new careers and enterprise company, to be led by employers and independent of Government. That company will help to transform the provision of young people’s careers experiences. It will help to ensure that all young people, irrespective of gender or background, aspire to great things and know how to achieve them. I am delighted to inform the House that Claudia Harris, a former partner at McKinsey and a graduate of Harvard Business School, has been appointed chief executive. Claudia is exactly the role model schools and businesses need, with her passion for female leadership, her drive to excel and to make a difference. I should of course also mention the fabulous chairman, Christine Hodgson. As I always say, if you want something done well, ask women. That is nowhere more true than with the England women’s football team. I am sure we all wish them every success in tonight’s match.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): But they are paid less than the men.

Nicky Morgan: That is a very good point. That is perhaps the next challenge we will have to take on.

We are also taking strong action to ensure that our workplaces are fit for the 21st century. As part of that, the right to request flexible working was extended to all employees from last June. More than 20 million employees now have that right. Working parents now also have the option of taking shared parental leave and pay, which will enable a culture change to take place both in the home and in the workplace.

Affordable, good-quality childcare is vital to enabling parents to stay and progress in work. Almost 2 million families can benefit from our new tax childcare scheme from autumn 2015, worth up to £2,000 per child. In our manifesto, we announced that we would extend the number of free hours from 15 to 30 hours a week for 3 and 4-year-olds from working families.

Ultimately, we know that we cannot address the gender pay gap unless we work with business. We have also strongly promoted and championed the work of the Women's Business Council, set up by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), and implemented Lord Davies' conclusions on women on boards.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Does the right hon. Lady agree that in order to improve the number of women on boards we must do much more to tackle the pipeline and encourage businesses to promote women internally? From my own experience working in the City of London, senior women were often brought into the organisation but very few women were promoted internally.

Nicky Morgan: I entirely agree. There has been a lot of focus on non-executive positions. The next place to look and on which to work with businesses is the executive pipeline. The hon. Lady is right. Whether we are talking about the education sector, parliamentarians or business, growing that internal talent, working to keep people in the workplace and to promote them is so important.

We have been actively working in partnership with business through the Think, Act, Report initiative. Nearly 300 companies, employing over 2.5 million people, are committed to that initiative, leading the way on gender equality. Those are just some of the steps we have taken in recent years.

We have also strengthened the law so that where an employer has been found by a tribunal to have breached the equal pay or pay-related sex discrimination provisions in the Equality Act 2010, they are now required to conduct and publish an equal pay audit.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Since the Government introduced fees for tribunals, the number of unequal pay cases has fallen by 68%. If the Government are committed to tackling the gender pay gap, why are they making it much harder for women to challenge pay discrimination?

Nicky Morgan: I am not sure the hon. Lady was here earlier when we talked about employment tribunals, the changes made under the previous Government and the reasons for those, but I can confirm that in June we announced the start of the post-implementation review

of the introduction of fees in employment tribunals. I know that the Minister will be listening carefully, given her interest and work in the Ministry of Justice.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): On a connected point, often the burden of challenging unequal pay falls on individuals though the tribunal system. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Government should consider having class actions and a more robust equality watchdog, which could undertake fee litigation investigations on behalf of claimants, rather than leaving the burden to fall on the shoulders of individual women?

Nicky Morgan: It is certainly something always to be considered. I go back to the point I made earlier. We would much rather not have discrimination and problems with pay in the first place, and ensure that everyone is paid the right amount for doing the work. The regulations requiring employment tribunals to order an equal pay audit, which is what happens when an employer is found to be in breach of equal pay law, came into force on 1 October last year. We are not aware yet of any cases where an audit has been ordered, but that is another way in which employers' minds might be concentrated, if they are found guilty of breaching the equal pay laws.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): The right hon. Lady mentioned the review of charges in tribunals. What is of greater importance—saving £71 million, or justice for women?

Nicky Morgan: I know that the hon. Lady is new to the House and that she will not have seen all the debates in the previous Parliament when we talked about the impact of her party—the economic legacy left to us and the justice—[*Interruption.*] The issue, honestly, is that the best way to have justice for women and children, given the earlier statement by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, is to have an economy that works for all, where there are jobs for all, paying good wages, and where we help all children to reach their aspirations.

Chris Stephens: On equal pay audits and employers, some of those employers who are found liable will be public bodies. Indeed, public bodies are being taken to tribunal at the moment, as I indicated earlier, including my former employer, Glasgow City Council. If public bodies are found liable with regard to equal pay at tribunal, what action will the Government take to help them because they will say, "This is costing the taxpayer money", and will go to the Government for some of that to be recouped?

Nicky Morgan: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Of course if a public body were found to be liable we would need to work out what the situation was and the context in which that had occurred, but I go back to a point that was made earlier. To be fair, the motion says, "Let's have the transparency, and the regulations and the consultation, so we know exactly where there is a gender pay gap," and therefore employers, before being taken to a tribunal, can address the issue for themselves, rather than—I say this as a former lawyer—providing more work for the lawyers and less immediate pay equality for people working in those organisations.

[*Nicky Morgan*]

As a result of the actions this Government have taken, and as a result of having a strong economy, women are playing a greater role than ever before in the labour market. There are more women in work than ever before. There are also more women-led businesses than ever before, and critically, as the hon. Member for Ashfield said, the gender pay gap is the lowest on record—she obviously knew that I would point that out at some point. I am pleased to say that it has been virtually eliminated among full-time workers under 35.

The hon. Lady also talked about the full-time and part-time differences. That is interesting because the gender pay gap based on median hourly earnings, excluding overtime, has narrowed for full-time employees to 9.4% compared with 10% in 2013, and for part-time employees the higher rate of pay for women than men results in a negative gender pay gap. Although there is evidence that the part-time gap has widened in the long term, it has remained relatively stable in recent years, standing at minus 5.5% in April 2014. But the overall points remain: there is a gender pay gap and we would very much like to get rid of it.

While the fact that the gender pay gap has narrowed is something to celebrate, I am in no way complacent. That is why we pledged in our manifesto to go further. We will publish a consultation in the coming weeks to seek views on how best to implement our commitment to require employers to publish gender pay information.

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): In my constituency the gender pay gap figures are worse than the national average, and I would like this to be stamped out. What steps will my right hon. Friend take to encourage businesses to report on the gender pay gap?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and welcome her to the House. I am about to come on to the regulations that will apply to companies with more than 250 employees. I say to those businesses and employers in her constituency who may not be paying the right amounts that I know she will be an active MP and will be asking them what they are going to do to ensure there is no gender pay gap in their businesses.

I can assure the Opposition that the consultation to which I just referred will consider the mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission may well play a role in monitoring, as is the case for the public sector equality duty, but as hon. Members will be aware the commission already has the ability to carry out the work envisaged in the motion. I must return to my earlier comments on the distinction between equal pay and the gender pay gap, which are unhelpfully conflated in the motion.

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (SNP): I welcome this debate. Has the Secretary of State seen and acknowledged the Fawcett Society research which shows that since 2010 some 85% of cuts to benefits, tax credits, pay and pensions have been taken from women's incomes?

Nicky Morgan: I welcome the hon. Lady to the House. I have seen that report. I do not agree with it, and think the figures are flawed, because it makes

assumptions about household income and the way men and women—two people in a household—divide their income, and those assumptions are not always right.

Let me return to the motion. All of its suggestions, apart from the formal laying of the annual document before Parliament, can already be done by the EHRC without changes to legislation or instruction by Government. The motion also talks about an annual equal pay check. The critical point here is that I do not think the hon. Lady is actually talking about an annual equal pay check; instead, she is talking about an annual gender pay check. An annual equal pay check implies an assessment of the extent to which companies are acting lawfully under the equal pay provisions of the Equality Act and that information would not be obtainable from companies' gender pay data. I am not saying the issues are not important, but that is the reason for our queries about the motion.

Our aim is to create greater transparency on the gender pay gap. We know from Office for National Statistics data that pay gaps can vary widely by sector. Publishing the data will help companies to understand these differences.

Fiona Mactaggart: The Secretary of State referred to the narrowing of the pay gap for younger women, but it is still stubbornly wide for older women. Will she tell us what she is going to do for those older women who lose their jobs, get stuck in low pay and who are stuck as well looking after their families without proper support from the state?

Nicky Morgan: I talked about the position of older women and the Women's Business Council. Its "Staying on" strand of work is about helping older women. She may be aware of steps like the carers pilot that we launched in the last Parliament to help often older women who are juggling caring responsibilities—sometimes for both children and grandchildren while also looking after older relatives—to stay in the workplace, which obviously makes a difference to their pay. However, she is right to say that the gender pay gap is wider for older woman than for younger women. We are seeing the cohort effect, whereby the gender pay gap is even narrower for women who started working in the last decade. Things are changing but I take her point that there is an issue to address for older women, which is why have concentrated on it in the work of the Women's Business Council.

Most employers recognise the need to attract and retain the best people, and developing and promoting talented women into higher paid, senior roles could help to make companies more competitive. Let me be clear: greater transparency on pay will be good for not only employers, but shareholders, investors and prospective female employees. There is an important point here, which is that we increasingly expect greater transparency from one another.

We are aware from the wide engagement we have already had with businesses that some employers have concerns about publishing gender pay information. We will consider these issues carefully in the consultation—we have established a business reference group to inform our proposals—but we believe that these concerns are largely unfounded.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): Will the right hon. Lady acknowledge that we face a large task in addressing the gender pay gap? Will she note that the average percentage difference in the UK is 19.6%, with the figures for England and Scotland being 19.5% and 17.4% respectively? There is still much to do to address these issues. Will she also note that the industries she speaks of do not address the acute problems that arise in low-paid sectors and industries? We are talking not only about businesses, but other areas.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I do not want to be awkward, but may I just help Members by saying, once again, that we must have sharp interventions? They must be quick so that we can let the Secretary of State get on, because I want to get everyone in and it is your debate.

Nicky Morgan: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am nearly at the end of my speech and I appreciate that Back-Bench Members will want to contribute to this important debate.

The hon. Lady makes a point about the gender pay gap, but I have it as being 19.1%, which is the lowest on record. The shadow Minister mentioned how the gender pay gap in Scotland had perhaps grown while the SNP has been in government, but I will leave it to Opposition Members to debate that. The general point is that the gender pay gap has got smaller, but there remains far more for all of us to do to tackle it. The ONS has calculated the pay gap in my Department to be 13.6%.

Let me conclude by saying that I am very pleased that the House has come together to discuss a very important issue, and I hope it is clear to everyone here and to those listening elsewhere that tackling the gender pay gap is something that I am, and my party is, extremely passionate about. As I set out, the gender pay gap is a complex issue with a range of causes, and I am determined to ensure that no child thinks a career is off limits because of their gender, race or background. That is why our efforts to tackle this issue must span right across society. I hope that all Members will join me in supporting these efforts to make the gender pay gap a thing of the past. As I have explained, we do not think that the motion is quite right, and there is a confusion between equal pay and the gender pay gap. For that reason, we will be asking Members not to support the motion, although we support the principle of getting rid of the gender pay gap.

3.37 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): I echo the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) in congratulating the First Minister on making top place in the list of the 100 most powerful and influential women in the UK. I also recognise the work of the Scottish Government in creating a 50:50 Cabinet, and the importance of ensuring that this Chamber, and all Chambers of democracy, receive 50:50 representation.

It is my pleasure to speak in this important debate and to open on behalf of my party. I regret that, in this day and age, this debate has to take place, but it does and I welcome the consensus from all parties on the fact that progress has to be made. Across my constituency, I have met many women who say life is still tough for them and their families. They say that despite the optimistic

forecasts from the Chancellor, the recovery he speaks of is not reaching their pay packet. In fact, a report last year showed that it could be almost 100 years until women can expect to be paid the same as men—this while three quarters of company directors, three quarters of MPs and more than three quarters of national newspaper editors are men. That simply is not good enough and more action needs to be taken. More than 40 years after the Equal Pay Act 1970, the pay gap between men and women in the UK remains substantial.

Carolyn Harris: The gender pay gap in Scotland has risen by 0.2% under the SNP. Why does the hon. Lady believe that her Government in Holyrood are failing so badly?

Angela Crawley: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, but she is in fact mistaken, as the gap has reduced to 17.4%.

The gender pay gap is not a surprise, as it is women who bear the brunt of the Government's welfare cuts. But devolution has proved to be a success. It has shown that when the Scottish Government have the power, they take action. The Scottish National party Government are the first Administration ever to pay the living wage to all employees covered by their pay policy—something that has yet to be replicated by the UK Government.

Last year, the Scottish Government's Finance Secretary, John Swinney, announced that the living wage would rise to £7.85 per hour. My message is clear: giving the Scottish Government powers over employment policy would benefit thousands of women across Scotland and the UK and bring about real progress in tackling low pay. The SNP Scottish Government have taken great steps to help parents, especially mothers, back into work or education by extending access to childcare. Provision for three and four-year-olds is up 45% since the SNP took office in 2007, saving families up to £707 per child. The entitlement has been extended to thousands of two-year-olds from Scotland's most disadvantaged families. Some of the powers that we need to go further remain in this Parliament.

If the UK Government are not willing to take action on equal pay, they should not stand in the way of the Scottish Government. They should give the Scottish Parliament the powers it needs to make real change. As parliamentarians, we have a duty to ensure that, once and for all, pay inequality is a thing of the past. But the problem of unequal pay extends beyond this Conservative Government. The Labour party may talk a good game on equal pay, but the facts tell a different story.

South Lanarkshire council, on which I was a councillor before I joined this House, has a Labour majority, but the gender pay gap is a staggering 16%, and substantially more men than women are in higher grade posts. It was only a year ago that the council had to make a £75 million pay-out mainly to female workers in the equal pay scandal that has swept many local authorities. This situation is simply unacceptable and the Labour party in South Lanarkshire must get its act together when it comes to paying women the same as men.

Thanks to my colleagues in the Scottish Parliament, new labour market figures published a few weeks ago showed that female employment in Scotland has reached a record high. They reported that female employment now stands at 72.5%, that youth unemployment is at its

[Angela Crawley]

lowest level in six years and that the number of people in work continues to grow. That is a testament to the strong action taken by the SNP Government with the economic powers that they currently hold, which is exactly why we need more economic powers to be transferred. We should have the power to create even more jobs and better jobs for women, rather than the current situation where those powers are held by the UK Government. The SNP Government have proved their record on gender equality. They have proved their commitment to equality in the workplace, which is why they should and must be given the power to build on their success.

3.43 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) and no one could doubt her commitment to these issues. I also wish to congratulate the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) on securing this important debate. Everyone can see from the level of participation so far that there are many Members who are interested in contributing, so I will try to keep my comments as brief as I can.

It is important that we recognise the achievements that have been made in reducing the gender pay gap not just by this Government but by other Governments over recent years. If we go back to 1992, when Baroness Shephard first became Minister with responsibility for women, we can see that we have made enormous progress, and that is coming out in some of the statistics that have been rehearsed today.

As I said earlier, the gender pay gap has fallen dramatically in full-time jobs for people under the age of 40. Although regional and industry variations still exist, it is important that we acknowledge the progress that has been made. Indeed, the full-time pay gap is the lowest and narrowest since records began. Progress has not been as good, however, for those in part-time work or those over the age of 40. It is on those two matters that we need to focus. I will try to have a conversation with the hon. Member for Ashfield about this later, but I am not sure that removing the segmentation of the data would give us the clarity we need in trying to find the answers to some of these problems.

It is right that every woman in this country should have the same right as every man to a job that uses their talents and does not marginalise them simply because of their gender or their caring responsibilities. The policies put in place over the past five years by the coalition Government have created momentum for further progress in the next few years. The modernisation of the workplace will help women across the board, whether through the support for career choices mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, such as the “Your Life” campaign, or through parental leave, the right to request flexible working, or tax relief on childcare. All those things will help to give women the same sorts of opportunities as their male counterparts and I applaud and welcome all of them, but I think that all right hon. and hon. Members in the House today will agree that there is an economic and social justice imperative to continue to tackle the gender pay gap, which is why I welcome today’s debate.

To put it simply, girls outperform boys throughout the education system and have done so not just for years but for decades. We are selling the country short by not allowing the best people to do the best job that they can. More than 60% of female youngsters get five good GCSEs, 10 percentage points higher than boys. Today, 29% of girls and 19% of boys achieve the EBacc. Girls outperform boys in English and maths at school and, as I said earlier, 53% of Russell Group university undergraduates are women. More women get first-class degrees than men and 70% of law graduates are women, yet just 20% of judges in this country today are women.

That has not happened just over the past few years. For more than 15 years, more women have gone to university than men and 25 years ago, when perhaps many of us were in university, 40% of university graduates were women—and they are in their late 40s today. We have an enormous talent pool that is alive and kicking, and we should do everything we can to use it in a country that is enjoying renewed economic success.

The Secretary of State talked about the causes of the gender pay gap and she is right that career choice is important, as is time out of the labour market. Some of the changes that have been made will help to fix those causes, but there is much more to do. I want to close by focusing on three different areas and I hope that when the Minister responds she will be able to reflect on them a little more.

The first is the importance of part-time and flexible working and ensuring that there are more opportunities for skilled part-time working. I have some sympathy with the Opposition’s motion today—although I think the Secretary of State is right that it contains some flaws—but we need to understand the data on flexible working. Indeed, the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee produced a report in 2013—I think that the Secretary of State might have been a member of the Committee at around that time—that recommended that more data needed to be collected on flexible working and part-time working. I would be interested to know what progress the Government are making on collecting and publishing data on working practices in that area. The Committee also asked the Government to consider their data collection. In 2013, just 3% of Foreign Office staff worked flexibly, whereas about 40% of Department for Work and Pensions staff did so. Collecting data is important. Are we really confident that we have the data available to understand where part-time working occurs and how successful it is?

My second point relates to older women in the workplace—something that the right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) mentioned in her intervention. An enormous amount of change is going on and there is good momentum, but I would be concerned if anyone felt that the momentum that we see in younger women’s working practices will simply work its way through the system because I do not believe that that is true.

Some good work has been done, again, in the DWP on the challenges that older women face, particularly with work opportunities. It is particularly telling that in 1983 the British social attitudes survey showed that 13% of women aged 45 to 64 thought that employers gave them too few opportunities when they got older; today, the figure is 71%. Older women are not seeing opportunities to get back into employment, and they find it difficult to balance employment with their caring

responsibilities. The carers pilot was an incredibly important piece of work to put in place. I hope that the Minister can tell us about the pilot's findings and say when an action plan will be produced.

Finally, the role of women in senior management has been rightly a focus for many Ministers in recent years, and I am sure that we would all commend the Davies commission report, which has done so much to promote women's involvement in non-executive positions on boards.

Hannah Bardell: The right hon. Lady makes a point about women in executive positions. Before I came to the House, I worked for an oil and gas services company where I was one of three women in a senior leadership team of 23. Does she not think that we need to do even more to encourage women into those executive positions, including by extending childcare, which the Scottish Government have given a lot of support to?

Mrs Miller: Governments across the United Kingdom will support women reaching their potential in whatever position they take. Certainly, in executive positions, that is important, but there has not been enough focus on executive, as opposed to non-executive, positions. The Fawcett Society is right to question whether unconscious bias is at play here, particularly in respect of the work that executive search firms could do to enhance the number of women candidates put forward. That is another area of work that the Government need to continue to make progress on.

Today's debate is incredibly important, but we would be wrong to think that it will produce the progress that we need if we say that it is just about monitoring data or putting in place commission reports, although I know that that is not what the hon. Member for Ashfield is talking about. We need a culture change, which needs to be driven by changing working practices and by the sort of things that the Government have been doing in recent years.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. May I stress working on the basis of eight minutes? I do not want to impose a time limit, but I want to ensure that everyone gets equal time.

3.53 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): My speech today is about equality. Equality is not a women's issue; it is a society issue. I say this because, if a woman is unable to reach her true potential, the whole of society is worse off, and that is exactly why we need this debate. It's exactly why, when people ask me if feminism still has a place, I can stand up and say, "Yes, definitively, it does," because feminism is about equality, and that is still a long way off.

In the last Parliament, I was extremely fortunate to be supported, guided and helped by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) and her team. I tabled a ten-minute rule Bill on gender pay equality. I wanted companies with more than 250 employees to publish their figures on the gender pay gap. A voluntary scheme had been in place since the Equality Act 2010, but under the scheme, only four companies released figures to show how much women were paid compared with men. I am delighted that 300 companies now do

so—but just 300. Why would companies be reluctant to publish those figures if they have nothing to hide? Why should a woman have to carry out her own research to see whether she is receiving the same pay as her male counterpart? We need a mandatory requirement for companies to publish those figures, so that those that pay women equal pay for equal work can be celebrated and those that do not can be challenged.

In my constituency of Rotherham, women earn just 77p for every £1 a man earns. That is £200,000 over her lifetime—£200,000 that her family are missing out on. That simply cannot be right. I am proud that my Bill was overwhelmingly voted through its first stage in the previous Parliament, but I am still incredulous that eight Members voted against. I expect that the Government will take that mandate and look at putting it into practice. Today, I ask the Secretary of State to make a commitment to that effect, clarify the timetable and put her weight behind it.

However, pay is not the only area where women are still struggling to gain equality. In politics, the figure for women leading local authorities is only 13%. The Prime Minister has filled only one Cabinet post in three with a woman and the Chamber has limped up to 29% of women MPs. In the media, there is only one female editor of a national daily newspaper and only 24% of news stories are about women. In work, only 17% of directors of FTSE 100 companies are women and 70% of minimum wage earners are women. Women are consistently underrepresented throughout society, and until we tackle that head on I am afraid that little will change.

There are also direct links between the Government's austerity programme and the disproportionate effect on women. Women's unemployment has recently peaked at a 24-year high. Cuts to public sector jobs disproportionately affect women, as we make up two thirds of the public sector's workforce. Cuts to benefits disproportionately affect women too, as benefits typically make up a fifth of women's income, whereas they make up a tenth of men's income.

Let me give an example of how we systematically discriminate against women. A recent survey of more than 2,000 working mums found that more than half would be forced to stop work or significantly reduce their working hours, as a result of a cut to support for childcare costs. From politics to media, work to childcare, women are being systematically pushed down.

We are almost 100 years on from the suffragettes winning their fight for votes for women. We are approaching 50 years since the women of Ford Dagenham put down their tools and walked out in their fight for equal pay. We should be doing better than this by now, but if we think our fight for equality in the UK is hard, we should look to the rest of the world and know that we are not alone and that we are fighting this cause together.

That is why we must give our full commitment to the sustainable development goals. Those 17 goals can change the world we live in by 2030. The fifth goal is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It sounds ambitious, but it needs to be if we are to achieve a world where women can live freely, are empowered to make their own voices heard, can live the life they want on their own terms and reach their full potential.

One of the biggest blocks to women and girls reaching their full potential is violence. Since my election, I have

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been working on tackling child sexual exploitation, in my constituency and nationally. That exploitation is disproportionately of girls, and we see the same pattern with all forms of child abuse and domestic violence. Those crimes have a direct bearing on the economic potential of women due to the mental, physical and health issues involved, but there is also an effect on their confidence—their ability to ask for a pay rise and to put themselves forward.

The grim reality is that, in the UK, on average, two women a week are killed by a violent partner or ex-partner, and up to 3 million women and girls experience rape, abuse, domestic violence or stalking each year. In 2011, the forced marriage unit advised more than 1,450 people relating to possible forced marriage, 78% of whom were women or girls.

I have been trying to grasp the root causes of violence against women and girls, rather than focusing on the outcomes. I have spoken to countless survivors of abuse and met approximately 60 young Rotherham women to try to understand what needs to be done to tackle this escalation in violence. I am of the firm belief that there has been a shift in cultural norms, with young girls now accepting their “commodification” and violence from a partner, or indeed viewing it as normal.

How do we move on from that? Our first step is in empowering young children with the knowledge that they need to understand when things have crossed a line. We need to help them, from an early age, to understand what a respectful relationship is and is not, and how to speak out if they find themselves in an inappropriate relationship. I am a passionate advocate of the NSPCC’s PANTS scheme, which teaches little children that their privates are just that—private. Every child, once they reach school age, should be taught this for their own protection, and so that they do not grow up and perpetuate abuse of others because they do not know any better.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): The hon. Lady is making some excellent points and I am enjoying her speech very much. How can we tackle abuse at the young age that she is talking about, among children in school? Would it be worthwhile trying to introduce a scheme to normalise female leadership from a very young age in schools and beyond?

Sarah Champion: I completely agree. This is about empowerment, enabling all children to reach their potential both at a young age and as they grow up, and the direct impact that being treated with disrespect has on their potential to reach their full financial and economic growth, which directly affects their immediate family.

I am not advocating teaching little children about sex, but I am saying that every child at key stage 1 should understand about valuing themselves and others. They should understand their rights to respect and privacy, and understand what to do if those rights are violated. We cannot protect children 24/7 from abusers, but we can teach children to protect themselves.

Violence against girls and women is not a problem that can be fixed overnight, but perpetrators do not reach adulthood and decide one day that they are going to abuse a girl. It is not an on/off switch where one day

they are fine and the next day they are a perpetrator of domestic violence or child abuse. It is a slow erosion of boundaries that happens over years. Instead of waiting to deal with the crime, we need to empower our young people with positive examples of relationships, using their years in education for positive interventions in an attempt to prevent violence occurring. Building on that, I intend to work with a number of the leading charities to try to engage the country and decision makers in challenging the stereotypes that are repressing women.

Angela Crawley: Does the hon. Lady agree that the key is the education not only of young women, but of young boys and men?

Sarah Champion: I completely agree, which is why I spoke about educating children, and why at the very beginning I said that this was not a women’s issue, but a society issue. Unless we address it at that level, we will not move forward at all. We need to empower all children, but young girls in particular need to be given support and encouragement so that they can reach their full potential.

4.2 pm

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to deliver my maiden speech as the first female Member of Parliament for Bury St Edmunds.

First, I pay tribute to my predecessor, David Ruffley, a man who is good with numbers. In 2002, he was a fierce critic of the then Government’s handling of the economy. As a Treasury Committee member, he was a regular interrogator of the finance sector. For 17 years, he was a great constituency MP.

I turn to my constituency, Bury. Come and visit it—you will fall in love. It is rich in history. St Edmund, the town’s namesake, was England’s first patron saint. He was killed by invading Danes in 869. His head was severed and then protected by a wolf. Less gory and particularly auspicious this year is the fact that in 1214 the barons met in our abbey to plan Magna Carta, the document that enshrines our freedoms.

Let us fast forward some 800 years. Bury is the finest shopping destination in the east of England, a vibrant, dynamic constituency stretching along the A14. It includes Stowmarket and Needham Market, beautiful villages such as Walsham-le-Willows, Beyton and Thurston, great tea stops at Wortham and Alder Carr, and the most fabulous cricket club at Woolpit. In Suffolk’s glorious countryside the needs of farmers and environmentalists co-exist, as they should. Great farming to enhance our food security should be evidence-led, but care of our environment should also be evidence-led. These two objectives must not be mutually exclusive.

But what really makes my constituency special is the people—at the hospitals, in the schools and behind the front doors; quiet, determined and funny—such as the old boy I met while campaigning and asked, “Have you lived in the village all your life?” He looked at me and replied, “Not yet.” You see, people and fairness are my passions.

In this place, my thanks go to the staff, who have helped us all to settle in. They have been unfailingly lovely. Its traditions are quickly becoming part of the working day. For a start, getting the right Division

Lobby is not always easy, as I am sure the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) will confirm.

Fellow Members' maiden speeches have moved and inspired me. Two young men on opposite sides of the House have brought recent military experience to help inform good decision making when providing for our servicemen and women. Teachers, postmen, business people, doctors, nurses and carers all bring their knowledge to this place, hopefully giving the electorate what they crave: a more representative Parliament.

My motivation to come to this place sits on survival, resilience and possibility. As a double cancer survivor, I thank the nurse who in 1995 held my hand all night while we discussed the future for my one and two-year-old children. Her politics were irrelevant, but her care was essential. In 2010 it was a different cancer, but it was an amazing doctor who cared for me. By then, it was our four teenage daughters who reacted to the news. The NHS is wonderful, with the drugs, technology and care provided by the health service and businesses, working efficiently when good leadership allows. But it cannot be immunised against change when that is required.

Raising our four daughters, all under five, while building a business, I have worked with their schools as a governor and friend. Between them they have 52 years of great state education. I want that for every child. Accountability and joint responsibility lead the way. Having run that business for over 20 years, I think that a lot of nonsense is spoken in this place about small and medium-sized enterprises in particular. I hope that the knowledge that has entered the House this time with colleagues will allow us to defend the owners and creators of our businesses.

The businesses in my constituency, like those up and down the country, work hard. They create the jobs. They pay the wages that allow a tax take. They hopefully pay corporation tax. Tax pays for what we need and want. Poor business practice should be penalised. Late payment and bank lending is still not perfect. Small businesses are the life blood of this economy—we employ 60% of the working population—but businesses need two things if they are to invest and prosper: confidence and certainty.

In 2009 the banks said that they had closed lending to several sectors—construction, which is mine, being one of them. People are bemused at the lack of housing and infrastructure in this country, but they should not be—construction is not a tap that can be turned on and off. Financial mismanagement hurts us all; not just our businesses, but our hospitals, schools and welfare system.

Let me turn to today's debate. I thank the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) for bringing this issue to the Floor of the House. That the gender pay gap has shrunk since 2013 is great. That FTSE all-male boards now number zero is fantastic. That 35% of all start-ups are now owned or run by women is excellent. But it is not enough. The target for female representation on those FTSE boards was just 25%. Amusingly, there are more chief execs on FTSE boards called John than there are women, so, if we do not have a proliferation of men called John, we still have some work to do. Shamefully, as been pointed out, women are paid, on average, 19.1% less than men for doing the same job—and that is the best we have ever been. Who does not want to see parity of opportunity, representation and pay?

Women are survivors. They have resilience. More women are carers for disabled children and elderly relatives. Women have to balance careers and children. I look to them to inspire those children to become our engineers, our nurses and our business owners of the future. I speak to this House as a woman, obviously, and as a daughter, but most importantly as a mother—and a highly competitive mother. Earlier, I heard from an hon. Friend with two daughters and one with three; I have four. As the mother of those four daughters, I ask whether it is right that in 2015 their efforts, their diligence and their merit will be rewarded less than that of their male counterparts, or that their opportunities will be narrower. I think we all know the right answer to that.

I welcome this debate and the opportunity to work with all Members of Parliament, not least in my capacity on the Women and Equalities Committee, and the chance to champion the needs of my Bury St Edmunds constituents.

4.11 pm

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): I congratulate the new hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) on her maiden speech.

It is very hard to articulate how grateful I am to the voters who put their faith and trust in me on 7 May and how proud I am to stand before you as the new Member of Parliament for Bermondsey and Old Southwark. It is also a privilege to be able to join in this debate on equalities. Women in Bermondsey and Old Southwark can expect to earn only 83p for every £1 earned by men locally. My background experience in the past 10 years has been in the charity and public sectors tackling inequality, particularly disability inequality due to my family experience of growing up with a parent with a severe mental health problem.

Having had an unusual upbringing, I found it a little strange that the House of Commons Library described the seat as unusual also. It chose that adjective because, in researching the maiden speeches of previous Members, it found that I am only the third Member of Parliament for Bermondsey to make a maiden speech since the second world war. My predecessor, Simon Hughes, served for 32 years and his predecessor, the Labour MP Bob Mellish, served for 36 years. It has already been pointed out to me how hard I will have to work in order to sustain anything like that kind of average.

It has also been unfairly suggested that it would be difficult for me to say positive things about my predecessor because we come from different political parties. That is as untrue as it is inaccurate. Simon Hughes's record speaks for itself. He took the seat by surprise in 1983 and put up with media intrusion into his personal life, but he held the seat for that long because of his hard work and diligence in helping thousands of local people every year. While other areas saw a slump in Liberal Democrat support this year, Simon Hughes secured more votes than he did in 2005. Indeed, he got more votes than five of the Liberal Democrat Members who were returned to this place. His personal contribution to so many local people's lives was what helped him to gain and secure that support. I use this opportunity again to congratulate him on his knighthood. I wish Sir Simon very well. I would like to clarify, though, that I will be less visible than my predecessor within the

[Neil Coyle]

constituency because I do not plan to adopt his mode of transport. There will be no red cab with my name on the side motoring around the constituency.

The first Labour MP for the constituency was Dr Alfred Salter, who was elected in 1922. It was a privilege to unveil a statue of him and his family last year along the riverside. There is a school and a road named after him locally. He is a genuine legend locally as a healthcare pioneer. He was delivering free medical treatment to local people well before the national health service was established. In an equalities debate it would be remiss of me not to mention his wife, Ada, who was the first Labour woman elected mayor anywhere in the UK, and that also happened in Bermondsey in 1922, which, as Members will know, was before the equal franchise. She is credited with greening the borough in her role as mayor. As patron of Southern park, and with my landscape architect wife, I hope we are continuing her legacy in some small way.

The Salters' concern for health, wellbeing and the environment lives on in my local borough. Southwark's Labour council is one of the most progressive in the country. We have the biggest council house building programme. A new park is being provided at the Elephant and Castle through a local development and there is also going to be a new leisure centre. The council will allow local residents to use the swimming pool and gym for free, and it introduced free healthy school meals well before it was central Government policy. I am proud to have served as a councillor on that council since 2010, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes).

Much has changed in the area since the Salters' time. We are now far more diverse, but we are also, arguably, far more dynamic. The constituency has the third highest banking and financial sector employment of any constituency in the UK, and we bring more than 7 million tourists into the capital city every year. They come to see the fantastic attractions I am proud to have in my constituency, including Tate Modern, the Globe, the Imperial War Museum, Tower bridge and HMS Belfast.

It is an unusually young constituency. We have four fantastic universities with local bases: the London School of Economics, King's College, South Bank University and the University of the Arts London. We are also making a massive contribution to house building and tackling the housing crisis locally. The average figure for new home starts in UK constituencies in 2013 was 200; the figure in Bermondsey and Old Southwark was 1,600. Some people have suggested that we would be better termed Bermondsey and New Southwark.

The attraction of living in the constituency is partly the amazing local food and drink industry. I am sure that many Members are familiar with Borough market—it has been there for 1,000 years, so I hope they have noticed it. Bermondsey has had the reputation of being the larder of London for many years. The first tinned food factory anywhere in the UK was opened in Bermondsey in the 1800s. More recently, a market has opened on Maltby Street—please visit—and there are no fewer than six breweries and a gin distillery open locally. I cannot promise to shout everyone a drink, but please do visit.

Despite the positives of such an amazing constituency, inequality is still a massive concern. Child poverty remains stubbornly high across Rotherhithe and Bermondsey in particular. Low pay and unequal gender pay are definitely a factor. It is no coincidence that the justice for cleaners campaign is based in the constituency and helping in particular women from the Latin American community who are working as cleaners.

Some local private sector companies have done very well to introduce the London living wage, including the Ministry of Sound and the Association of British Travel Agents, which is living-wage accredited. The council also delivers the living wage. It is a shame that that example is not being followed in Lanark and Hamilton East, but Southwark has pioneered that policy, including making sure that women who are disproportionately represented in low-paid care jobs are covered by the living wage. I would like central Government to deliver that better in their commissioning and procurement policies.

I am proud of the food and banking sectors locally, but I am less proud of my constituency's growing food bank sector. This year, 7,000 people are expected to use this central London food bank, including 700 who are in work. Low pay is a very serious concern for me. The citizens advice bureau and Pecan, which provides the food bank, have outlined how Tory welfare waste, particularly over the past five years, has contributed to that food bank growth. I will be throwing myself at making sure that I address inequality in the constituency. Indeed, I have already outlined how I will donate this year's increase in the MP's salary to my local food bank.

I hope that the Government recognise that they cannot build one nation on such high levels of in-work poverty. One former Southwark resident, Charles Dickens, who lived just off what is now Marshalsea road, wrote about the best and worst of times, and it is very sad that he would probably still recognise those two cities in a constituency in the heart of London.

I would like to end with a note of thanks not only to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and the Speaker's team more widely, but to all the staff across the Westminster estate, including those in the canteen and security, for the fantastic and warm welcome I have received as a new Member, no matter how many times I get lost. I am particularly grateful for their advice and support, as I am to the voters of Bermondsey and Old Southwark who put their faith and trust in me. I hope to serve with a degree of passion and diligence and, I hope, some small measure of success.

4.19 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) for his maiden speech. He is clearly a passionate champion for his constituents, and he gave a moving speech on their behalf. I know his constituency well from having staggered around it twice—on a marathon, I hasten to add—when I was not perhaps in the best of shape. Should matters deteriorate on my daily commute from London Bridge, I now know where I should go, and I look forward to so doing.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), who made a very moving speech. I have got to know her well since we entered the House at the same time, and I have found

her to be an inspirational person. She is an absolute winner in business, and she will no doubt be a winner in the House as well. I was moved by her description of the struggles that she has overcome.

I should perhaps follow my hon. Friend's declaration of interests by declaring that I have three daughters. I say so not in any glib attempt to speak on behalf of their sex, but because the motion is incredibly important to us all. If we have daughters, we want them to be the best they can be, not to suffer any disadvantages or prejudice. That is also true for all of us, because if everybody reaches their true potential, we will be better off as a society and an economy.

I welcome the motion's recognition of the steps that the Government have taken, including with their new data transparency initiative. I am sure Members from both sides of the House welcome what drives the motion and the sentiment behind its words—the attempt to close the gender pay gap. It should be noted that the direction of travel is heading the right way. Indeed, the current gender pay gap is the lowest on record. For all employees, it is less than 20%, and for full-time employees, it is less 10%. However, the UK still has only the sixth highest gender equality index score in the European Union. We should aspire to close the gap and to lead other European nations in this sphere.

I managed a legal team for many years before I entered the House, and I want to reflect on my 18 years of experience. I wish to highlight three areas that we need to focus on further as subjects for discussion in this debate on how to close the gap. The first area is flexible working, on which we have made hugely encouraging strides. In the legal profession, more women than men are qualifying. Yet, historically, women have found it harder to reach the senior status of partner, Queen's counsel or managing director within their practice due, among other reasons, to their taking leave to start a family or, indeed, to their leaving the profession.

In my experience, however, employers increasingly recognise and embrace the upside of flexible working. The opportunity to hire an experienced lawyer for three or four days per week over set and fixed hours gave my department more productivity from that individual than it would have had from a full-time lawyer without the same level of experience. It therefore became the norm for members of my team to come in and work under flexible arrangements. Indeed, I had more people working on a flexible than on a fixed basis, and my team was better as a result. It also became the norm for members of my team to make the grade of managing director, notwithstanding the fact that they worked flexibly, either in their hours or from home.

Such hugely encouraging strides would not have occurred when I started out 18 years previously. In that regard, the market, following encouragement by the Government, is recognising the issue and closing the gender pay gap, via demand and supply in an increasingly competitive labour market.

The second area is quotas. If flexible working arrangements recognise talent and allow employers to take advantage of experience and talent, quotas for board members are a good example of how forcing the issue can have damaging consequences for those we are seeking to help. Seniority can be gained only by experience and endeavour. A voluntary approach to targets, with transparency and publication of data, is likely to encourage employers to see the positive benefits of having a diverse

board of all talents. To fast-track any individual, male or female, to a board to meet a quota is unlikely to lead to good career practice for that inexperienced individual, and it is even less likely to benefit the workforce of the company.

I note that the latest figures show that the proportion of women on the boards of FTSE 100 members has increased from 12.5% in 2011 to 22.8% in 2014. That is a welcome change, but the figure remains too low. I encourage companies to use models that other companies have adopted. Some companies invest in senior staff and mentor and coach them to board level to escalate their progress and achievement. I encourage the Government to consider tax incentives for those who practise that approach. However, any Government quotas to force the issue on companies would not only amount to state interference, but do little to help individuals to enjoy a long and lasting career at the top.

The third area I wish to explore is data—not the most inspirational of words, but the key, in my view, to unlocking poor practices. By requiring companies with more than 250 employees to publish data on the difference between the average pay of men and women, it should be easier for individuals to assess why they lag behind the opposite sex and to work with their employer to take action. It should also ensure that companies review discrepancies. Hopefully, they will close any unjustifiable differences before publishing. Those who do not operate fairly will lose their talent. With an increasing need to retain top talent, the market should help to force best practice to the top. The number is fixed at 250 employees, but publishing data should encourage best practice for smaller companies and encourage them to adopt the same processes. Smaller companies should find it easier to get their hands on the data, so I hope the practice spreads all the way to them, too.

In conclusion, I welcome the drive behind the motion to recognise the improvements that have been made. The House should unite in encouraging employers to go further. I recognise the achievements my Government have delivered in this sphere and applaud the latest initiative to force data disclosure on companies. I reflect on the Government's key deliverable to empower all genders in the workplace—namely, a state that creates the economic climate for growth. Our companies then increase the supply of jobs. Employees have options in the jobs market and can demand to be paid their worth, benchmarked against the new gender data, or they can exercise their rights in the labour market and move to a more enlightened employer who will pay them more, thereby bringing us closer to gender pay equality. There is a record number of women in the workplace. In my view, that is the key deliverable in tackling gender pay inequality.

4.27 pm

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) on two outstanding maiden speeches. I believe they will do a tremendous job in this Parliament in standing up for their constituents.

I welcome the debate and the opportunity to speak, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) on calling it. It is an incredibly

[*Seema Malhotra*]

important issue. As we have heard from many hon. Members, it is an issue for men as much as women. It is an issue for our nation as much as it is for our economic benefit and local communities. As well as being an end in itself, the debate is important in sending a message that women's labour is equal to men's.

I was pleased to hear the Minister's commitment and her words about the importance of transparency. However, it is a shame that it has taken the Government so long to recognise that transparency is a key step on the pathway to action. As has been mentioned, the previous Labour Government introduced rules on pay transparency in section 78 of the Equality Act 2010. It was only earlier this year, when Labour tabled an amendment to the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015, that the Government gave in, having voted down a proposal as recently as December 2014. That happened even after we had launched a campaign to implement pay transparency that was supported by *Grazia*. I was incredibly proud to be part of that.

I welcome the Government consultation that will be conducted over the summer. I will certainly contribute my thoughts to it.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is only under Labour Governments that the equal pay issue has been pushed forward, and not under Conservative Governments?

Seema Malhotra: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Labour's commitment to pay transparency and equality, and to gender equality, has been second to none in the history of Parliament.

It is 45 years since we passed the Equal Pay Act 1970, but in my constituency there is still a 13.3% pay gap. Women earn 87p for every pound that a man earns. That will continue to come as a shock to the men and women in my constituency—the engineers, the shop workers, the public sector workers, the small business employees and carers—who are earning a wage. They will consider themselves to be treated equally until they realise that there is actually pay inequality.

A number of incredibly important issues have been raised in this debate, particularly on the perception of the causes of pay inequality, whether relating to careers advice, role models, social attitudes or care responsibilities that can impact on women's ability to hold down a full-time job. My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) raised important points about the impact that violence against women and girls can have on employment and on self-esteem. The ability to hold down a stable life has an impact on their experience in the workplace. I recognise and celebrate the work of the Women's Business Council, which does a lot to tackle inequality in business.

I want to raise one issue in particular that I believe contributes to pay inequality: the perception of jobs in gender stereotypes. I want to ask where the agency of change is, because I do not want the debate to turn into a discussion about what women need to do differently. The debate needs to be about what business and society does and thinks, and how they need to change. Too often, pay has been set based on perceptions of whether something is a "woman's job". In a "man's job" the

perception will be that a woman might do it less well. In this Parliament, we have to break such perceptions. We need to say that there should be no glass ceilings and no no-go areas for women in any sector of employment.

Dawn Butler: My hon. Friend is making a compelling case for why Members on all sides of the House should support the motion. The Secretary of State said that she supports the motion in principle. Should we just urge Government Members to support us?

Seema Malhotra: I continue to urge the Government to follow our lead. They have a few hours in which to do that, and I am sure all Opposition Members would welcome it.

I want to share a couple of cases of stereotype-busting by women who have entered different professions or jobs, starting with my sister. I do not have daughters, so I may just talk about sisters. I have three sisters—perhaps that can be a new dimension of the competition today. My sister is an engineer. She works with racing cars in America and is often the only woman involved in any particular race. She started out life, as I did, at the Green School in Hounslow. Being a racing car engineer was not part of the careers advice. Being a politician was not part of my careers advice either. I remember asking whether we might invite a politician to speak at the school and was told that we did not really want to be political.

I want to share the story of someone I met yesterday, a young woman called Caitlin, who is on an apprenticeship. She is a fork-lift truck driver, among other things. When I was shown how to operate an electric forklift truck by her in Feltham, I can honestly say that she was an inspiration to me, as someone who is busting a stereotype in the work she is doing. She is setting a true example, leading and encouraging others to take the pathway to a career in logistics.

I welcome the Government's consultation, and I look forward to continuing debate and dialogue on this issue. I also want to support today's call from Opposition parties for an annual gender pay check for this simple reason: there is no point in having a target, as aspiration or a process without a method of delivery being put in place behind it. I believe that this is a proportionate measure—one that would fit in well with the work of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and one that would make a useful contribution to ensuring the achievement and the outcome of gender pay equality that we all wish to see.

4.35 pm

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): I would first like to congratulate the two Members who made their maiden speeches today. It was excellent to hear about Bury St Edmunds, and I like the idea of going shopping there. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) shares my delight in getting lost! I must come and visit the breweries, which sounded really good.

My Derby North constituency has often led the way when it comes to industry, manufacturing and business—and, once again, our city has shown that it is ahead of the curve when it comes to addressing inequalities. I share the concerns of Labour Members that we are still

talking about a gender pay gap in 2015, but I know that this Government have made huge strides to decrease the gap across the country. In fact, in my own constituency, there is a disparity of 9.1% in the other direction—that is, women are paid 9.1% more on average than men! I am proud of the advances that my city has made when it comes to promoting women in the workplace. I am also rather proud of the advances that it made when it elected me as its first female MP. I would urge all right hon. and hon. Members to visit Derby and see just how we do it.

On a national level, the Government have made some good steps towards reducing the gender pay gap, although we need to do more, and I am very supportive of the action taken so far to maximise women's contribution to economic growth and to address this disparity. I am sure that nobody on the Government Benches is talking about positive discrimination, as Conservatives base their beliefs on equality of opportunity for all. As a woman, I believe that we should be promoted and selected on our merit. I believe, too, and always have believed, that we should have equal pay for equal roles and equal opportunities for all.

This kind of equality in the workplace is vital, and I am passionate for everyone to have access to a fair and flexible labour market that draws on individual talents, skills and experience. In order to achieve that, we need to be working on increasing the confidence of all young people—especially that of young women, who should be encouraged at an early age to have high expectations for equal pay and high expectations for their achievements in the workforce.

One way to do this is by having meaningful work experience, so an organisation such as Young Enterprise adds value to the workplace. Campaigns such as the “This Girl Can” have done a fantastic job of boosting the morale of young females in particular, and should go some way to changing attitudes to girls and young women taking part in typically male-dominated activities such as football, boxing and engineering. One of my nieces plays football for Liverpool's youth team and other nieces are kick-boxing champions!

On engineering, it is very telling that women make up 90% of secretaries and only 7% of engineers. This fact alone raises a whole host of questions that we do not have enough time to discuss today. However, I am sure that these questions will be addressed and will form the basis of the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) in leading her Select Committee on Women and Equalities.

Encouraging girls into STEM careers is vital to our long-term future as a country. Fully to address gender-based pay differences, we need to encourage more women into male-dominated professions. At the moment, women make up only 20% of architects and 18% of actuaries and statisticians. Schemes such as the “Your Life” programme aim to double the proportion of technology degrees taken by women to 30% by 2030—and they have my full support.

Given Derby's rich engineering heritage, the £10 million investment in the “Developing Women Engineers” programme will be very welcome. Boosting local engineering in whatever way we can is one of the best measures we can take to improve our local economy and create jobs and skills. It is important that women play a key role in the engineering future of our city, and I thank the Secretary of State for her support in that regard.

Increasing transparency is also important, and I am pleased that the Secretary of State is to introduce changes that will require companies with more than 250 employees to publish information showing whether there are differences in the pay of men and women. A helpful tool for employers is the free online software that is now available to all companies, and can help them to calculate their own gender pay gaps.

Women in business play a vital role, but my background in business makes it very clear to me that men are still leading the way. I want more women to become involved in business. Although the Government have done great work so far, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels.

I know that many Members wish to speak, so let me end by saying that I am proud of the Government's record on equality, which boasts more women in work than ever before, more women-led businesses than ever before, a woman on the board of every FTSE 100 company, and a gender pay gap that is now the lowest on record.

4.41 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Reference has been made to one of my predecessors, a Member of Parliament for Islington East. Perhaps, as the first woman to represent Islington South and Finsbury, I should point out that my constituency incorporates Islington East. There was a time in the 1930s, I must confess, when the good people of Islington East were so keen on women MPs that it once had a Tory representative—and she was a woman. Given what she was up to, it seems that she was not necessarily a traditional 1930s Tory: she was very interested in women's equality.

Let me turn to more general matters. Those who will read the report of our debate may not fully appreciate this, but a large group of female Conservatives have been sitting together throughout, although not all of them have spoken. They have made one mistake, however, and I urge them to think about it. They are sitting on the wrong side of the Gangway. I am told that in 1997, when a large number of new Members arrived in the House, those who sat on the Government side of the Gangway were promoted, while those who sat on the other side were not. So girls, move over there so that you can get yourselves promoted. I am just trying to be helpful.

Rebecca Pow: I have been wondering what a traditional Conservative woman is.

Emily Thornberry: I do not think it would be a good idea for me to rise to that question. I have only 10 minutes, and I want to make some important points about equality, particularly women's equality.

I think that, when the Equal Pay Act 1970 was passed, Barbara Castle was right to describe it as a “historic advance in the struggle against discrimination in our society”.—[*Official Report*, 9 February 1970; Vol. 795, c. 914.]

Unfortunately, however, it has not stood the test of time. In those days, there was blatant and obvious discrimination between the sexes. It was easy for an individual woman to take her case to a tribunal, point to the man who sat at the desk next to hers and who she had realised was being paid more than her, and prove

[Emily Thornberry]

that she had been discriminated against; but time has moved on, and we now need legislation that is not simply reactive. We cannot rely on individual women to root out evidence of discrimination and take their cases to a tribunal. Besides, the process has never been more difficult, not only because tribunal law has become so complex—many cases continue for as long as seven years—but because tribunal fees are at such a level that it is no surprise that there has been a 79% drop in the number of equal pay claims. Those fees have rightly been described as a tax on justice.

However, there are more fundamental problems. I think that we need to look at a new type of legislation that has begun to be introduced and that can be very effective. Conservative Members had better take a deep breath, because I am about to mention the Human Rights Act, a proactive piece of legislation with a beating heart which could be moved to the centre of our constitution and ensure that work was done properly. Another proactive piece of legislation is the Bribery Act 2010. Under that Act, a company has to prove that it has structures in place to manage things in such a way that, if a person is bribing someone else, they are acting as a lone wolf and the company has done everything it can to stop it. It has resulted in a culture change in our companies, which is very much to be recommended.

A new equality Act could do the same thing. Our current Equality Act does not do that. It has failed to foresee the fragmentation of pay-setting, even within an organisation. It has the most ridiculous loopholes. For example, if I as a woman were to leave a job because I felt that I was not being paid properly and was being discriminated against, but I did not want to take the matter to a tribunal, and then I realised that, to make matters worse, I had been replaced by a man, who was not being discriminated against and was being paid more than me for doing the same work, I could not use that as evidence that I had been discriminated against. How crazy is that. We need to look again at some of these ridiculous loopholes.

It is to be applauded that we are looking further at pay transparency, but that is not in itself sufficient. The Equality Act is up for its five-year review. The Government have said that they are looking again at whether the Act has achieved its stated aims. The Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice has said that

“Parliament will consider this information before deciding whether to gather further evidence on how the Act is operating.” However, it seems to me that we should introduce a new Bill. As Barbara Castle rightly said:

“I have no doubt that some employers will try it on... undoubtedly, pockets of discrimination will remain—unless women organise to put a stop to it.”—[*Official Report*, 9 February 1970; Vol. 795, c. 928.]

So let us do that. Let us organise and stop it.

A new Act should be proactive and not reactive. I strongly suggest that successful claims should trigger a mandatory company-wide audit, including proper job evaluation studies. That does not just mean listing what the women get paid, what the men get paid and what the different jobs are. We should be drilling down into companies and looking at what skills are being used, what the women are doing compared with the men, and seeing whether there is systemic discrimination in a

company. It would be right for tribunals to be able to trigger that. It could be done before the case even gets to the tribunal, where there are negotiations before the case officially kicks off. However, it should also happen afterwards if a claim against an individual is upheld.

There should be a flipside to that. If a company has done a proper, deep and profound voluntary audit, that should be a prima facie defence against any equal pay claim. We need to do this by way of carrot and stick.

Other things need to be done. There has been a chilling effect on some negotiations because of widely publicised cases in which trade unions have negotiated with an employer to try to get rid of discrimination within a company and to introduce equal pay, only to find that many of the women feel that the settlement has not been sufficiently fair, and the trade union has ended up being sued itself. New legislation could include guidance so that everyone knows where they stand and where their settlement should end up when trade unions and employers negotiate. That again could be a prima facie defence against any equal pay claim.

At the moment, legislation is too complicated, and the tribunal process is too obscure, too difficult and takes too long. It seems to me that many people are running away from using our tribunals and any legal process to enforce equal pay. Good as it was at the time, it seems that the 1970 Act is not fit for the 21st century, and we need to look at it.

Not only should we have new codes of practice so that the parties know what is expected of them, but we need to streamline our tribunal process and bring in experienced, senior judges to adjudicate more complex claims—those cases where preliminary issues get appealed and go back to the tribunal, and then another preliminary issue is taken up and appealed. For that reason, these cases can take seven years. It is not right. The current process is not fit to do what we want it to do.

We should look again at introducing questionnaires. Why have the Government stopped the process whereby, if a woman makes a claim against a company, the company is supposed to answer a questionnaire to give proper information on the practices within the company? The Government said that they were cutting red tape. That is one way of looking at it, but another way is that they disempowered women from taking their equal pay cases to tribunals. If we are looking again at what we should do with tribunals, we should reintroduce the questionnaire. We can make it two pages if we are worried about it being red tape, but we must ensure that that short-form questionnaire includes important information such as, “Has the company been sued before? Have you done a proper audit? When did you last do a proper audit?” Women will know exactly where they stand before they begin the process of taking a case to a tribunal.

I have talked about the ridiculous loophole whereby if I am replaced by a man I cannot use that as prima facie evidence to show that I was discriminated against. I feel very strongly about this issue. I have written extensively on it. For those who are interested, I have written on “Comment is free”, there is a long article in the *New Statesmen*, and those who are really techie can go to my website.

A new Act will not, of course, solve all the problems. We cannot have equality without proper flexible working. I say that as a mother of a precious daughter, but also

of two precious boys. I want my boys to be fathers and to be able to look after me when I get old, and to be able to balance their work and family life, and for their family life to be as important to them as it will be, I hope, to my daughter. When we talk about women's liberation, we must not leave the men behind, because this should be about the liberation of all of us. Flexible working is very important for us all.

We should also look at the fact that women tend to cluster in certain professions. We may have left the kitchen, but we have not gone very far. The majority of us still do things like cleaning and cooking, secretarial work, nursing and looking after children. Those are the main sorts of work we do, and, guess what, it is seen as women's work and, guess what, it is not paid as well as men's work. We have to look at that if we are serious about equal pay. The importance of proper careers advice for boys and girls has been mentioned, and understanding the careers available in STEM subjects is particularly important.

These are long-term goals. Right now we need a new equal pay Act. Let us be radical; let us not be afraid; let us get on with it.

4.52 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): I speak from the nursery Benches here at the far side of the Chamber, but I am sure I shall graduate to the other Benches in good time.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) on her amazing and very moving maiden speech, and also on having four daughters, who have obviously been brought up very successfully. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle). He is not in his place, but I often visit Borough market in his constituency when I visit my daughter who is training to be a doctor at King's college and is often at Guy's hospital.

I am pleased to see that equality in my area, certainly as far as this House is concerned, is progressing. We have the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinéage), who is currently sitting on the Front Bench, my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), who is the first woman to be Minister for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes), and myself, representing Portsmouth South. That is four strong women whose constituencies surround Portsmouth harbour, which is excellent. We also have seven female MPs representing Hampshire, which is almost 50%. We have a little more to do; we have another male to knock off his perch at some point.

We must keep driving progress outside this House as well. I would like the gender pay gap be much smaller in my constituency. At 22% it is fractionally above the average for the south-east region. We must look at how to close that gap, but we can only do that by boosting aspiration for all women to help them get better jobs, as well as equal pay for equal work.

A growing number of businesses in Portsmouth are led by women, particularly small and medium-sized businesses which they own and run. The Hampshire chamber of commerce and the Portsmouth Federation of Small Businesses are run by women as well, so it is an area where women are beginning to dominate, which is excellent.

In a city where the main source of employment was once the dockyard, a centre for heavy engineering and other trades traditionally dominated by men, we are making important strides—and I suspect that history is part of the reason why we still have a gender pay gap of 22%. Through the efforts of key employers such as British Aerospace and Airbus, a growing number of young people are going into technical and engineering trades, especially through apprenticeships. That is why I welcome the Government's new initiative on the careers and enterprise company, which will show how young people can go into careers that have normally been dominated by men. A key aim of our university technical college will be to recruit students equally between the genders to drive this progress forward. Education has always been a main source of empowerment for women. That applies in industry, so the £10 million from the Government to help develop engineers will help. One of my daughters was going to go into engineering but has changed to medicine, and I would like much more proactive engineering courses for women, to make it much more interesting for them, so that they stick with it, rather than deciding to go into other careers.

We are backing all that up with our reforms to the childcare system, extending free access to it and helping mothers to get back into the employment market. I would also like greater recognition of the role of mothers and fathers who stay at home and look after the next generation. Their role is largely unrecognised, and we always try to push people back into work even though being at home looking after the children is equally important. Through my membership of the Select Committee on Women and Equalities, I look forward to working to find ways of encouraging and supporting all parents who stay at home to get back into work when they feel it is right to do so. Many of them lose confidence by being at home and find it difficult to get back the skills they need to return to the workplace. I ask employers to provide more flexible working opportunities for mothers and fathers who have taken time out of the workplace to bring up families. Employers should recognise them both in work and in pay, and give them the skills to get back into work, at whatever age they are.

4.56 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech today. I also thank all the previous speakers in this debate. Many of them have taken a trip through their constituencies, a good number of which, in my previous career, I dallied in—perhaps I should have stayed longer. I cannot compete with the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill); I have two daughters and one son. My election agent and my campaign manager were women, and I am a fully paid-up member of the gender balance club.

It is my privilege to represent the area in which I was born and grew up. Prior to me, Inverclyde was served by Iain McKenzie, who won the seat in a by-election after the death of David Cairns. I am sure that both Iain and David worked hard for their constituents and I am sure they shared my desire to improve many aspects of Inverclyde. Traditionally, it was the home to shipyards. Jobs were available, as were apprenticeships, too. An honest day's labour produced an honest day's wage, and that is what we are talking about here today. When I

[*Ronnie Cowan*]

was a child, my late father owned a pub and one of my jobs was to stand at the end of the bar and shout, "Time gentlemen, please." I never knew that in a few short years it would be the shipyards of the lower Clyde we were shouting time on, not the pubs. Inverclyde has never fully recovered, although I was delighted to visit Ferguson Marine last Friday and hear its visionary plans to revitalise the business, and I was heartened by its confidence in our local community. I am glad to note that, in a male-dominated environment, its apprentices are both male and female.

My constituency sits at the tail of the River Clyde. It encompasses part of Kilmacolm, and all of Port Glasgow, Greenock, Gourock, Inverkip and Wemyss Bay. Historically, Greenock has shown great innovation, including that of James Watt. Watt's improvements in the design of the steam engine made such engines cost-effective, and radically enhanced their power and efficiency. The new engines fuelled the industrial revolution. In the early 1800s, Robert Thom designed a clean water-management system that drew water from the hills behind Greenock and powered a grain mill, a paper mill, a loom manufacturer, a sugar refinery, a cloth manufacturer and even a mill grinding clay for a local pottery works. Inverclyde led the way in clean renewable energy almost 200 years ago.

We enjoy our sport too, with vibrant tennis, cricket, golf, hockey and many other sporting clubs. I do not need to tell the House that we are home to the finest wee football team of them all, the original hoops—the mighty Greenock Morton. And close to my red, yellow and black heart is Greenock Wanderers rugby football club, including a very vibrant ladies team.

The stunning views across the water from Inverclyde to the constituency of Argyll and Bute are marred only by the obscenity of the Trident ballistic missile system being ferried to and fro by four Vanguard submarines. Sometimes I think that people's approach to Trident is an abstract one, but in my constituency it is real; it is a real weapon with the very real capacity to murder hundreds of millions of men, women and children.

On the positive side, Inverclyde has great potential for growth. We have a major road that runs east to Glasgow and beyond, and west to Ayrshire. We have two railways that run from Wemyss Bay and Gourock into the heart of Glasgow city. We have a river that runs by us. We are situated between two international airports. Most importantly, we have a ready, willing and able workforce. It is my aim to represent Inverclyde to the best of my ability, so that once again we can declare that Inverclyde is truly open for business.

Since being elected, I have attended community events for autism, carers, Alzheimer's disease, sea cadets, school choirs and brass bands. I am delighted to be included by those groups, and acknowledge that my job is back there in my community, but my challenge is to bring the voice of my community into this place and make it heard.

I grew up in the 1960s—the decade that formed me. We had the Beatles, the Stones, Carnaby Street and Woodstock. We also had the assassinations of John F Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and we had the Vietnam war, when America sent more than 300,000 young men—mostly conscripts—to die. I watched in awe as man walked on the moon. In his book, "The

Lost Moon", Jim Lovell says that going to the moon was not so remarkable—they just decided to go there. The Apollo missions proved that if a nation sets its sights high and is prepared to work hard to achieve its end goal, great things can and will be achieved.

I watched the American civil rights movement, massive and dignified, march across America, and, through peaceful protest and civil engagement, change the psyche of a nation. I remember 1967 when Winnie Ewing—Madame Ecosse—was elected to this Chamber. No one ever suggested to Winnie that she should be paid less than her male counterparts.

By the age of 11, my political identity was forming. In 1971, I stood in my primary school election on an SNP ticket and won. My teacher said that she wondered whether it was an indication of where my generation would take our country. As I walked home, I felt 10 feet tall. Surely, it was only a matter of time before my country was independent. As a child, I never knew how slowly time could crawl forward. But standing here today, as the result of a monumental SNP victory—among so many SNP victories—I know that if it is the will of the citizens of Scotland then that day will come, and from that, I hope, greater self-determination for all of the regions and countries in the UK.

During the Scottish referendum, I had "the" conversation with many people, some did not agree with me, but some did. As it turns out, more disagreed with me than agreed, but 87% of the electorate turned out to vote. People engaged with the political system. People talked politics in bars, restaurants, cafés and hairdressers, at the school gate and at sporting venues. One of the great benefits of that is that politicians in Scotland are now more accountable. I have a dialogue with my constituents. They text me, email me, use Facebook, tweet me, phone me and stop me in the street, and that is how it should be. The viewing figures for Parliament TV must have gone through the roof. Our maiden speeches are followed and critiqued.

My wish for Scotland is that we can take our place as a modern, diverse, inclusive and equal nation. We should not be afraid to question ourselves, because in doing that, we will come up with stronger solutions. But frankly, as a small northern European country in the 21st century, we are not doing well enough. Lesley Riddoch put it eloquently in her fabulous book, "Blossom". She wrote:

"Generally life today for the majority of Scots is not bad, it just isn't as long, healthy, productive, reproductive, literate, wealthy, sustainable or creative as it could be. That either bothers you or it doesn't."

Well, it bothers me. In a country that is not blighted by natural disasters, enjoys a temperate climate, has an abundance of fresh water and arable land, we still have one in four children living in poverty. In some areas of Inverclyde, that figure is an even more disgraceful one in two. We need to understand that as we sit in these cosseted surroundings, shouting, "Hear, hear," it is out there that the austerity cuts are hurting the most vulnerable in our society. In this place, we make the choices that can improve that. We can choose to invest in our children or we can choose to invest in weapons of mass destruction. I am still saying bairns, not bombs.

In Lewis Grassie Gibbon's "Smeddum", he berates historians for trashing Scotland's history, including depicting Jacobites as dashing rebels and romanticising the Stuart

queens, when they should have been focusing on the poverty and injustice wreaked on the people. I can do nothing about the history books, but my fellow SNP MPs and I can at least be a footnote in a brave new future where we are inspired by hope and not restrained by fear.

5.5 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan). I am so pleased to hear that his constituency is open for business and I am delighted that he is living out his early dreams by finally getting into politics. He speaks passionately about his area and I know that he will speak up for it well while he is here. I also want to congratulate the other Members who made maiden speeches today. We had two excellent speeches from the two Bs, Bermondsey and Bury St Edmunds—the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill). I know that they will both be a working part of the operation of this Chamber and I welcome them.

I also want to congratulate everyone who has contributed to today's debate. I speak as a woman who not only set up my own small business in my constituency some 12 years ago but has juggled work for large companies and corporations, including the National Farmers Union, the BBC and ITV, with family life since leaving university. Yes, that was a long time ago, but all that has happened since. I am now the first female Conservative MP for Taunton Deane, so I have a particular interest in today's debate, as do many other Members.

I particularly want not to be negative but to highlight that although there might be a long way to go with differences in pay between men and women, we have made enormous strides. More women are in work than ever before, 14.4 million nationally, and there are more women-led businesses than ever before. To prove that point, in Somerset there are 1,957 women members of the Federation of Small Businesses, with 577 of them within the Taunton postcode area.

I want to focus especially on the growing surge in women running their own businesses, which, of course, puts them in control of their own pay. Some 20% of small and medium-sized enterprises are either run by women or are women-heavy—and by that I do not mean anything about weight: I mean, of course, that they are predominantly run by women. SMEs led by women contributed £75 billion to the economy in 2012, which was the latest figure I could find.

In my experience in Taunton Deane and through joining and working with a range of women's business groups, women-centric businesses are growing and they are successful. The Government must do all they can to enable and encourage those businesses to grow. Let me give just one example of a very successful small business in Taunton Deane. It is called Mastergen and is in a very rural location, in the village of West Bagborough. It is a women-only company made up of six women. The managing director is Alison Dunphy, and I spoke to her earlier for an update on how they are doing. I am pleased to report that the company is doing well. It specialises in supplying quality dairy and beef genetics to farmers throughout the UK. To the uninitiated, that means bull semen, and very important it is too. So

successful is the company that turnover has doubled in under nine months and the company won the Taunton business incentive award last year.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): My hon. Friend's comments bring me on to an issue that I want to raise. In my constituency of Berwick-upon-Tweed—another B—we are all to a man very proud to support the Bronze family, who have spent years travelling hundreds of miles each week to help their daughter Lucy fulfil her passion for football. That young woman is now kicking winning goals for our England women's team and hopefully will do so again tonight against Japan. I hope that Members will keep their fingers crossed. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should encourage the lottery sports fund to focus on investing in sports clubs and facilities that are committed to investing in girls' sports such as cricket and football? I ask because the subject of bull semen leads us to the male sports, and in cricket and football we are seeing spectacular results from our female players—

Mr Speaker: We are extremely grateful to the hon. Lady.

Rebecca Pow: I thank my hon. Friend for her interesting intervention. I do not know whether she knows this, but my daughter played cricket for Somerset, so I am very keen to promote women's sports. Indeed, during my campaign, I became very involved in promoting women's sports down at the football ground with our Taunton football club. I urge the Government to do exactly as my hon. Friend suggests as much is to be gained from incentivising and encouraging women's sports.

The women in that bull semen company, many of whom have children, work effectively, intensively and flexibly. Flexibility is the key for women in the working world, and we need to give them the tools to get the job done. I am pleased that a number of my hon. Friends mentioned flexibility earlier in the day and I am confident that the Government are supplying the tools in an increasingly thoughtful and practical way to enable that to happen.

Women, with their talent, are a key to driving this country's economic success. Obviously, the more successful the economy, the more pay will rise and the more women will benefit. Of course, women's pay must always be equal to that of men across the board, and our female children—to join the team, I have two girls aged 23 and 20—should never have to think about whether they might be paid less than men. We really do need to get those girls, who are so good at taking their exams, into science, engineering and even manufacturing—all areas that have been highlighted today.

I praise the Government's recent moves to modernise the workplace by introducing rights to more flexible working for employees, which will increasingly help women, and I also very much welcome the 20% support for childcare costs for up to £10,000 a year for each child.

Angela Crawley: Does the hon. Lady accept the point made earlier by one of my colleagues about the Fawcett Society's research suggesting that 85% of cuts to benefits, tax credits, pay and pensions have a greater impact on female members of the household than on their male

[Angela Crawley]

counterparts, and that that has a substantial impact on child poverty figures and women's ability to move on in the workplace?

Rebecca Pow: That is why we need to get the economy moving to improve all those areas and why childcare support is so important in helping to top them up. That support is very much welcomed by all the women I speak to.

I welcome the introduction of 15 hours a week of state-funded early education for three and four-year-olds. Although I welcome that support, I know from speaking to a range of women in work that many of them are calling for it to be introduced when children are even younger, to enable those women who want to do so to get back to work sooner. I support my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), who said that we must recognise those women and even fathers who want to stay at home to bring up their children, because nothing is more important than what we do for our children in bringing up the next generation.

Emily Thornberry: Of course, the hon. Lady is absolutely right: such decisions—whoever makes them on behalf of their family—should be in their family's best interests. Some women may wish to work part time and take advantage of tax credits. The difficulty is that they need to work 16 hours a week to get tax credits. Is there not a problem therefore with offering only 15 hours childcare, particularly as children have to be dropped off and picked up again?

Rebecca Pow: The hon. Lady makes an exceedingly good point, and it is something that we should throw into the mix.

In my constituency, the gender pay gap is the lowest on record, due largely to the progress made during the last Government, because the economy in Taunton Deane has really improved. The disparity between men's and women's pay is relatively small at 11% and, with the actions being taken by this Government, is coming down all the time, which, of course, I welcome.

I am pleased that the Government are taking this issue seriously. I see some people shaking their heads. The figure is still too high, but I am confident that, with the measures that the Government are putting in place, the gender pay gap in my constituency and elsewhere will continue to come down, and I shall be pressing to ensure that that happens. I have an all-women political team, both in London and in Taunton, and they are of mixed ages—some older, like me—so we are addressing the issue that was raised earlier. Indeed, with the glorious flood of new, young—and not so young—female blood coming into the House, I am sure that we will all work on this very important issue together.

5.15 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) on an excellent maiden speech and on raising some good points around austerity.

I am proud to speak in support of this important motion. It is 45 years since we passed the Equal Pay Act 1970, but in my constituency of Lancaster and Fleetwood women still earn just 87p for every male

pound. I am pleased to note, however, that that is above the national average of 81p, but any gap is too large.

There is a saying that what counts is measured, and what is measured counts. That is why the motion to task the Equality and Human Rights Commission to perform an annual equal pay check to collate and analyse published information, and to make recommendations for action, is so important.

The Equality Act 2010 included rules on pay transparency that would have required employers of more than 250 employees to publish details of the average pay of men and women in their workforce and the gender pay gap. However, when the coalition came to government, it announced that it would not implement the provisions for mandatory reporting, which seems to be a clear indication that the gender pay gap is not important to those on the Government Benches because they did not think that it was important to measure it.

The coalition Government did, however, invite companies to report voluntarily—a policy adopted by only a fraction of companies. Perhaps that explains why the UK performs so poorly on measures of gender pay inequality globally. We have the sixth highest gender pay gap in the EU, and in 2014 slipped out of the top 20 in the global gender pay index for the first time, with the high gender pay gap cited as a significant reason for that.

While Labour was in government, there was a clear focus on closing the gender pay gap and real progress was made. In the five years before 2010, under a Labour Government, the gender pay gap narrowed by 2.4%, but in the past five years, under a Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition Government, progress slowed and the gap closed by only a further 0.7%.

It would seem not unreasonable, therefore, to argue that the Government, in telling companies that they were not interested in measuring the gender pay gap, were also telling companies that the gender pay gap did not matter. The incentive of public disclosure represented by the reporting measures that Labour included in section 78 of the Equality Act was removed by the coalition Government, the focus on closing the gender pay gap was lost and progress slowed.

Pay transparency works, and it is not a new idea. Countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Belgium and Australia have gender pay reporting requirements, and they all score better than the UK on the global gender equality index.

The Office for National Statistics reports a rolled-up figure for the gender pay gap, but, as we know, women are over-represented in low-pay sectors and more likely to work part-time than men, so disaggregating the information is vital if we are to understand the problem properly and work out how to address it.

An equal day's pay for an equal day's work has been an idea long at the heart of the Labour movement and the campaign for women's pay equity has crossed into popular culture, with the story of the campaign of the women workers at the Ford car factory in Dagenham being made into not only a film, but, more recently, a west end musical. The story from Dagenham illustrates some of the complexities of equal pay, for it is about not only women being paid the same as men when they do the same job, but recognising that those trades and professions that have traditionally been occupied by women are generally paid less.

Women's work across the economy is undervalued. We see that in the gender pay gap, but also in the austerity measures of this Government—cutting the funding for public services and then pushing services from the public sector into the charity and voluntary sector, where employees are more likely to be women, wages are more likely to be lower and more work will be unpaid.

This situation only highlights the contradictions inherent in Government policy. Introducing his plans to cut working tax credits, the Prime Minister made the argument that the Government should not be subsidising large companies to underpay their workforce. This is a position I agree with, but for me it has two logical consequences—first, that the minimum wage must be a living wage, and secondly, that organisations funded by any level of government to provide public services must be funded at a level that ensures that each of their workers receives at least a living wage, and preferably one that reflects the skill and centrality of public services to our community.

In conclusion, the UN says that at the current rate of progress it will take Britain another 70 years to close the gender pay gap. That would be another 70 years on top of the 45 years since the Equal Pay Act was passed. Surely 115 years is just too long. It certainly is for the women of my constituency, which is why I support the motion and call on all Members to do so.

5.20 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I congratulate those who made the excellent maiden speeches that we have heard this afternoon—my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle), and the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan), who reminded me of what I might have experienced if I had been a child of the 1960s, as opposed to a child of the 1970s.

I appreciate it when maiden speeches highlight the experience that many of my colleagues bring to this House. One of the things that has struck me since being here is what a huge wealth of experience there is in this place, which we can all contribute to the debate and to the work of Parliament and Government.

I welcome the debate on gender pay equality. I declare that I have only two daughters, unlike others who have claimed more, and I should mention that I have a son, in case he thinks he was forgotten, should he ever look back at this debate in years to come. There is an interesting change in the dynamic in the House during this debate, whether as a consequence of the topic or of the relatively female-dominated Benches.

I appreciate the contribution from the men who have chosen to speak in the debate. We have heard a couple of maiden speeches by men, and the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman). In this debate about women's equality and gender pay, the role of men cannot be overestimated. In the big picture, men need to change and be a bit more understanding. I have seen some data recently showing that men commonly underestimate the confidence gap between men and women. Women recognise that they are not very confident about what they can achieve; men seem to underestimate women's lack of confidence so men need to develop some sympathy.

For me personally, men have made a huge difference in my life and even to the fact that I am here today. My father always encouraged and believed in me. My husband, who makes it possible for me to be here, and several male mentors in my career before politics have been incredibly important in giving me confidence, courage and support. Men are essential, as well as what we women bring to this debate.

The debate is not just about pay. For example, some recent research that I read examined the gender bias in the media. The ratio of men to women in films is 3:1. Of characters with jobs in films, 81% are male. Think of the unconscious effect on boys and girls, women and men absorbing that media influence. That must affect the life chances and ambitions of young people.

On gender equality and the progress that has been made in recent years, we must recognise that the gender pay gap is the narrowest ever. A huge amount of progress has been made, thanks to a huge amount of effort. The gap in full-time pay has fallen from 17.4% in 1997 to 9.4% in 2014. The gap is greater for high-paid than for low-paid employment. It is interesting to note that, if I understand correctly the data from the House of Commons Library, the part-time pay gap has been reversed: men are worse paid than women for part-time work, with a 5.5% pay gap.

Stephen Phillips: In fact, that is not the only discrepancy. There is a negative pay gap between men and women in favour of women in the age groups 22 to 29 and 30 to 39. Other than the fact that in all aspects of life women are more successful than men, can my hon. Friend think why that might be the case?

Helen Whately: My hon. and learned Friend makes an important point. While many of us here and outside this place are fighting for more opportunities and support for women, we must not forget how difficult life can be for young men, who have much higher rates of mental health problems and suicide, and for young boys who are not doing so well in school. We need to think about both genders when considering how people can achieve their potential in life. As he suggests, there is no longer a pay gap for women under 40, so we must take care not to try to solve a problem that no longer exists. We must now ensure that that achievement is extended to women over 40 so that there is no gender pay gap at all, because there certainly is today.

When looking at the progress made in recent years, we should look beyond pay and consider the success of women on boards. The work of the 30% Club has been very influential in that area. In 2010 only 12.5% of FTSE 100 board members were women, but now the figure is up to 24.7%. The UK leads many countries around the world in that regard, including America, Canada and Australia. We should also appreciate the increasing number of women in leadership positions in both the private and public sectors.

It might be helpful to reflect on what has worked so far and how we have achieved that progress. Legislation has certainly played a role, going all the way back to the Equal Pay Act 1970, which the motion refers to, and the Equality Act 2010, which, beyond the pay problem, ended the gap in contractual terms so that other terms do not favour men over women. That also put a stop to confidentiality clauses getting in the way of fair pay.

[*Helen Whately*]

There is huge support for childcare, with the introduction of breakfast clubs and after-school clubs making a big difference for working parents. Hon. Members have also mentioned flexibility for women in the workplace, and for men.

Corporate organisations such as the 30% Club have worked to make data available on the pay gap. One thing that has made a difference in the decisions of big businesses is the fact that the data show that companies that have women on their boards do better. Companies have then said, “Okay, in order to do better we need to ensure that we have women coming through the organisation and on our board.”

As many case studies show, private and public sector organisations often do well through informal methods, such as supporting women with mentoring, networking and coaching, recognising the challenges they face—often they relate to mindset—and helping them overcome them. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which has focused on supporting women in the workplace over the past couple of years, makes a very good case study: unlike the civil service as a whole, in which women fill only 38% of leadership positions, more than 50% of its senior leaders are now women. Progress really is being made.

Martin John Docherty (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The hon. Lady is raising many important points for the House to take on board. Does she agree that it is not just the private and public sectors, but the charitable bodies that work with the Charity Commission for England and Wales, the new Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and those under the regulation of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator—I am sorry about the long names—that should take cognisance of this debate, because they are substantial employers and should also be setting an example in their charitable works and management?

Helen Whately: I support that; I do not know the data for the charitable sector, but it makes sense. I wonder whether the charitable sector might be like the healthcare sector and the NHS, where women make up a greater proportion of the workforce as a whole but the top tier of leadership is still male-dominated. Any organisation in which that is the case cannot simply say, “We have more women across our workforce. Aren’t we doing well?” There should be an equal proportion of women at the top as across the whole organisation.

Things are happening and more needs to happen. On the increase in transparency, the Government will rightly make the reporting of gender pay information for companies with more than 250 employees mandatory and give employment tribunals the power to require employers to conduct a pay audit. Those things are really important. I am a huge advocate of transparency in healthcare, which was my area of expertise before coming here. I also want to see more voluntary transparency. Companies that are competing for top women graduates and school leavers should surely publicise their effectiveness and success in supporting women in work. They should be transparent about their pay and the progress they are making for women in the workplace.

Making the workplace more supportive of women and family life, for women and men, is incredibly important. I am proud that my Government are moving forward on the equal right to request flexible working and the opportunity to have shared parental leave, tax-free childcare, and state-funded early education. I know the difference that having state-funded early education makes in enabling women to go back to work earlier, as they are more often the primary child carer. I have heard women say that they would like to be able to go back to work sooner and ask that that support therefore be provided earlier. It is incredibly important that we encourage men to take up the opportunity to have shared parental leave so that there is genuine equality in the workplace. Children need their father figures just as much as they need mothers in their lives.

I am getting an indication from the Speaker that I should move towards the conclusion of my comments, so I shall do so. We are rightly supporting women and girls to make choices that enable them to make the most of their potential. The Your Life campaign aims to increase the number of girls and young women taking up careers in science and technology. Beyond that, we need to encourage girls to study STEM subjects and to aim higher.

On the confidence gap, 69% of women executives surveyed expected to reach board level compared with 81% of men. There is a persistent gap in women’s confidence in their ability to succeed. Fabulous research is being done on centred leadership and what works for women. We should encourage companies and organisations to draw on that, and schools could also use it to ensure that girls are supported in taking the approach to their life that they need to take to be successful. Being a woman leader is different from being a male leader—we now understand that.

We all have a part to play in our constituencies and in our work with our colleagues to ensure that the improvement seen for the under-40s continues for people who are over 40. Pay is important, but let us recognise that this debate is broader than that and look at all the ways to improve opportunities and achievements for women.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Chair richly enjoyed the hon. Lady’s contribution, so I hope she will not take the slightly concerned look on my face as a criticism; I am just concerned that everybody should get in. It might be helpful if I say to the House that I have seven people on my list still seeking to contribute. I expect the Chair to call the Front-Bench speakers at approximately 20 minutes to 7, or certainly no later than that, so if people can think in terms of eight minutes each, then we should be fine. I call Steven Paterson.

5.33 pm

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is a great pleasure to be called to give my maiden speech in the House of Commons. I stand here as the Member of Parliament for the Stirling constituency, and I am privileged and humbled to be so. I am from the village of Cambusbarron; I was born and raised in the area.

I begin by following many of my colleagues in thanking the members of staff here in the House of Commons, who have helped us new Members to get to grips with

the bamboozling workings, traditions and conventions of this place. They have displayed remarkable patience and been a great help. The staff here are a credit to this place.

I next want to put on record my appreciation of my predecessor as MP—Anne McGuire. Anne was elected in 1997. In that election, she defeated, as part of the new Labour landslide, one Michael Forsyth MP, who was Secretary of State for Scotland at the time, so it was quite an achievement. Michael Forsyth had won two elections previously by a very narrow margin, so it was a win that Anne should be proud of. Anne held a number of ministerial positions under the Blair and Brown Governments, most notably as Minister for disabled people. I wish her well in the future.

Given the maiden speeches I have heard in recent weeks, I can only conclude that there are a great many beautiful constituencies in the country, especially in the country of Scotland. However, I contend that, for spectacular scenic beauty, the Stirling constituency takes some beating. It covers approximately 800 square miles and stretches from Tyndrum, Crianlarich and Killin in the highland north, and down the Loch Lomond side to Blanefield, Strathblane and Mugdock. East along the Carron valley and the Gargunnoch hills are the former mining villages of Plean, Cowie and Fallin and the historic city of Stirling, and back to the north-west are the old burghs of Bridge of Allan, Dunblane and Callander, with many other villages in between. There is incredible scenic beauty to be found in the constituency, including the majesty of Loch Lomond, the Trossachs, and the towering peaks of Ben Ledi and Ben More, and the Ochil hills.

The constituency also boasts excellence in education, including Stirling University—of which I am a graduate—and Forth Valley College. Tourism is a major industry. I used to work at the National Wallace monument and I will work hard to support that industry.

There is remarkable history to be found in the Stirling constituency. The geographic position of the town—it is now a city—at the lowest crossing point of the River Forth meant that, in historic times, Stirling was of vital strategic importance, and through the royal palace and fortress of Stirling castle it has had a long history of being the administrative capital of Scotland. If it becomes necessary for this House of Commons to up sticks and move, the Stirling constituency is more than capable of hosting it and being the capital once again.

Stirling was also the site of many important battles that turned the political tides of their day. The confrontation between the Picts and the Scots that led to the unifying of Scotland as one nation is reputed to have taken place where the university now stands. Wallace and Murray's famous victory at Stirling bridge, the civil war at Sauchieburn and the Jacobite clash at Sheriffmuir bear witness to Stirling's importance in Scotland's story.

The most famous, of course, is the battle of Bannockburn, where a force superior only in numbers was defeated by a skilful and determined force with superior tactics and better knowledge of the terrain. I know that many in this House are keen on parliamentary history, so I should say that, following that battle, Robert the Bruce convened a Parliament in my constituency, at Cambuskenneth Abbey. It was a fine example of a powerful and independent Scottish Parliament.

In more modern history, just a few years ago Stirling was remarkable for having a local council controlled by a formal coalition between Labour and the Tories. Alas, such an alliance is no surprise whatsoever to anyone in Scotland these days. It is a sad fact that the sleekit connivance between Labour and Tory that I witnessed routinely as a Stirling councillor is also too often shown here in Westminster when Scottish issues are being debated.

In preparing for this speech I looked at the maiden speeches of some of my predecessors as representatives of the Stirling area. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was MP for the Stirling Burghs from 1868 to 1908. His first recorded speech was in May 1873 during a debate about complaints received from military authorities about the then system for punishing drunkenness. Apparently, fines for drunkenness among soldiers had accrued an enormous sum of £60,000 and the authorities did not know what to do with it. It was originally supposed to reward the “sober and well-living soldier”, but apparently not enough of them could be found. The House appears to have deferred the decision on that occasion, although it is thought that the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the day wanted to get his hands on the money.

After 37 years as an MP for Stirling, Campbell-Bannerman became Prime Minister in 1905 and held the position for his last three years as a Member of this House. He is the only representative of Stirling to become Prime Minister—and so he will remain, because I have no desire whatsoever to serve either for 40 years or as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. In all seriousness, the people of Scotland returned 56 SNP MPs from a possible 59. They gave us a job of work to do and that is what we will do.

Turning to the subject of today's debate, I share the disappointment expressed by many Members that we have to debate the fact that there is a gender pay gap at all in this day and age, in 2015. The Scottish Government have led the way, as some of my hon. Friends have said, and I hope that, in summing up, the Minister will give an undertaking to look at what has been achieved in Scotland under its current powers and to see whether best practice can be found there. As hon. Members would expect, I fully support the devolution of further powers in this area as in many others, because the Scottish Government are making a difference in areas where they have powers.

Finally, it is my honour to be the MP for the Stirling constituency and to represent the people of that constituency, and I will do that to the best of my ability. I will, if I may, paraphrase Mr Speaker himself by saying that the voice of the Stirling constituency in this Parliament will be heard.

5.40 pm

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It is an enormous pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson), who has made an excellent maiden speech. I fully echo the tribute he paid to his predecessor, Dame Anne McGuire. Hers are big shoes to fill, as he knows, although I suspect that his shoes will not be the same type and will have a somewhat smaller heel.

[*Stephen Phillips*]

Before you took the Chair this afternoon, Madam Deputy Speaker, there was what can only be described as a form of daughter inflation, at least on the Government Benches, at the start of this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) appeared to be competing to establish who had the greater number of daughters. I declare at the outset that I have two daughters and one son, like my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), although I should perhaps make it clear to the House that they are not the same two daughters and one son.

Joking apart, there is of course a serious point: the issue of equal pay and the gender pay gap, which has rightly been brought before the House by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), affects all of us. It affects fathers of daughters, husbands and sons, and it also affects all of us as members of an equal civil society in which we want everyone to rise and use their abilities without regard to gender, disability or any other characteristic which is irrelevant to their ability to do a job for which they are fitted.

There is much good news and, rightly, there is a great deal of common ground across the House. The gender pay gap is now at the lowest level on record. As a result of changes in the law that have received support from across the House in the last few decades, no woman can any longer be paid less than a man for the same job, for that is rightly illegal. I must, however, say to the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), that that distinction has evidently eluded the drafters of the motion. The legal requirement for equal pay, which is well enforced, is very different from the gender pay gap. That gap arises as a result of any number of structural features from the moment of birth, and it is now the mission of society to tackle that gap.

It falls to us to tackle the subtle differences in pay between the genders—largely, it has to be said, for those over the age of 35—not the overt discrimination of yesteryear that, rightly, we have largely consigned to the history books. That battle has been won. Many factors affect women over the course of their school and working lives with which men simply do not have to deal, not least, as every male Member of the House ought to recognise, the gender imbalance in most families when it comes to children and childcare.

Some of that has been addressed, or at least it has begun to be addressed. For example, the gender pay gap used to have strong roots in educational attainment. The traditional boys' science subjects used to lead to more lucrative careers, while girls were steered into studying arts and the humanities, and thereafter worked in the less profitable roles into which they were too often pushed by careers staff focused on gender stereotypes. Even when I was growing up, boys did better at school, received degrees more valued by employers and saw that translated into more pay over their career lifetimes.

The dominance of boys at school and of young men at university is largely no longer apparent. An OECD report in March found that although boys' dominance just about endures in maths, it is no longer present in science subjects. As everyone who has both sons and

daughters knows anecdotally, girls are racing ahead in literacy. In all 64 countries and economies in the OECD study, girls outperformed boys at reading, with the mean gap equivalent to an extra year of schooling. Since literacy is of course the foundation of further learning, that gap means that teenage boys are 50% more likely than girls to fail to achieve basic proficiency in maths, reading or science. I hope that the House will have equal time to debate that subject, because if equality means anything, it must mean equality for both sexes.

Equally, girls' educational dominance now persists after school as well as at school. Until a few decades ago, there was a clear male majority at university almost everywhere in the world but, as higher education has boomed, women's enrolment has increased faster than men's. In the OECD, women now make up 56% of students enrolled at university, which is up from 46% in 1985. Women who go to university are more likely than their male peers to graduate and they typically get better grades.

Hon. Gentlemen on both sides of the House need to beware, for just as there are more women in this place, there are still not enough. It is clear that women are not only closing the gap, but doing so on merit and largely without any form of positive discrimination. To my mind, that is important. For the most part, we do not allow of positive discrimination in this country, despite what I understood the hon. Member for Ashfield to indicate in response to an intervention in her speech at the outset of the debate. That is important not only because all appointments should be based on merit, irrespective of gender, disability, race, sexual orientation, religion or any other protected characteristic, but because positive discrimination runs the risk of undermining the equality that we all strive to achieve. If appointments are made other than on merit, there exists the risk that those who are unsuccessful will point the finger, saying that so-and-so got their job only because of gender, race or whatever. To my mind, that is a dangerous and slippery slope that it is best to avoid.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman recognise that positive discrimination has existed in this country since the beginning of time immemorial—for white men?

Stephen Phillips: I acknowledge the hon. Lady's point to this extent: she is absolutely right that, throughout history at least until now, white men, of whom I am one, have had a much easier ride in life. Even to this day, with all the laws that we have designed to ensure equality, women in every single walk of life have a much harder time than any man ever does.

To return to the university story, many women continue to choose courses in so-called traditionally female subjects such as education, health, arts and the humanities, but in mathematics, women are drawing level, and in the life sciences, social sciences, business and law, they have moved ahead. That means that women are moving closer to equal pay when they start their working lives. However, we still see a gap, which widens to a chasm when women reach the point at which they want to have children. No end of studies have shown the impact of motherhood on women's pay, with hourly pay dropping relative to men's. Just a few years ago, the Institute for Public Policy Research estimated that a woman with

middling skills who has a baby at the age of 24 loses more than £500,000 in lifetime earnings compared with one who remains childless. That is simply unacceptable. It is far too often the case that women must see motherhood as a choice that will affect their entire careers—an irreversible move either to the mummy track or the career track.

Mothers' average hourly pay recovers slightly by the time their children leave home, and their employment rate increases steadily as their children grow older, but it never returns to the level it would have been had they not had children, much less to the same level as a man's. That is something of which all hon. Members should be aware, and something of which, as a society, we should be deeply ashamed.

Martin John Docherty: Given what the hon. and learned Gentleman says, does he recognise that, even in this Chamber, we perpetuate stereotypes of gender? Hon. Gentlemen are not allowed to bring a bag into the Chamber, and yet hon. Ladies are more than delighted to bring in a small handbag. That perpetuates stigma and gender stereotypes.

Stephen Phillips: As one of the few Members of the House who has a man bag, I will stage a protest with the hon. Gentleman. We will both bring in our bags and see whether we are upbraided by the Chair and receive some sort of censure for doing so.

There is much debate over whether women should be protected from the consequences of their reproductive choices, but improving things is good not just for the women concerned, but for the economy. We need more women in the workforce to pick up the demographic slack as our society ages, and more families rely solely on women's earnings to live these days. Low pay for women increases child poverty, it makes families more vulnerable to sudden shocks and it costs the taxpayer in benefits and other supports. Low rates of female employment also contribute to socioeconomic marginalisation among immigrant communities.

Social change has done more to encourage women to enter higher education and the workforce than any deliberate policy. The contraceptive pill and a decline in the average number of children, together with later marriage and childbearing, have made it easier for women to join the workforce. As more women went out to work, discrimination became less severe. Girls saw the point of studying once they were expected to have careers, and once they saw that careers in all sectors were open to them and that they had the same opportunities as their male colleagues. These days, girls nearly everywhere seem more ambitious than boys, both academically and in their careers.

Given the impact of motherhood on earnings, the Government can do a lot of good by supporting women in the workforce. I am pleased that they are doing just that. Flexible working, childcare provision, shared parental leave and better careers advice will all help women who want to have children and to be able to do so without such a huge impact on their careers. We now have the highest number of women in work and in self-employment on record, the highest ever employment rate for women and record numbers of women-led enterprises.

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Stephen Phillips: I am drawing to a conclusion and am conscious of the time.

I fully support the Government's actions, and any action that continues this trend. As the father of those two daughters, I want to be able to look them in the eye as they grow up and go to university. I want to be able to say to them not only that we ensured they would be paid the same amount for the same job that a man did, but that over the course of their lives they had every opportunity to earn the same amount of money as men do.

5.51 pm

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Before I speak to the motion, I would like to congratulate the hon. Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson) on his impressive first speech. He mentioned a skilful, determined force and superior tactics. I am sure he will be skilful and determined, but I hope that his party will not have too many superior tactics.

I speak today on behalf of the women in my constituency, who earn just 81p for every pound my male constituents earn. It is 45 years since the pioneering Equal Pay Act 1970 and women in Cardiff Central are still paid less than their male counterparts simply because of their gender. I have listened to the debate and I have to say that I do not accept the Secretary of State's assertion that the wording of the motion conflates equal pay and the gender pay gap. It is the lack of pay equality that leads directly to the gender pay gap itself.

Tackling unequal pay should be at the top of the Government's agenda, but looking at their record with the Liberal Democrats over the past five years I do not hold out much hope. Pay discrimination is still an everyday experience for women in Cardiff Central and across the UK. Employers who discriminate against women by paying them less know they can do so without condemnation, let alone any concrete action. Those employers' actions are unlawful, not illegal, but opportunities for remedying this are, as we have heard today many times, being reduced.

We know that despite the progressive intentions of those who pioneered equal pay legislation 45 years ago, the law has not achieved what it intended. With many colleagues from the Labour Benches past and present, I have championed the campaign for equal pay. During my law degree in the mid 1980s, I wrote a thesis on the equal pay legislation, analysing how, and in my view why, it had not succeeded at that time in delivering pay equality for women. After graduating, I practised as a solicitor in a UK-wide law firm that has represented tens of thousands of working women who have suffered pay discrimination. As a director of that law firm, I led equal pay auditing and pay transparency reporting. I can say that it is an easy thing to do. It beggars belief that only 300 companies have chosen to do the same.

Despite progressive intentions in the late 1960s, the law still does not deliver pay equality for women. The previous Labour Government delivered the Equality Act 2010, providing an opportunity for those on the Government Benches to implement pay transparency. However, the Conservative party has never prioritised pay transparency, never mind pay equality. The coalition Government had to be dragged kicking and screaming earlier this year, by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), to agree to implement a pay

[*Jo Stevens*]

transparency requirement for employers with more than 250 employees. At the same time, however, the Conservatives, along with their Liberal Democrat colleagues, ensured it was made even more difficult for women to fight equal pay claims by introducing prohibitive employment tribunal fees. As with much else that the Conservative party does—public spending cuts, welfare cuts, pension reform—it is always women who seem to bear the brunt. The figures on employment tribunal claims speak for themselves, with a 68% drop in claims being brought since fees were introduced.

For those women who can afford to bring tribunal claims and for those women who are trade union members and are lucky enough to have the backing of their trade unions, equal pay cases, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) so eloquently explained, take far too long to litigate because of the evidential burden. Cases take years rather than months, and they require a woman to prove that her job is of equal value to that of a male comparator. Even job evaluation experts, however, cannot and very often do not agree on that requirement, and the result is no change for women and no change in pay inequality. That is why we need the Government to support this motion. We urgently need reform of equal pay legislation, and we must have employment tribunal fees abolished.

It is clear that pay discrimination is institutionalised across the UK. The Government need to listen and to act, because even in circumstances where equal pay is achieved, it does not deal with the underlying issue of unfair pay. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield has said, the headline figure published by the Office for National Statistics is the full-time pay gap rather than the pay gap for full and part-time workers together. So, for example, in Wales, men hold nearly two thirds of all available full-time jobs and women hold 80% of the part-time jobs. Those part-time jobs are not only lower paid, but tend to be jobs that are under-valued compared to others. I am sure that Members across the House will agree that specific action to tackle institutionalised pay discrimination in this country is long overdue. By supporting this motion, the Government could demonstrate their commitment to action—rather than simply words.

5.56 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): In a feminist debate, I am going to say, Ms Deputy Speaker, that I congratulate all those who have made their maiden speeches, and I remind Members that when we say “maiden”, what we mean is someone who is inexperienced. So that is another example of sexist language that gets used.

I wonder whether Ms Deputy Speaker has read Caitlin Moran’s book, “How to be a Woman”. In it, she compels people to stand on their chairs and shout, “I am a feminist”. If the motion is carried today, perhaps the Speaker would allow us the indulgence of standing on these Green Benches altogether to shout those very words. If it passes throughout the House, we will have done something really feminist. I proudly say that I am a feminist and that a bit of feminist marauding would be a welcome relief from some of the groaning we normally get.

Taking the title of Ms Moran’s book, “How to be a Woman”, it seems that the answer before us today is very simple. It is to get paid less. In my constituency, for every pound a man earns, a woman earns 83p. This is not always because women are simply being paid less for the same job, although that is obviously a feature; it is because we simply value the work that women do less.

I went to university and I have two degrees. After leaving university, I had the misfortune of having two children—both sons, incidentally, so I cannot ring the daughter bell. I went back to work quite quickly, thanks to the tax credits I received, which enabled me to do that. For the first seven years of my career, I earned less than my husband. I am sure he will not mind me saying that I am not sure that he even has a GCSE. The work he did was what is considered to be man’s work—he is a lift engineer—and, after all, I was working only in a charity, helping victims of domestic and sexual violence. The value is there for all to see.

Like so many local authorities across the country, Birmingham has paid the price for the lack of equal pay in exceptionally costly—and, I am afraid to say, bankrupting—court settlements, with care workers, social workers, cleaners and dinner ladies paid less than bin men. After all, why should we value those who look after our elderly relatives and feed our children? However, Birmingham City Council is trying to settle that score, and the Labour council’s work around paying all staff a living wage and demanding that all contractors, including care contractors, do the same is a huge step forward in equalising some of the public and private sector pay in the city I love.

I commend any advance towards payment of a living wage, but I bet that if I were to look into what is paid to those working for the two large public sector contractors in the city I would find that there was still a stark disparity between the pay of the men who are highways engineers, ground staff members and building contractors, and the pay of the mainly female work force who are caring, nursing, cleaning and feeding.

Chris Stephens: I am sure that there is systemic discrimination, in that bonuses have been paid to those in supposedly male-dominated workplaces, but not to the “cleaning and caring” staff. Did central Government help Birmingham City Council to settle the claims?

Jess Phillips: To the best of my knowledge, the answer is no. I believe that the council is selling the family silver, including the National Exhibition Centre, to settle those claims. I will not criticise it for that. The council should have paid the women more in the first place.

The hon. Gentleman is right about overtime. The reason my husband earned so much more than me was that his overtime was paid, whereas mine was just part of my job.

To add insult to injury, the vast majority of unpaid work is done by us, the very much fairer sex. I sometimes fantasise about all the women in the country going on strike for just one day. They would stop doing everything that they do for free: caring for children, caring for grandchildren, and caring for relatives, friends and neighbours. Imagine the cost to social services if we withdrew our labour! Perhaps women’s jobs are paid so poorly because we forgot the bit of the business model that says, “You will devalue it if you give it away.” The

constant rhetoric about hard-working families seems to forget that the hardest work of all is that which pays nothing. I challenge anyone to stay at home permanently with a couple of kids, delivering meals, care and company to a dying mother, and then tell me that that is not hard work. I have lots of caring responsibilities, and I can assure Members that coming to this place, or going to any work, is like being on holiday.

Having worked for years with women who have been beaten and abused because of their gender, perhaps I am less keen than others to herald how far we have come. I know that a good, honest and decent society we can all be proud must value its women. There is a well-evidenced and reliable link between violence against women and their general standing in society. This debate is not just about money and pound signs; it is about value and worth.

We have a chance to do something good here today—to push companies and the country to place equal value on the work of half the population. We have a chance to show our mothers, wives, daughters and constituents that they matter and their rights matter. If we do that today, I will gladly stand on these Benches, or the chairs in the bar later, with any Member from any party, so that we can declare in unison that we are feminists.

Stephen Phillips: Are you buying?

Jess Phillips: I cannot afford to.

Should the motion not be passed, I shall know, like so many before me, that I should not have bothered to speak up, because, after all, “I’m just a girl.”

6.3 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): I congratulate all Members who have made their maiden speeches today. I shall be taking up some of the themes that have featured in the debate so far.

I am proud to be the first female Member of Parliament for Neath. I have only one daughter, but she is the apple of my eye. I have no sisters, but I have a wonderful brother who is definitely in touch with his feminine side, although he does not have a man bag—not to my knowledge, at least.

Let me begin by taking up the sporting theme. Before I came here, I was proud to be the only female national coach for Squash Wales. I introduced many women and girls to sport, whether they wanted to engage in it merely for recreational purposes or to fulfil their potential and go on to represent Wales, as I did many times.

It is 45 years since a Labour Government passed the Equal Pay Act in response to the proactive campaign of the women in Dagenham, yet, on average, women still earn just 81p for every pound earned by men. Progress to close that gap has slowed dramatically, with the rate falling from 2.4% between 2006 and 2010 to 0.7% during the coalition Government’s period in office.

One of the first acts of the coalition Government was to abolish the Women’s National Commission, which was established in 1979 by Harold Wilson and Barbara Castle. It was an equality body advising and informing the Government on issues facing women, such as the lack of women in key jobs. A renewed focus on those issues is needed now more than ever.

In my constituency women earn 86p for every pound earned by a man. That is slightly above the UK average, but in Neath the median weekly income for all workers, including men, is just £460, which is £20 lower than the rest of Wales, and £60 less than the UK median. The gender gap is less pronounced when the issue of equal pay is analysed through the prism of older industrial areas and the economic disparities faced by all the people of Neath.

The public sector, which has been severely hit by the Government’s austerity programme, is critical to women’s employment in Wales. It accounts for 40% of women’s employment, compared with 20% of men’s, and nearly two thirds of public sector employees are women. Here, the gap has increased from 9.5% to 11%.

The impact of the recession on work in Neath is stark. Wage rates for women in Wales are depressed compared with other regions, with women full-time employees in Wales’s public sector the second lowest paid in the UK, and in the private sector the lowest paid of all. In the service, retail and operative sectors, more than one in 20 jobs have been lost in just two years after the recession, with the total number of semi-skilled and unskilled jobs still less than in 2005. The recovery in these jobs is only coming in the shape of insecure, poorly paid employment.

The Bevan Foundation examined the issue in its report “Women, work and the recession in Wales”. It suggests that women in occupations at the bottom of the labour market have borne the brunt of job losses, with administrative and secretarial roles and process and plant operatives seeing significant decreases in numbers. The report also suggests that women are very much more likely to be employed part time than men—42% of women’s employment is part time, compared with just 12% of men’s employment in June 2012. Crucially, the average part-time hourly rate is a third less than it is for full-time work. Those registered as self-employed, which accounts for 30% of female jobs since 2010, similarly earn less—in fact, they earn less than half what self-employed men earn. Then there are the punitive zero-hour contracts, which should be abolished.

In Wales in 2009, only 55.7% of lone parents were in employment and 26.7% of all children were living in households of in-work poverty. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2014 there were 2 million lone parents with dependent children in the UK. Women accounted for 91% of lone parents with dependent children.

Women earning less in Wales, and in Neath, where the situation is exacerbated, has a direct effect on child poverty and children living in poor households. All that paints a grim picture for working women in our country. The broader effects on families and on children are clear. The United Nations predicts that at the current rate of progress it will take 70 years to achieve gender parity in Britain and to close the pay gap. It is of paramount importance that the annual equal pay check is implemented so that the information can be used to ensure that the gender pay gap is closed.

6.9 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I join others in congratulating the hon. Members for Stirling (Steven Paterson) and for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan), my hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark

[*Daniel Zeichner*]

(Neil Coyle), and the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) on their powerful initial contributions to the House. I also associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) on the use of language here. I also pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) because whenever I meet women's organisations in Cambridge I am struck by how quickly they tell me about the work done by them when they were in government and how they were such powerful champions for women. I suspect my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) is well on the way to being spoken of in similar terms.

As others have pointed out, this has been a long battle and it is a long way from being won, and, sadly, progress has slowed since 2010. I will try not to repeat the points others have made, but before I entered Parliament I was very proud to work for Unison, Britain's biggest public service union with over 1 million women members, many in low-paid public service jobs. Unsurprisingly, much of Unison's time was spent campaigning to tackle the unfair gender pay gap.

As has been pointed out, that is not easy because the causes are complex. It is worth recalling that a decade ago another inestimable champion of women's causes, Margaret Prosser, was asked by the then Government to look at these issues in detail. She concluded that it is "a many faceted and multidimensional issue. The pay gap is affected by issues such as outdated work practices; expectations and stereotypes that are ingrained in us from a young age; differences in working patterns because of women's role as 'carer'; and a lack of quality part-time work".

Sadly, in the decade since then these issues remain as real as ever, and the progress that was being made has slowed.

I am reminded of a book whose title has stuck with me over many years: "How working-class kids get working-class jobs." It is always useful for those of us with time management problems to have a book where the entire message is summed up in the title. I think that same cycle applies to women's jobs. The positive attempts to break that cycle have been undermined in recent years. For instance, the crisis in our careers service means that young women are again more likely to be directed down the traditional low-pay routes. There is a risk that the depressing funding cuts to many of our further education colleges will have the same effect.

Change comes when we make it happen, and Labour Governments have a proud record. We are particularly proud of the Equality Act which will forever be associated with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham. It is sad that the coalition Government chose not to implement some of the proposals, but I believe when they are finally implemented—I do believe they will be at some point—the impact will be far reaching.

In the meantime, the Government's belated conversion to the cause of tackling unequal pay is welcome, as is their stated intention to implement section 78 of the Equality Act, but it is vital that this is done in a way that reflects what actually happens in the workplace, and is not used to hide what is really happening. I am grateful

to former colleagues at Unison for bringing some of these points to my attention. For example, perhaps the Minister will be able to tell us whether bonus payments and overtime will be included. Men are typically far more likely to receive both. By not including them, comparisons will be seriously distorted and it will look as if pay in the workplace is more equal than it really is.

We also have to watch out for attempts to game the system. In the public sector, if a company wants to skew the results it will simply outsource the lower-paid, predominantly female part of the workforce so that their salaries are not included in the pay comparison figures.

Chris Stephens: I will call the hon. Gentleman my Unison comrade, if that is in order. Will he confirm that many public bodies now have legal advice which says that if they outsource they are no longer liable for equal pay claims?

Daniel Zeichner: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comradely intervention. I am afraid I am not expert enough to be able to give advice on that, but I am sure others will be able to.

On the matter of sanctions for companies that fail to comply and whether that should be a criminal or civil matter, whatever sanction is applied has to be meaningful, or else we will be stuck in the same position that we were in for many years, when local authorities refused to implement equality-proofed equal pay because it was cheaper for them just not to do so at the time. It is perhaps worth considering whether publishing the results should be done as part of the annual auditing process, for which sanctions for non-compliance are already in place. This would work in tandem with Labour's sensible proposals for an annual equal pay check to be carried out by the EHRC.

It is also worth pointing out that the EHRC has under this Government suffered drastic cuts to its funding and staffing with consequent effects on the level of service it can provide. It will need to be better resourced to take on the challenge of monitoring and supporting employers to do the right things. Other things could be done, including introducing mandatory pay audits for all employers, regardless of size. If we are serious about equal pay, that has to be the ultimate goal, and there must be a requirement to act on the audit. Failure to do so should, in itself, be an act of unlawful discrimination. Any protective award made in such circumstances should be proportionate to the scale of the problem and the number of women affected.

Let me finish by mentioning one sector that has suffered consistently from low pay for many years: local government. It is worth noting that, according to the Local Government Association, the gender pay gap in that sector has widened by 3% since 2010. Women's pay for full-time equivalent posts in 2010-11 was 83.2% that of men's whereas it is now 80.8%, so they are almost 20% worse off. It is worth pointing out that the local government workforce is 78% women and that 61% of jobs are part time, but more than 90% of those are done by women. Local government is undergoing constant reorganisation, with many people doing far more complex jobs. I fear that some councils are not undertaking the kind of job evaluation that should be going on, and there is a danger that after paying out some £2 billion in

equal pay settlements, councils are again becoming vulnerable to a new wave of equal pay claims. There has to be a better way of doing it.

There are clearly ways forward and clearly things that can be done. As ever, the question is: is there the political will to do it? Sadly, I have to say that the signs from the Government are not encouraging—but we live in hope.

6.16 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): First, I must congratulate those who made maiden speeches today: the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), my hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) and the hon. Members for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) and for Stirling (Steven Paterson). Their speeches were all passionate, personal and interesting.

Let me follow up on the point my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) made about local government pay. It is not just about the job evaluations; the requirement to undertake equality impact assessments has been removed. As a Unison member, I know it has long been an issue that local government has tended to shy away from, and the Government have now given councils licence to wriggle out of that requirement. That is disappointing, as are the empty Government Benches as we draw this important debate to a close.

Major progress was made on closing the gap between men's and women's pay under the last Labour Government. We have heard Government Members talk about the fact that the gender pay gap is at its lowest level ever, but the progress in tackling it over the past five years has slowed inordinately under this Government and the former coalition Government. That is incredibly disappointing. The progress has slowed, along with pay, across the board.

Looking to other countries, we know that much more can be done. This should not be up for debate, and I concur with the many colleagues who have shared that sentiment. We should not be here today, in 2015, having this debate about whether anything more should be done, because the answer is clear: yes, of course it should. The Equal Pay Act was passed 10 years before I was born, yet we are still here today arguing for parity between the sexes. That Act put into law the basic principle that we should all receive the same treatment on pay and employment conditions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) mentioned, it allows women to take their employer to a tribunal if a man doing similar work to her is being paid more, although now that is only possible if you can afford it, thanks to the barriers to accessing justice that the coalition saw fit to introduce. I remind everyone of the statistics: the number of equal pay claims has fallen by 68% but the number of claims going to tribunal has fallen by 79%, as my hon. Friend the Member for Finsbury—[*Interruption.*] I have entirely forgotten the name of her constituency, I am so sorry. [*Interruption.*] Yes, it was one of the London ones.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Melanie Onn: Absolutely, while I try to remember the name of the constituency.

Barbara Keeley: I wish to raise with my hon. Friend the point that was made in our debate on sport and the Olympic legacy last week: the gross inequality between men and women in relation to payment and sponsorship in sport. That is one of the worst areas. America has the wonderful Title IX legislation, which ensures equal funding if and when it comes from the public purse, which is another thing to bear in mind. Not only is this so unequal, but, worse still, it is unequal to people such as our football team that will play in Canada tonight.

Melanie Onn: I could not agree more. Low pay concerns me, particularly as it is in all areas. If those who are public facing, with whom people interact more, can demonstrate the necessity of closing the gender pay gap, it will become a more prioritised issue among the general public.

I can now confirm that I was referring to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry). I thank my colleagues for reminding me. It is quite embarrassing to have such a public brain fade.

Jess Phillips: You are only a woman!

Melanie Onn: Yes, how can I be expected to remember such complicated information?

I was just reflecting on accessing justice, and the difficulties faced by people from across the board. This is about not just women finding it difficult to access justice through the employment tribunal system, but those who are suffering from any kind of discrimination, particularly that relating to their pay. The Equal Pay Act was a milestone in the fight for equal pay, but, clearly, the Act in itself is not sufficient to close that gap altogether, especially in today's world of casual employment, of people working multiple jobs and of increasing levels of self-employment. I am incredibly proud that the previous Labour Government made equal pay a priority and closed the pay gap by one third during their time in office. I say again that, over the past five years, we have seen almost no progress on this issue. In their manifesto, the Conservatives made no mention of putting in place any measures to try to tackle the pay gap, even though they have accepted that it exists. Today is about Labour challenging the Government on this important issue and trying to get them to change their mind.

We have heard quite a lot today with regard to how much women earn. In my constituency of Grimsby, women earn just 77p for every £1 brought home by men. I heard today that the figure in Coventry is as low as 60p. That is a significant difference. If we do not think that that affects the home lives of the children in our country, we are deluding ourselves.

Why is this such a significant problem in my constituency compared with some other areas in the country? As I noted earlier, there has been a surge of low pay and insecure work in this country over the past few years, and that has particularly been the case in my constituency. I know, from speaking to my constituents, that it tends to be women who have to work two or three different jobs, often on casual or zero-hours contracts, because they receive such low pay. Since 2010, one in three women's jobs has come from women registering as self-employed. That is a problem that, again, the Equal Pay Act cannot address. On average, self-employed

[*Melanie Onn*]

women earn less than half the money earned by self-employed men. Women are far more likely to be in jobs that pay less than the living wage. We heard my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) talking at length and most passionately about the fact that the labour undertaken by women is given such scant value by our society.

Chris Stephens: The hon. Lady has made a number of excellent points, but another factor in decreasing wages has been the substantial reduction in collective bargaining in the UK since 1979. In Scotland, for example, 81% of workers' pay was decided by collective bargaining in 1979, whereas that figure is now 23%.

Melanie Onn: I agree absolutely. We have seen the demise of collective bargaining in many different areas and employers are now moving further away from those agreements.

Previously, for example, the Labour Government had agreed a national arrangement for teaching assistants, but the coalition decided not to continue with the national pay negotiating body. Teaching assistants are, obviously, largely women, largely part time and largely low paid, and on term-time-only contracts. I know from my constituency and from people I have represented as an official of Unison that some earn as little as £5,000 or £7,000 a year, working in our schools and supporting our children when they most need additional support. That problem is being exacerbated by the move away from collective bargaining and those people are more prone to being exploited and having their wages squeezed.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making some powerful points in a strong speech. She has mentioned the living wage and many local authorities are trying to elevate the circumstances for low-paid workers, particularly the women workers about whom we have heard, by becoming living wage councils. Surely that is a step forward that all councils should look to take.

Melanie Onn: I shall come to that point shortly.

If I can just make some progress—I have been dying to say that—to tackle unequal pay, it is imperative that we tackle the low-skill, low-wage economy that is particularly detrimental to women. Much of the success of the previous Labour Government was down to the introduction of the minimum wage. With 27% of women earning less than the living wage, the Government must do more to raise wages. If they will not do that by raising the minimum wage, they must commit actively to support SME businesses to pay the living wage and legislate for FTSE 100 companies to do the same. The forthcoming cuts to tax credits will only make the problem of low pay worse. If the Government want tax credits to be replaced by higher wages, they need to be active in making that happen and should not simply cut, and cross their fingers.

I completely concur with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) about living wage councils. I have been active in securing living wage agreements in four different local authorities. That needs to be championed across the board and we

must ensure that when those councils make arrangements for any contractors to undertake services on their behalf those companies should also be living wage employers.

The Government need to accept that many zero-hours contracts are exploitative and that people cannot properly manage their household budget if they do not know what they will be earning from one week to the next. The change to exclusivity clauses is welcome, but it ignores the wider problem. Something needs to be done to make the lives of people in insecure work more manageable. I will always believe that when a job exists, a proper contract of employment should be provided. The Conservative Government claim to be on the side of working people, yet when they are presented with an opportunity such as this genuinely to improve people's working lives, they squirm about like a worm at the end of a line.

It is simply not good enough. People need change and they need it now. Take the Government's commitment to 30 hours of free childcare for working parents. First, I am pleased to see that they have adopted another of the previous Labour Government's pledges to support working families. In the race to win votes ahead of the general election, they made a commitment they cannot afford. It is massively underfunded. It costs on average £4.53 an hour to provide the care, but the Government are offering only £3.88 an hour. Perhaps the Minister can tell us where the rest of the money is coming from. If it comes at the expense of child tax credit or working families tax credit, the Government are merely giving with one hand but taking away with the other.

I want to finish by saying that I recently met representatives of a local charity in my constituency called Care, which provides emergency food aid in Grimsby, and they told me that the number of meals that they provide to children has increased by 27% this year alone. Unfair wages for women is a problem of basic fairness, but the fact that working women are being pushed into poverty and insecurity to the extent that they can no longer afford to feed their children is a crisis that surely demands urgent action.

6.30 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): First, I welcome the new Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice, the hon. Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage) to her place and look forward to hearing from her shortly.

It has been an excellent debate today and we have heard many thoughtful and passionate contributions, on which I will reflect shortly, but I begin by paying tribute to all those in the House and in our country more broadly who have fought for gender justice, equality and equal pay. I refer to the former Member for Blackburn, Barbara Castle, whom I was privileged to meet a number of times—in fact, I wrote my first political letter to her when I was eight or nine years old—and to those who have campaigned in recent years on pay transparency, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra), and many others.

We have heard some shocking statistics today that show us just how far we have to go 45 years after the Equal Pay Act: the 81p on average that women earn for

every male £1, the disparity in the proportion of women who study the law yet do not end up as judges and the 68% fall in the number of equal pay claims since the introduction of the new tribunal fees. Given that we are the start of Wimbledon, which has had its own equal pay concerns over many years, and the fantastic football match that we are all expecting this evening—I wish my very best to the women's England football team—we have heard from many hon. Members about the disparity in sport. We heard a number of such contributions just a few moments ago. It is a sad fact, as a recent BBC study showed, that men get more prize money than women in 30% of sports—the disparity could not be shown more starkly.

I want to turn to some of the excellent speeches that we have heard today, including a number of excellent maiden speeches. First, the SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), was clearly passionate about and committed to these issues. There seemed to be a dispute about the statistics on Scotland. They are from the Office for National Statistics and show that the gender pay gap in Scotland has grown from 17.2% in 2011 to 17.4% to 2014. We all need to do a lot better, whatever part of the United Kingdom we are from, and we all need to take a good look at ourselves given that we have so much progress to make 45 years on from the Equal Pay Act.

The right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), who is not in her place but is the new Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, spoke of the irony of girls outperforming boys for many years and said that, effectively, we were selling the country short, as she put it, by not using their talents, and I could not agree more.

We heard a very passionate speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham, who introduced a ten-minute rule Bill on the gender pay gap last year. She quite rightly asked why companies are scared to make pay information more readily available. That is the question we all ought to ask. She powerfully said that equality is not a women's issue; it is an issue for society and we must do much better.

The hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) made an excellent maiden speech, which I found particularly interesting as my family is historically linked to her constituency. She was the first of three hon. Members who spoke today who are the first female Members of Parliament for their constituencies. She spoke powerfully about Magna Carta's link to her constituency. I was proud to join her recently on the armed forces parliamentary scheme—another area of our society where the progress of women has been slower than we would have liked. Progress is now being made, and it will be great to work with her on that scheme in the months ahead.

We had another maiden speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle), who spoke about the position of women in his constituency, particularly the justice for cleaners campaign, and the fight against inequality in his career and his family experience before coming to this place. Like him, I am only the third MP from my constituency since world war two to have made a maiden speech. I look forward to going to Borough market again shortly; I very much like the coffee there, as well as the many other delights that are on offer.

We heard an excellent speech from the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), who spoke about his three daughters, but also, powerfully, from his legal experience—the challenges for women in the legal profession. The tone of the debate has been that we need to unite as a House around the issue and perhaps not look for some of the semantic differences, which I shall come to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston, who is an experienced advocate on these issues, proudly spoke about our party's record and the pressure we applied during consideration of the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill—I was a member of the Committee—on the issue of transparency. She also spoke powerfully about the perception of jobs and gender stereotypes, on which a number of hon. Members touched.

The hon. Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway), who is also the first female MP for that constituency, spoke authoritatively, and my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) spoke powerfully about the potential need for a new Act. She said that the 1970 Act simply has not stood the test of time and that we cannot have reactive legislation, especially in the context of fees and the changes in tribunal law. That needs to be considered holistically: as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) said, we cannot deny people access to justice on this crucial issue through the imposition of those fees. She also powerfully said that women might have left the kitchen, but many have not gone very far. That is a stark reminder to us all.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) spoke about the four strong women who now represent constituencies around Portsmouth harbour. She spoke passionately about the prospects of women in her constituency and, like the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds, has joined the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I know she will do her best to speak up for the role of women in the armed forces.

The hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) made an excellent maiden speech. Clearly, he is incredibly passionate about the people and the industrial history of his constituency. There are many links between my constituency and the Clyde's industries, and I share the inspiration he has taken from the Apollo programme.

The hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) spoke strongly from her experience as a woman in business. Again, she is the first female Member of Parliament for her constituency. That is a significant reflection of how things are starting to change in this Chamber, although, as we have all said, that has not gone far enough.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) essentially asked us the question, "How long do we have to wait?" We have had 45 years since the Equal Pay Act, so how long will it be before we close the gender pay gap? The hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) asked the good question, "Is there a different dynamic in the debate today?" That is an important point to raise, and one that I note.

It is also important that men have spoken up in the debate. I am proud to be speaking today. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham said, this is not a women's issue; it is an issue for all society and all Members of the House.

[Stephen Doughty]

The hon. Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson) made an excellent maiden speech and spoke warmly of his illustrious predecessors, whether it was Campbell-Bannerman or my former friend in this place, Anne McGuire, who did such an incredible job championing the cause of equality for disabled people. The hon. Gentleman also spoke passionately about his history and the history of his constituency.

We heard a strong speech, which perhaps struck a more discordant tone, from the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips), but he took it in his stride. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) followed up with an excellent speech, made from her experience as a director of a major company, in which she highlighted the situation of part-time workers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) spoke honestly about her own marital pay gap and, importantly, about the recent history of the gender pay gap in Birmingham. She challenged us all, quite rightly, about our commitment to feminism and standing up for equalities in this place. I will certainly join her later and declare that I am a feminist, whether in this place or in the bar.

We also heard powerful speeches from my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees), who was an advocate for women in sport before coming to this place, and my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), who spoke about the widening gender pay gap in local government since 2010. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) rightly highlighted the fact that progress is slowing down, which should ring alarm bells with us all and which is disappointing, given the progress we have seen in recent years.

I do not disagree with the Secretary of State that the causes of the gender pay gap are complex. That is all the more reason why we need the comprehensive report that we call for in the motion to identify the key trends and what we might do about them, particularly as the welcome progress that was made has slowed. Given the common ground and the support that has been expressed on all sides for the principles of the motion, I implore the right hon. Lady not to let semantics get in the way of allowing the motion to pass. She commented on the technicality of the use of the term “equal pay” in the motion and in the law, as opposed to the term “gender pay gap”, but I gently remind her that she has used the terms interchangeably herself, most recently in an article in *The Guardian* in November last year, when she stressed the importance of equal pay day which, as we all know, is the day in the year when women start working for free compared with men—a shocking indictment.

Although the terms may be used interchangeably in the motion, they expose the same injustice to women across the country which, for many and diverse reasons, still blights our economy and society. The facts are clear. It is 45 years since the Equal Pay Act, yet women still earn on average 81p for every pound earned by men. The average woman will lose more than £200,000 in the course of her working life as a result of the gender pay gap. Women’s wages fell by around £30 a year last year before inflation. The pay gap exists not only in low-wage jobs—we heard much about that

today—but across the board, especially at higher levels of management. We have seen a shocking fall in the number of equal pay claims.

The gender pay gap is not only morally wrong and an affront to our sense of equality in this House and in the country, but bad for our economy. If women were paid the same as men across the board, our GDP, on one projection, would be up by 13%. There is also an impact on parents and families. The unequal pay challenge means that parental leave will always be seen as primarily for women, even when men want to be with their children, because of the cost of raising children, even with a partner. We need to recognise the moral and economic costs and the costs for families.

I cannot participate in the daughters race as I do not have any daughters, but I have three goddaughters and I want them to have the same opportunities and chances in life as my godsons. As a man I am honoured to wind up the debate today. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham said, this is an issue for all of us, so we need to get on and deal with it. Let us have the transparency, assess the data properly, remove the barriers to justice from tribunal fees, take action on childcare, education, elderly care, low wages and representation in board rooms, and let us get equal. I commend the motion to the House.

6.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage):

It is a great pleasure to take part in the debate. I start by thanking the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) for securing this important debate on equal pay and the gender pay gap. It has been a fantastic debate and we have had some excellent contributions from across the House and some outstanding maiden speeches. I have listened with great interest to all the points that were made. I thank the hon. Member for Ashfield and the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) for their kind words of welcome.

We all know that equal pay and the gender pay gap are entirely different but equally important. Discrimination is, sadly, just one of a number of factors behind the gender pay gap. Even if there was never a single incident in which a woman was paid less than a man for the same job, there would still be a gender pay gap. That is why this debate is so important, as it gives me the chance to remind the House how much progress we have made, and how this Government strive to continue to tackle all the causes of disparity between what men and women earn.

Hon. Members asked lots of questions in the debate today and made many specific points. The hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) said that she regretted that a debate on this subject was needed in this day and age—a sentiment we all share across the House.

I am proud that my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), who will be the first Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, was able to speak today. She speaks with great power and authority on these matters. She said that every woman has the right to a job that does not marginalise them because of their gender or penalise them because they have caring responsibilities, which I think we can all unite behind. She also mentioned the importance of flexible skilled

working and asked about the progress on collecting data. The recent extension of the right to request flexible working means that more than 20 million employees will now have that right. We know that total requests just before the extension were running at about 182,000 a year, with about 144,000 agreed to. We will of course be monitoring the post-extension data.

The hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), who has long been a great champion of this important issue, spoke about the importance of tackling the pay gap nationally and internationally. She also talked about the devastating impact that violence against women and girls can have, both at home and overseas, on their ability to reach their full potential, both in the workplace and in the rest of their lives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) made a fantastic maiden speech, taking us on a sumptuous and spellbinding tour of the places and people of her constituency. Her remarkable life and business experience made quite an impression and, I think, will make her not only an excellent champion for her corner of Suffolk, but a first-class addition to the House.

The hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) spoke generously about his predecessor, who incidentally is also my predecessor in the Ministry of Justice. He spoke with enormous knowledge about his constituency and made all our mouths water as he talked about the delights of Borough market and the plethora of breweries and gin distilleries in his patch. Indeed, he might need his predecessor's taxi to get us all home.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) spoke with experience about the economic benefits of flexible working and highlighted the importance of data collection, echoing what many business people have said: what gets measured gets managed, and what gets published gets managed even better.

The hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) rightly pointed out that we need to tackle the jobs that are deemed to be either men's jobs or women's jobs. We need to get rid of that myth from our everyday parlance and everyday thinking. Unfortunately, she also felt the need, along with the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), to criticise the coalition Government for being slow to move away from a voluntary reporting system. She should remember that, contrary to what has been said, the previous Labour Government had no plans to move forward with section 78 of the Equality Act 2010; they proposed three years of voluntary compliance first, although I completely understand why the Labour party might want to erase parts of its more recent political history.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway) represents one of the 20 or so seats where there is actually a positive gender pay gap. We should certainly be hotfooting it to the streets of Derby to find out how they are making such magnificent progress.

The hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), who is no longer here—[*Interruption.*] Oh, she is here but has moved, just to try to fool me on my first day out of the blocks. I welcome her contribution. She always speaks with enormous knowledge and conviction on this subject. She led a Westminster Hall debate in March in which she called for a new equal pay Act, and now she is proposing a new equality Act. We

expect shortly to publish a post-legislative scrutiny memorandum on the 2010 Act as a Command Paper, and we now have the Women and Equalities Committee to receive it. It strikes me that the Committee, ably chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke, might wish to consider the important issues that the hon. Lady raised in relation to the need for a new Act.

It was particularly great to hear from my hon. Friend and neighbour, the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), who rightly pointed out the importance of encouraging girls to fill the skilled engineering and defence jobs that our neck of the woods, with such a proud Navy heritage, always demands. She makes it 100% female representation for the Portsmouth harbour area, and that is to be celebrated.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) on an educational and enlightening maiden speech that brought his constituency to life as the birthplace of James Watt, with a remarkable geography, and highlighted his long history of winning elections for the SNP.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) spoke about the success of women in SMEs, not least in her constituency, which has an award-winning bull semen business—the mind boggles. That reminds me that if women were starting businesses at the same rate as men, we would have 1 million more small businesses in this country. My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) highlighted the importance of the role of men in addressing this issue and how powerful they can be as agents of change.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson) made an excellent maiden speech giving a brief summary of his area's history and making an early pitch for Stirling castle as an alternative location should we ever have to leave this building; I hope everybody has noted that.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) spoke with his trademark eloquence about girls' educational dominance and rightly urged us not to forget their male peers who sometimes get left behind. He highlighted the impact of motherhood on women's ability to fulfil their career ambitions and abilities.

The hon. Members for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and for Neath (Christina Rees) made a series of powerful, passionate and engaging speeches that underlined the importance of tackling this issue for a whole host of reasons. I note carefully what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley said about the travails of Birmingham City Council in the face of equal pay claims, although I find it hard to square that evidence with the statements made by others in her party that equal pay law is ineffective and should be replaced.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) spoke about the local government pay gap, as did the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn). The Government do not seek to set pay rates for local government, as all local authorities are covered by the public sector equality duty, which requires them to have due regard to equality considerations in carrying out their functions, including decisions about their own workplaces. The hon. Member for Cambridge asked

[*Caroline Dinenage*]

whether bonuses will be covered in the regulations. The great thing about the consultation is that it will explore exactly what should be published, how it should be published, and what more can be done to tackle this issue.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby asked how we will fund 30 hours of free childcare. We will talk to the childcare sector and conduct a review of funding for this entitlement. We must strike the right balance between being fair to providers and delivering value for money for the taxpayer. I would gently say to her that as a mother of two children that I put through childcare under the previous Government, when it was the most expensive in Europe, anything we can do to improve opportunities for parents in this regard is very important.

The good news is that there are more women in work than ever before, and we have one of the highest women's employment rates in the EU, with 14.5 million women employed, 8.3 million of whom are working full time. It is encouraging to see that there are now no all-male FTSE 100 boards. We have strongly promoted and championed the work of the Women's Business Council and implemented Lord Davies's review of women on boards. As a result, women now make up 23% of FTSE 100 boards and 34% of managing directors and senior officials. Let us not forget that 20% of SMEs are now majority led by women—that is nearly 1 million small businesses.

Too many women have told us that they were unable to develop their careers due to lack of affordable childcare and limited flexibility in balancing work and family responsibilities. We have taken action to ensure that the workplace meets women's needs and to give them a fair chance to get to the top by extending to all the right to request flexible working, introducing shared parental leave, and extending free childcare to 30 hours a week for working families with three and four-year-olds, with a tax-free childcare scheme that will save a working family up to £2,000 per child.

We need to break down the barriers that say that one sort of job is more suitable for women and another for men. That needs to start with our young people, which is why we are broadening the career aspirations for girls and young women by encouraging them to consider careers in science, technology, engineering and maths through the "Your Life" campaign.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the great ladies from the Ford Motor Company in Dagenham—the spiritual home of the fight for equal pay—and I was there last week, seeing how they are inspiring the next generation of female engineers. Opening up those highly skilled and better paid careers ensures that women are less concentrated in sectors that offer narrower scope for reward and career progression.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke has said, we need to make sure that older women are supported to reach their full potential. We have built on the success of the older workers champion by rolling out a regional scheme across the country. We have also started a project with a £1.6 million pot, exploring how carers can be supported to remain in employment if they wish by using flexible working arrangements and improving technological access to information and resources.

Under this Government, the gender pay gap is the narrowest it has ever been, but at 19.1% we still have work to do. All parties agreed in the last Parliament that the way forward was to introduce section 78 of the Equality Act 2010, requiring mandatory pay reporting by employers with at least 250 employees. Our manifesto underlined our commitment to that. We are serious about reducing the gender pay gap further, and because we understand business we want to bring business with us as we do so. We are delivering that as a priority. In line with our commitments from the last Parliament, we will shortly launch a public consultation on gender pay reporting and introduce regulations in due course.

The Opposition's motion mentions the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Low Pay Commission. Of course, we are already working closely with the EHRC on equal pay, and there is nothing to stop it, as an independent body, analysing pay gap information in any way it likes. The EHRC is already under a duty to monitor the effectiveness of the equality enactments, which include regulations made under section 78, and to give advice and recommendations to the Government about them. Therefore, the EHRC will already be under a duty to monitor the effectiveness of section 78. Given that the EHRC will already be under such a duty, and given that the only way it could be mandated would be by Parliament changing the Equality Act 2006, which sets out its functions and remits, the Opposition's motion seems a little muddled. Where there is evidence of actual pay discrimination, we introduced legislation requiring employment tribunals to order the employer to complete an equal pay audit.

Stephen Doughty: Will the Minister give way?

Caroline Dinenage: I have very little time left, so I am going to try to get to the end of my speech, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind. [*Interruption.*] If the hon. Gentleman will give me time, I will offer a full explanation.

In conclusion, this Government are already strongly building on the record of the coalition, both in tackling the gender pay gap and, more widely, in promoting policies that will ensure that women can play their full part in our economic growth. I am proud to be a member of this Government—we are taking forward that work—and delighted to have this opportunity so early in the new Parliament to present our record to the House. However, we should never be complacent about equal pay and addressing the gender pay gap.

Sadly, although I share so much of the sentiment of the motion, all of its suggestions, apart from a formal laying of the annual document before Parliament, could already be done by the EHRC without any change to legislation or any instruction by Government, which we could not in any case give to an independent body. I therefore call upon the House to reject the motion as a muddled and unnecessary add-on to what this Government are already committed to taking very seriously.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 261, Noes 312.

Division No. 37]

[6.58 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Alexander, Heidi

Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Anderson, Mr David

Arkless, Richard
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Ms Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Cox, Jo
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Mr David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Docherty, Martin John
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
 Donaldson, Stuart
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Maria
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Esterson, Bill

Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harpham, Harry
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Kyle, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan

Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mullin, Roger
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paisley, Ian
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Robertson, Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Ryan, rh Joan

Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughtera, Andy
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmar, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jessica Morden and
Phil Wilson

NOES

Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Mr Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul

Berry, Jake	Frazer, Lucy	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Pow, Rebecca
Berry, James	Freeman, George	Knight, Julian	Prentis, Victoria
Bingham, Andrew	Freer, Mike	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Prisk, Mr Mark
Blackman, Bob	Fuller, Richard	Lancaster, Mark	Pritchard, Mark
Blackwood, Nicola	Fysh, Marcus	Latham, Pauline	Pursglove, Tom
Boles, Nick	Gale, Sir Roger	Leadsom, Andrea	Quin, Jeremy
Bone, Mr Peter	Garnier, rh Sir Edward	Lee, Dr Phillip	Quince, Will
Borwick, Victoria	Garnier, Mark	Lefroy, Jeremy	Raab, Mr Dominic
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Gauke, Mr David	Leigh, Sir Edward	Redwood, rh John
Bradley, Karen	Ghani, Nusrat	Leslie, Charlotte	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Brady, Mr Graham	Gibb, Mr Nick	Letwin, rh Mr Oliver	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Brazier, Mr Julian	Glen, John	Lewis, Brandon	Robinson, Mary
Bridgen, Andrew	Goldsmith, Zac	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Rosindell, Andrew
Brine, Steve	Goodwill, Mr Robert	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Rudd, rh Amber
Brokenshire, rh James	Gove, rh Michael	Lidington, rh Mr David	Rutley, David
Bruce, Fiona	Graham, Richard	Lilley, rh Mr Peter	Sandbach, Antoinette
Buckland, Robert	Grant, Mrs Helen	Lopresti, Jack	Scully, Paul
Burns, Conor	Gray, Mr James	Lopresti, Jack	Selous, Andrew
Burns, rh Sir Simon	Grayling, rh Chris	Lord, Jonathan	Shapps, rh Grant
Burrowes, Mr David	Green, Chris	Loughton, Tim	Sharma, Alok
Burt, rh Alistair	Green, rh Damian	Lumley, Karen	Shelbrooke, Alec
Cameron, rh Mr David	Greening, rh Justine	Mackinlay, Craig	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Carmichael, Neil	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Mackintosh, David	Skidmore, Chris
Cartledge, James	Griffiths, Andrew	Main, Mrs Anne	Smith, Chloe
Cash, Sir William	Gummer, Ben	Mak, Alan	Smith, Henry
Caulfield, Maria	Gyimah, Mr Sam	Malthouse, Kit	Smith, Julian
Chalk, Alex	Halfon, rh Robert	Mann, Scott	Smith, Royston
Chishti, Rehman	Hall, Luke	Mathias, Dr Tania	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Chope, Mr Christopher	Hammond, rh Mr Philip	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Solloway, Amanda
Churchill, Jo	Hammond, Stephen	Maynard, Paul	Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Hancock, rh Matthew	McCartney, Jason	Spencer, Mark
Cleverly, James	Harper, rh Mr Mark	McCartney, Karl	Stephenson, Andrew
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey	Harrington, Richard	McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick	Stevenson, John
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Harris, Rebecca	McPartland, Stephen	Stewart, Bob
Collins, Damian	Hart, Simon	Menzies, Mark	Stewart, Iain
Colvile, Oliver	Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan	Mercer, Johnny	Stewart, Rory
Costa, Alberto	Hayes, rh Mr John	Merriman, Huw	Streeter, Mr Gary
Cox, Mr Geoffrey	Heald, Sir Oliver	Metcalfe, Stephen	Stride, Mel
Crabb, rh Stephen	Heapey, James	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Stuart, Graham
Davies, Byron	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Milling, Amanda	Sturdy, Julian
Davies, Chris	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Mills, Nigel	Sunak, Rishi
Davies, David T. C.	Henderson, Gordon	Milton, rh Anne	Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Davies, Glyn	Herbert, rh Nick	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Davies, James	Hinds, Damian	Mordaunt, Penny	Syms, Mr Robert
Davies, Mims	Hoare, Simon	Morgan, rh Nicky	Thomas, Derek
Davies, Philip	Hollingbery, George	Morris, Anne Marie	Throup, Maggie
Davis, rh Mr David	Hollinrake, Kevin	Morris, David	Timpson, Edward
Dinenage, Caroline	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Morris, James	Tolhurst, Kelly
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Holloway, Mr Adam	Morton, Wendy	Tomlinson, Justin
Donelan, Michelle	Hopkins, Kris	Mowat, David	Tomlinson, Michael
Dorries, Nadine	Howarth, Sir Gerald	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Tracey, Craig
Double, Steve	Howell, John	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Tredinnick, David
Dowden, Oliver	Howlett, Ben	Neill, Robert	Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Drax, Richard	Huddleston, Nigel	Newton, Sarah	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Nokes, Caroline	Tugendhat, Tom
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Hurd, Mr Nick	Norman, Jesse	Turner, Mr Andrew
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Jackson, Mr Stewart	Nuttall, Mr David	Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Dunne, Mr Philip	James, Margot	Offord, Dr Matthew	Vaizey, Mr Edward
Ellis, Michael	Javid, rh Sajid	Parish, Neil	Vickers, Martin
Ellison, Jane	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Patel, rh Priti	Walker, Mr Charles
Elphicke, Charlie	Jenkin, Mr Bernard	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Walker, Mr Robin
Eustice, George	Jenkyns, Andrea	Pawsey, Mark	Warburton, David
Evans, Graham	Jenrick, Robert	Penning, rh Mike	Warman, Matt
Evans, Mr Nigel	Johnson, Boris	Penrose, John	Watkinson, Dame Angela
Evennett, rh Mr David	Johnson, Gareth	Percy, Andrew	Wharton, James
Fabricant, Michael	Johnson, Joseph	Perry, Claire	Whately, Helen
Fallon, rh Michael	Jones, Andrew	Phillips, Stephen	Wheeler, Heather
Fernandes, Suella	Jones, rh Mr David	Philp, Chris	White, Chris
Fox, rh Dr Liam	Jones, Mr Marcus	Pickles, rh Sir Eric	Whittaker, Craig
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Kawczynski, Daniel	Pincher, Christopher	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
	Kennedy, Seema	Poulter, Dr Daniel	Wiggin, Bill
	Kirby, Simon		Williams, Craig

Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William

Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Guy Opperman and
Jackie Doyle-Price

Question accordingly negatived.

Business without Debate

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That:

(1) the matter of the Legislative Programme as outlined in the Queen's Speech and the Budget Statement as it relates to Wales be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration;

(2) the Committee shall meet at Westminster on Wednesday 15 July at 9.30am and 2.00pm to consider the matter referred to it under paragraph (1) above; and

(3) the Chair shall interrupt proceedings at the afternoon session not later than two hours after their commencement at that sitting.—(*Kris Hopkins.*)

Sub-Saharan Africa (Corruption and the Economy)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Kris Hopkins.*)

7.12 pm

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Let us begin our journey in almost any country—certainly far too many countries—on the world's poorest continent, a continent bordering Europe: that of Africa. We sit in the office of the procurement manager of a Government Department—it matters not which one, for they are all much the same. Outside, not 100 feet away, a mother sits in the stifling heat with her children engaged in whatever business she has, selling mangoes, or coconuts, or smoked fish to passers-by perhaps. She survives and provides for her family on an income of less than a dollar a day. There is no father, for he passed away some time ago from a virus with which many in the developed world live full and long lives. Whether the mother has HIV, whether she will survive to see her sons grow to manhood, neither she nor we know. But our world, and even the world of our procurement manager, is a world wholly unknown to her experience.

In the office in which we sit, the procurement manager, who is tasked with spending donor funds from the developed world, is negotiating a contract for the supply of expensive photocopiers to the Department in which the brother who appointed him is the Minister. His salary is a few thousand dollars a year, a fortune to the vast majority of the citizens he is supposed to serve. Any yet below the cuff of his crisp white shirt, we find the essential element of the uniform of the Government procurement manager in any sub-Saharan African country: the gold, diamond-encrusted Rolex, yours for only \$40,000 at any good airport en route to the nation in which we find ourselves. How on earth was it paid for? Was it perhaps a gift? No. It was paid for by the official himself from cash given to him, which secured another lucrative Government contract for another supplier—funds paid not to the Government, but to the official himself. It is, we are told, something we must accept; it is the way things are. But it is the way things have been for far, far too long.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, if you want to do business, you must pay to oil the wheels. You must pay if you want to avoid the consequences of laws designed to protect the most vulnerable from the exploitation of the natural resources that lie adjacent to homes. You must pay if you want to drive unmolested past makeshift roadblocks manned by real police officers employed by the state. You must pay for almost any interaction with the officials of the state. For if you do not, you will find your life much more difficult than it needs to be—if, that is, you are fortunate enough to have the cash to ease your path.

If you are rich enough, you can change that; if you are rich enough and you want to—and many businesses do—you can change the laws that inconveniently prevent you from exploiting the resources Africa possesses and, even better, from paying tax on your profits. If you are rich enough, you can always buy yourself out of any trouble you find yourself in.

Corruption in sub-Saharan Africa is therefore endemic; it is part of the way of life; it is how things are. But—and this is the point with which the House needs

[*Stephen Phillips*]

to be troubled—corruption stifles legitimate investment, kills economic growth, maintains and supports poverty, and because it does all those things, it also threatens the security of this country and of the developed world as a whole.

The poorest people—and it is the very poorest and the most vulnerable in our world that we are talking about—will risk all in an attempt to make their way to the developed world. And some of them, seeing the quality of life we have and they do not, are also ripe for a radicalisation that endangers the security of our citizens overseas and, as we have seen, here at home as well.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I sought permission beforehand to intervene. Does the hon. and learned Gentleman feel that there is perhaps a need for Department for International Development projects that come from the backing of this Government—my and his Government—to be monitored in respect of project delivery for the people on the ground to ensure that they are correct? Does there need to be oversight of DFID projects by the Government to stop corruption?

Stephen Phillips: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and he is absolutely right. I shall come on to his point in due course.

Corruption in the developing world has been a hidden problem for too long, though it is now beginning to be brought home to us by the constant threat to our security and by an untrammelled immigration that sees fires set at the entrance to the channel tunnel in France. It is something that requires effort from every Government across the world to challenge, but it is also something that I fear is still too far down the political agenda across the world to be effectively tackled.

Nothing much is changing in terms of advancing the anti-corruption agenda. On 9 December 2013, on international anti-corruption day, the UN Secretary-General pointed out that

“corruption suppresses economic growth by driving up costs, and undermines the sustainable management of the environment and natural resources. It breaches fundamental human rights, exacerbates poverty and increases inequality by diverting funds from health care, education and other essential services. The malignant effects of corruption are felt by billions of people everywhere.”

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that until all Governments have zero tolerance of corruption, they will never be able to invest what they need to invest in health and education, as he said? They should take a leaf out of Rwanda’s book, as that is what it has done, and it is investing consistently, which other countries are not.

Stephen Phillips: My hon. Friend is right. I cannot speak specifically about Rwanda, but unless and until all countries bear down on corruption, this will be a problem that endures.

Very little progress has been made since the Secretary-General made those remarks two years ago. Still the procurement managers sit in their air-conditioned offices marking the passage of time on their gold Rolexes; still corporate interests buy their way out of laws designed to protect the environment and to ensure that they pay proper amounts of taxation; still wealthy individuals and businesses ease their passage through difficult lawsuits

by ensuring that the judiciary across Africa knows which side is more likely to pay more for the “right” result.

Let us take but one area. In its report “Making a Killing”, published this year, Save the Children estimated that the lost tax revenues to developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa due to illicit financial flows was in the order of \$15 billion—a figure that dwarfs this country’s annual aid budget and would pay for 1.8 million healthcare workers. That is a loss of revenue to sub-Saharan Africa in just one area, which is largely made possible by a corruption that allows the maintaining of tax laws and treaties that favour rich corporations which are prepared to bribe Governments and parliamentarians to secure their favoured status. The report fails to take account of perhaps even larger revenues that are lost because a blind eye is turned—once it has been paid for—to direct tax evasion. That is morally wrong. It sustains endemic poverty, and, as I have said, it threatens our own security.

We are not without an international framework within which to deal with the issue. In 2003, the United Nations opened for signature the international anti-corruption convention, which the majority of countries in the world have now ratified. It established some common standards in relation to, for example, criminalisation and law enforcement in chapter III, and international co-operation in chapter IV. However, although monitoring finally began in about 2010, it has been patchy and inconsistent. It also suffers from the major failing that review takes place principally “in region”, thus opening up a whole new field to corruption as non-compliant countries with mutual interests are able to score one another for compliance. One issue that the Minister could usefully discuss with his counterparts in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is how the convention can be updated to ensure proper monitoring.

I believe that the OECD anti-bribery convention has been ratified by only 41 countries. What efforts are the Government making to ensure not only that it is more broadly adopted, but that it is actually enforced by those who have signed it? In its most recent report on the implementation of the convention in 2015, Transparency International found that there was “little or no enforcement” of it in many states, including the Republic of Ireland. There was “active enforcement” only in the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany and Switzerland.

The conventions are, however, only part of the solution. They assist in establishing common international standards, but without enforcement—or, for that matter, the institutions that are necessary to ensure enforcement—they are essentially meaningless.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): My hon. and learned Friend has mentioned the Foreign Office and other Departments. Is he satisfied with the current position, or does he believe there is an opportunity for greater understanding and co-operation between the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development when it comes to tackling some of the problems that he is outlining?

Stephen Phillips: Co-operation between the two Departments is obviously critical. Indeed, the Government as a whole must focus on the need to bear down on corruption where it exists, whether here or anywhere else in the world.

One of the problems is that very little effort appears to have been devoted to ensuring that institution building is carried out by donors who too often prefer to focus on the sexier aspects of development, such as education and health—funding areas that are, in any event, losing more money than they are receiving because of the corruption that pervades the region. So it is, although he may not know it, that the Minister is funding education programmes which pay teachers who do not exist; so it is that he is paying for the planting of crops which cannot grow in soil that cannot be maintained; and so it is that he funds programmes as a result of which money routinely finds itself in the hands of the governing class, despite the best efforts of those in his Department who work so hard to ensure that that does not happen.

Unless and until there is an unrelenting focus on changing the institutional environment throughout sub-Saharan Africa, which at present there is not, very little will change. As Dr John Mukum Mbaku argued in his 2007 book on corruption in Africa,

“the institutional environment, not cultural norms, determine a society’s propensity to engage in corruption and other forms of opportunism ...The incentive structures that a country’s market participants face—which are determined by the country’s institutional arrangements, may create opportunities for corruption and provide an environment in which even honest and highly ethical individuals may be forced to engage in corrupt activities in order to survive. Such perverse incentive structures can be changed or modified through democratic constitutional reforms.”

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): May I take up that point about “getting our own house in order”? Does the hon. and learned Gentleman accept that, while some of the corruption that he is describing may not exist in this country, we operate certain systems of patronage about which we must be very careful in view of the example that they might set developing countries?

Stephen Phillips: I think that I agree with the hon. Gentleman, although unless he gives some specific examples it is a bit difficult for me to know. However, corruption plainly does not exist in this country to the extent that it exists in large parts of Africa. I would not want to equate the two, or, indeed, give solace to those who engage in corruption in Africa on the basis that there is anything similar going on here, for the simple reason that there is not.

What steps is the Minister taking in this area—not just because it is the right thing to do, but because it is essential for our own security—to ensure there is institution building within sub-Saharan Africa to discourage individual Government officials from engaging in corruption? What structural reforms do the Government intend to make our aid dependent on, in order to root out those who enrich themselves at the expense of those they are supposed to serve? To what extent is our international aid delivered in a manner designed to ensure that it does not find itself in the wrong places and, more importantly, in the wrong pockets?

DFID’s role is crucial. Having met, indeed enshrined in law, our commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on international aid—a decision not always popular, but again essential for our national security—DFID’s efforts in stamping out corruption, while well meaning, none the less give cause for concern in some areas. As the

Independent Commission for Aid Impact pointed out in its 2014 report “DFID’s Approach to Anti-Corruption and its Impact on the Poor”,

“DFID’s anti-corruption activities have demonstrated certain achievements but have had little success in reducing the effects of corruption, especially as directly experienced by the poor.”

The report went on to point out that DFID had “little understanding of what is working with respect to its anti-corruption activities” and

“does not fully understand which of its activities are addressing corruption or how they will make a difference.”

I appreciate that the Minister is new to his job, and that the Department is always well meaning and more often than not effective in delivering its objectives, but he has to tell the House how it is that, rather than merely paying lip service to the anti-corruption agenda, he now intends to bear down on something that hits the very poorest people in the world the hardest. More bilateral aid must, I say to him, go to the anti-corruption effort. All bilateral aid must be conditional on corruption, in all its forms, being stamped out in the countries to which it is given. If we really want to tackle poverty in the developing world and improve our security, adopting the sustainable development goals this year is all well and good, but part of that effort has to focus, in a way in which it has seemingly not to date, on the eradication of corruption as a way of life, and as a way of government, across the whole of Africa.

Why is that? Let me end where I began, for I must tell the House that the procurement manager and the mother with whom I began my speech are real people. I have spoken to them. I have witnessed the wealth of one and the poverty of the other, and I have played football with the sons. Like other boys across the developing world, theirs will not be an easy life, but it will be a great deal easier and more likely to be worth while if, in growing up, they do not need to bribe their way through school, university and into a job, paying teachers, university professors, lawyers, policemen, judges, healthcare workers and managers to perform the functions for which the state in which they live is already paying on their behalf.

Morally, we owe such boys an obligation to do all we can to stamp out the corruption that robs them and their fellows of their futures, and keeps them in poverty. Lest it be thought that it is not in our interests or not our problem, I end merely by pointing out that, if we do not act, it is they a future Home Secretary will be dealing with at Calais or, worse, on the beaches of some foreign shore where a poverty of existence made possible by corruption has given rise to a radicalisation which is at once both perverse and avoidable.

7.28 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Grant Shapps): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) on securing the debate on this important subject and on the incredibly powerful way in which he has framed his arguments. He is absolutely right to say that corruption, fraud, tax avoidance and evasion pose serious challenges in the developing world. They put an economic brake on development and help to ensure that nations fail to develop at the speed that we would all want to see. What is more, they

[Grant Shapps]

are matters of direct interest to this House because of our impressive record in international development. However, he is right to highlight the issue of corruption. I want to turn to his speech and to other comments made in the debate.

As my hon. and learned Friend will know, the Department for International Development works in some of the poorest countries in the world, where governance arrangements are often extremely weak. He highlighted that in his passionate speech. Corruption and fraud are often commonplace. Often, there is a highly sophisticated patronage network of elite engagement. I want to outline DFID's approach to combating corruption and fraud in sub-Saharan Africa while trying to achieve our development goals for some of the poorest people in the world.

First, however, I want to highlight the extent of the challenge facing us. My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right that in some countries and locations the problem is endemic. That can even be the case in really good countries. Last week I was in Malawi, a functioning democracy that has been free of war for the last 51 years. Even there the President was telling me that it is difficult to get things done and the state moves at a slow pace. Although he did not mention this, we know corruption is part of that problem.

Although there is evidence that some countries in east Asia have achieved high levels of growth in spite of high levels of corruption, the evidence for sub-Saharan Africa reinforces what our common sense tells us: that corruption has a hugely negative effect on investor confidence in a country. My hon. and learned Friend mentioned \$15 billion in lost revenue. In fact the World Economic Forum reported that corruption undermines prosperity by imposing a cost equivalent to 5% of global GDP, or \$2.6 trillion, every year.

Corruption is ranked as one of the top two barriers to doing business in two thirds of DFID's main partner countries, so this is a massive problem. It creates barriers to market entry. Two thirds of foreign bribery cases occurred in just four sectors related to infrastructure: 19% in the extractives sector; 15% in construction; 15% in transport and storage; and 10% in information and communication. That illustrates that corruption is huddled around specific sectors.

There is also increasing uncertainty for investors, to the detriment of long-term investment. The World Bank reports that bribery can add up to 10% to business costs globally. Corruption also limits the potential of business. It limits the growth and productivity of private sector firms, with small and medium-sized enterprises experiencing the most difficulties. Many do not even bother to show up in the first place because it is just too difficult to operate in those markets.

A corrupt society and state puts an unduly negative burden on the poorest. That is why the Prime Minister has gone to such lengths to talk about what he calls the golden thread of development. The idea is that a country can try to do everything else—build the infrastructure, put the right processes in place, sort out its health and education systems—but if it does not deal with corruption, it will never enfranchise its citizens, thereby making them all better off.

The scale and breadth of the challenge is enormous. DFID does three things to stop corruption: we work in countries to help Governments track and trace activities and funds; we build the capacity of institutions to stop behaviours; and we apply pressure on our international partners to ensure they raise their game. Most importantly—this is possibly the one respect in which I diverge from what my hon. and learned Friend said in his excellent speech—we would be wrong to inadvertently characterise the DFID budget as disappearing into some hole of corruption, for one simple reason. In the year 2013-14, DFID spent £9.791 billion—nearly £10 billion—on international development. Of that, 4% was what is known as sector support—it might be for education, for example—whereas just 1% was to general support. In other words, although my hon. and learned Friend is right to point out these problems, we are engaged in the task of making sure we do not give money to Governments who cannot, through their own procurement, be trusted to spend it.

Stephen Phillips: I understand that point, but let us consider the 4% we spend on education. When we build a school, DFID rightly secures three tenders, but they are essentially agreed between the tendering companies, and the British taxpayer ends up paying probably 10 times more than the actual cost. That form of corruption is hidden in the DFID budget.

Grant Shapps: Once again, my hon. and learned Friend is right to point out these problems, which indeed exist in many places in the world, and particularly in some of these markets. Last week, however, I was in a school in Zomba in Malawi announcing £11.6 million in DFID budget. In that case we have chosen to work with USAID, because it has an established programme. It has the contractors in place and we can be certain, as it is properly audited, that the money is being well spent. He is right to point out these issues and it is right that the Department works to clamp down on all these practices. Clearly, we must protect British taxpayers' funds and we must, for the reasons he outlined, ensure that the worst-off people in the world—Malawi is in the world's bottom five for income, with an average income of £179 a year—are not being subsidised, through corruption, by one of the wealthiest countries in the world, which we are fortunate enough to live in.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Does the Minister agree that some of the most effective international development work is often done by small, local, community organisations? We may be talking about building schools, working in community health centres or other such things. One problem they find is accessing the funds that DFID or others provide. We often hear people say, "We would like to work with these people but we cannot do so because the grant size is too small." Yet these organisations are probably the least corrupt and often the most effective.

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend will be interested to hear that we were having that conversation in the Department only yesterday, and he is right to highlight it.

Let me turn to some of the things we are doing to combat these problems of corruption. First, we track and trace activities and funds. DFID works in and with developing countries to ensure that public bodies and

public funds are serving the people. Over recent months, DFID country teams have been undertaking analyses of some of the constraints to growth, and the message is clear: corruption negatively influences investor confidence, as we have already established. To address that, we fund track and trace activities to shine a light on corruption and recover stolen assets. DFID has been supporting the extractives industry transparency initiative since 2002, working in 23 sub-Saharan African countries. DFID supports the International Centre for Asset Recovery, which provides practical legal assistance to countries trying to track, trace and recover funds; it has cases worth potentially \$235 million in Kenya, \$227 million in Tanzania, which I visited and where I discussed some of this just a few weeks ago, and \$30 million in Malawi, which I was in last week. An awful lot of work is going on in track and trace.

We have also built capacity to stop behaviours and reduce the opportunities for corruption. We work with partners on the ground to build the capacity of civil society organisations and partner agencies. For example, in Nigeria, DFID has worked to reduce government funds being lost or stolen. That has resulted in some £1.5 billion of assets being recovered, and DFID is supporting 2,670 investigation cases. My hon. and learned Friend will rightly point out that that must have something to do with the scale of the problem, but none the less he will be pleased to know that UK-based police and intelligence units, and many other organs of the British state, are helping in the swift recovery of assets.

Thirdly, we are applying pressure to our international partners, and that is at the heart of this matter. We are working on that UN convention against corruption in partner countries and with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on strengthening financial action taskforces around the globe. We have been taking real leadership in these areas. DFID works with other G8 and G20 members, and through the UN, to strengthen the international architecture to combat corruption and illicit financial flows. I remind the House that the United Kingdom took the lead when we chaired the G8 in 2013, implementing a number of measures which have put the UK in a leadership position.

It is, however, important to continue raising our game and it goes without saying that we also take our responsibilities very seriously. All DFID offices must

complete and regularly refresh anti-corruption and counter-fraud country strategies that highlight the critical barriers. I can provide my hon. and learned Friend with the assurance that as a result of this evening's debate I will be taking even more interest in that matter over the coming weeks and months.

My hon. and learned Friend mentioned the ICAI report on DFID's work in this area in 2014, when DFID's resources on counter-fraud and anti-corruption were said to have been "fragmented". We have taken a number of steps since then to address these things, but because of a lack of time I will not produce the entire list.

I want to touch on tax—the issue of tackling tax avoidance and tax evasion in developing countries—to which my hon. and learned Friend referred. As I mentioned, the UK led on the issue during its G8 presidency. What I did not mention was that more than 90 countries have now signed up to principles such as automatic tax information exchange and helping to tackle offshore tax evasion. We are working to champion the OECD's base erosion and profit-shifting project. This is in relation to multinational companies moving profits in order not to pay tax where it should be paid.

A huge amount of work is going on across Whitehall. The Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne), sits on a body that is responsible, across Whitehall, for trying to build the capacity to monitor these areas. The body has done a huge amount of work already in Britain to prevent corruption, and it is now turning its attention internationally.

Tackling global poverty is the right thing to do, and it is also in Britain's interests. We will continue to insist that every Department and organisation that we fund adopt a zero-tolerance approach to corruption. We will also continue with our focus on tackling tax avoidance and tax evasion in the developing world. As I mentioned to the House a moment ago, as a product of this debate, my own attention will be more highly focused on the matter.

Question put and agreed to.

7.41 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 1 July 2015

[MR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

English Votes for English Laws and North Wales

9.30 am

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered English votes for English laws and North Wales.

It is good to see so many hon. Members from across the United Kingdom who are interested in North Wales. That was the purpose of this debate. We live in interesting constitutional times and I welcome the opportunity to put the case for Wales, and North Wales in particular. In the 1880s we had the Irish question. In the latter part of the 20th century, there was devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and we had the West Lothian question. Today, we have the North Wales question, which is an important constitutional issue.

Although I support it, devolution is unbalanced, asymmetrical and needs adjusting, but I do not believe the Government's proposal for English votes on English laws is the answer. The UK Parliament is creaking and the devolution settlement is messy, but we need to deal with it objectively through a UK constitutional convention. That is the basis of my argument.

I want to make it clear that I support devolution. I supported it in the 1970s, when the majority of my party did not, and I supported it in 1997-98, when it was the will of the Welsh people, and the people of Scotland and Northern Ireland. It is important to remember that part of that devolution settlement was the creation of the London Assembly and the establishment of the Mayor for London, giving powers to the largest city in England. That was important, but we should have gone further. I am not just saying that with hindsight; I was arguing for that at the time, before I was a Member of Parliament, because I could see that it was an uneven settlement. I should have liked the regions of England to have an element of devolution, too, because that would have provided balance.

I go a step further than my party: I believe in a federal United Kingdom. I think we should have an English Parliament within the UK. We should retain the UK Parliament for foreign affairs and other bigger issues that concern the whole United Kingdom. I know, because I am a realist, that this is not an issue for today, but we must look to the future for a UK convention on constitutional rights.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman explain whether there would be a separate House of Commons in a federal organisation, compared with the English basis, or can they be combined?

Albert Owen: I appreciate that intervention from a fellow islander. I was in Jersey yesterday, watching the Island games and cheering Isle of Wight on. The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point. We need a proper convention to consider these issues, because some of

the arguments have not been dealt with in great detail in this House. The knee-jerk reaction of having English laws and English votes is not the answer; it is a sticking plaster and it will cause more problems than it will create solutions.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): Is the hon. Gentleman acknowledging that the devolution settlement established in 1999—the creature of the Labour party, of course—is grievously flawed?

Albert Owen: The call for devolution in the '70s was so strong that there had to be a reaction to it from the UK Parliament. I mentioned in my opening remarks that there should have been a more balanced version, with more English devolution, at the time it was introduced. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would have supported that, because he is now a pragmatist and in favour of the current constitutional settlement.

Mr Jones: Yes, but did not the people of the north-east reject devolution to the English regions when it was put to them?

Albert Owen: Obviously, that happened. If it had been done at the same time as the London Mayor, and perhaps at the same time as another region, perhaps others would have clamoured for it later. I accept that that was an error. However, the right hon. Gentleman's party, which opposed devolution at that time, has now wholly embraced it, so the Labour party has done his party a favour, moving it forward in many ways. The right hon. Gentleman, a pragmatic Secretary of State who wanted more devolution for Wales and for the rest of the UK, is evidence of that. I welcome the fact that many Conservative Members of Parliament have taken this journey, but I want the direction of the journey to be clear in future.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): This is an important subject. Does my hon. Friend agree that there are many types of devolution? He talks about English devolution. Once upon a time, I served as a borough councillor in London and I think the emphasis there would be on London-wide devolution, with virtually no interest in English devolution. Does he also agree with his predecessor, the late, great Cledwyn Hughes, who spoke of an authority for North Wales? I am not necessarily advocating that as a model, but there are different types of devolution and all have to be considered in the round.

Albert Owen: I am grateful for that intervention. I will develop my argument a little bit further, but my point is that devolution needs to be close to the people. In the original Welsh devolution settlement, the Assembly had regional bodies where we discussed many issues. I do not want devolution to be just a movement of powers from Westminster to Cardiff Bay: within Wales, I want it to go to Colwyn bay and Cardigan bay, and to Cemaes bay in my constituency. That is real devolution and that is what I am advocating. Devolution should not just be for one part of the UK. We need even distribution of devolution across the UK.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Of course, the reality is that the decisions of the Assembly have led to power being centralised in Cardiff, out of the regions of Wales. That is a product of the very devolution that

[*Antoinette Sandbach*]

the hon. Gentleman professes to support, and it happened because of decisions taken in the Welsh Assembly by elected Welsh representatives. Is the hon. Gentleman arguing against the devolution that has happened in Cardiff?

Albert Owen: The hon. Lady was a North Wales Member of the Assembly. My criticism is not just about the institution or the Government in Cardiff Bay. North Wales Assembly Members should be making a stronger case for North Wales. That is what I am doing today, as a North Wales MP. I will argue, when I have a chance to develop my argument without interventions, that there needs to be representation from North Wales MPs in this debate.

The debate has gone a bit sterile post-Scottish referendum, partly because of the Prime Minister's reaction on the morning after the referendum result, which I very much welcomed. Instead of being statesmanlike and trying to strengthen the Union after the referendum result, he chose to talk about one part of the UK: England. The Union is not strengthened by isolating and talking about one part of it. Unionism must be about the whole UK. That is why I am arguing for North Wales MPs having a strong voice and being equal in this UK Parliament. We are all elected under the same franchise and we should be allowed to debate and vote on the same rules and regulations that are before this House, and there should be no exemption. No Parliament will succeed if it has two tiers of representative. We all have the same mandate and we are here to represent our constituents and the UK, but we will not be able to do that if we go down the avenue proposed by the Conservatives. That is the gist of my argument. I will put some detail on it in the next seven or eight minutes, after which I will sit down and allow other hon. Members to contribute.

Devolution has to be more than just a theory: it has to be practical and real because it concerns services, such as health and transport, which are often provided east-west in the UK. Most decisions on transport that affect Wales are made here in the Department for Transport. The debacle over the west coast main line affects not just my constituents, but the whole of North Wales and the whole of England. It is an interconnector and a corridor between Ireland and London, going through North Wales. It would be crazy for North Wales MPs not to have a say or not to be able to question the Secretary of State when big decisions go wrong, such as when millions of pounds of taxpayer's money is squandered by errors in the franchise process. That affects my constituency and services to my constituents. I travel on that train every week, and I know the composition of its passengers: they are from North-West Wales, other parts of North Wales and England. We need to have a voice in this House when we debate such issues, so that we can express our views and vote on big decisions that affect our constituents.

Mr David Jones: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is being very kind in giving way. While I agree with the thrust of his argument, is he not choosing a rather bad example, because railway services are not a devolved issue?

Albert Owen: I am trying to make a number of points, but I am being intervened on every couple of minutes; I am trying to develop a stronger argument about transport and other public services—health, for example. The right hon. Gentleman and I sat on the Welsh Affairs Committee many years ago, and we realised that there were anomalies. People from North Wales use specialised services in English hospitals, such as the Christie, Alder Hey and the Walton Centre; those specialisms cannot be delivered in general hospitals across the UK. They are specialist UK institutions providing some of the finest services in the world, and I want my constituents to be able to access them, but I also want a say if big decisions are to be made on whether to cut those services, because that would affect my constituents. I am not making the argument from an ideological point of view; it is about real services for real people. That is the principle here.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent point about North Wales, but what he says is equally true of South Wales. Some 48% of the Welsh population lives within 25 miles of the border, so in constituencies such as mine, many people use the English NHS and English schools and travel to work in Bristol and elsewhere.

Albert Owen: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This debate is about North Wales, but there are important issues in South Wales and southern Scotland and England that need to be looked at, and that is why we need a proper UK constitutional convention, so that we can deal with all these points properly and in a sober manner. She is absolutely right. We need decentralisation, but in a balanced way, rather than simply devolving powers from one capital city to another.

I agree with the point that the hon. Member for Eddisbury (*Antoinette Sandbach*) made about over-centralisation in some smaller countries after devolution. Instead of devolving power closer to the people, there is a tendency to have political control at the centre. I make no bones about it: in the 1970s, I was arguing against decentralisation. Some of the best devolution in the British state has been the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency move to Liverpool, the British Council move to Manchester and various bodies' move to Scotland. Moving institutions helps to create local economies and a more balanced United Kingdom. I am certainly not happy with everything that has happened in the devolution settlement, but I believe that the response of the Conservative Government and the previous coalition Government is a sticking plaster that will cause more problems than it will create solutions. That is the reason for this debate.

I want a UK Parliament to look at defence and other issues if we are to have an English Parliament, but I am a realist and I do not think there is the appetite for that at the moment. However, the answer is not exempting Welsh, Northern Irish and Scottish MPs from issues that Parliament is discussing. I do not think there is a Parliament anywhere that has different degrees of power within the legislature. Yes, some Parliaments have more than one chamber to discuss things in detail, but the proposals in front of us, drawn from different reports and different exercises that the coalition Government put together, are wrong for a number of reasons.

I made the point that we are all elected equally on an equal franchise. We should have Second Reading debates where everyone can take part. During the Committee stage, where detailed amendments are discussed—for example, amendments dealing with health and how an English trust is run, which may affect my constituents, so they are important—I should have some input, or a chance to be on the Committee. If I do not get on that Committee, I can debate such measures on Report on the Floor of the UK Parliament. UK parliamentarians should be involved in that process. If we go down the road the Government propose, what is next on the agenda? What procedures will be passed upstairs that will exempt English Members from talking about different parts of England? That logic can be applied to the proposals as they stand, and that is worrying.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Albert Owen: I will give way one more time, because I want to hear the English dimension on this issue. I know that the hon. Gentleman wants to speak for England.

Mr Gray: I speak as the person who was the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland for the shortest ever time: five days. That was a result of making untoward remarks on “Newsnight” in favour of some form of federal solution of the kind the hon. Gentleman describes. I want to pick up on the point he was making a moment ago on the importance of him having a say on health matters, because his constituents use the health service in England. That is true of course and I do not disagree with him, but my constituents may well use the national health service in Wales, and I can have no say in how the NHS in Wales is run. Why should it be one way and not the other?

Albert Owen: I understand why the hon. Gentleman makes that point, but I am talking about specialisms, not general hospitals or general practitioners. Hospitals in England used by patients from North Wales were built by North Wales people especially in those locations to serve England and Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom. Let us be honest; we cannot have specialisms in every region of England and every part of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We have some of the best hospitals in the world in certain areas of the UK, and we need to be able to discuss them in the UK Parliament. It is not right to exempt MPs from that. I understand the hon. Gentleman’s frustration at having no say on general health issues in Wales, but it is more important to look at specialisms and the reality of what our constituents face, rather than the theory to which he refers.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) makes a valid point about a frustration he faces, but he can still speak on equal terms in this Parliament to the Secretary of State for Wales or the Department of Health and raise those issues. Under the Government’s proposals, he would not be able to speak or move amendments on those issues at all.

Albert Owen: Other Members, if they catch your eye, Mr Crausby, will be able to give examples of using services closer to the border in far more detail than I

will, but I am laying out the context. It is a dangerous constitutional move to exempt UK Members in a UK Parliament. We are all here as equals. I do not want to be a second-class MP. I want the same rights and responsibilities as other Members.

We should have a written constitution to underpin all this. The present situation is a mess. We celebrate 800 years of Magna Carta, but we do not have a 21st-century constitution. The world has changed in those 800 years. We did not have NATO, the UN or the EU back then. We need to look at our constitution and the bloody battles we had instead of resolving this around the institutions.

I do not think the Conservative party and the coalition have looked at the issue seriously. I do not agree with the Scottish National party when it talks about independence, but I do think it has the right to have that debate. Scotland had the debate and the vote. Its Members of Parliament were elected under the same franchise as the Welsh, Northern Irish and English Members and they have the same rights in this place, and that is what I am defending. However, the North Wales case is special because of our east-west relationship in transport, health and the economy. We have large employers in England and large employers in Wales, and there are cross-border issues in that regard that are dealt with by the UK Parliament. I would have spoken for longer on some of the technical issues, but this debate is about empowering people and maintaining the right of MPs to speak on their behalf.

We need to have a proper UK convention on the constitution. We cannot go on in a piecemeal way; we need to look at this in a broad context, and it cannot be done behind closed doors or in corridors. A Conservative manifesto is being pushed through without thought to exempt a large number of MPs from debates who represent areas that have been represented here for centuries. One reason why we had the Act of Union when Wales became a part of the United Kingdom was to have equal representation, and that has not changed. I understand the need to have fewer MPs from areas where there are devolved Administrations, but we should not exempt those Members from voting on laws in the UK Parliament.

Let us have a proper debate. I hope that today’s discussion will help to highlight the North Wales question in some way. The Leader of the House has said that he wants a proper debate on English votes for English laws, but I want to debate the whole issue, and I want to protect my constituents’ right to elect an MP who can speak on their behalf.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. I intend to call the first of the three Front-Bench speakers at 10.30 am, which gives us about 40 minutes. Ten Members have risen to speak, so if they can keep their contributions to around four minutes, everyone will have an opportunity to speak.

9.50 am

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby.

[*Guto Bebb*]

Four minutes is not a long time to discuss the issues raised by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), whom I congratulate on securing this debate. He is a champion for his constituency and for North Wales, and there is no doubt that he has raised some genuine concerns that are felt across the region and, indeed, recognised in the wider United Kingdom. Nevertheless, it is a shame that the main thrust of his argument was that we should establish a UK constitutional convention along the lines proposed by the Labour party in their manifesto for the 2015 general election. If there was ever a need for such a convention, it has long since passed.

The truth is that we have a devolution settlement that was not particularly well thought through. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones), who highlighted the fact that the devolution settlement we have was created without any real thought as to how to ensure that it was fair and equitable. Nevertheless, we are where we are. We must address how we move forward equitably and reasonably.

It is interesting to note that many Members from North Wales will say that they want to retain the ability to influence the services provided by, for example, the English NHS—the hon. Member for Ynys Môn spoke about the health service. It is true that people from North Wales go to Greater Manchester or the Merseyside area for specialist services, but it is also true that people from England come to Cardiff for specialist services. My cousin is a consultant in a hospital in Cardiff, and he treats people from South Wales and people from England. The point still stands: it is clear that, as Welsh MPs, we have no ability to influence most of the health services provided by the Welsh Assembly, but it is also the case that English MPs have no ability to influence how their constituents are treated if they require support.

The situation in North Wales is very clear: specialist services are generally provided from England. But the same is not necessarily true in all parts of the kingdom. The issue remains: how do we reach an equitable situation so that Members from both North Wales and England have the ability to influence decisions? It is important to recognise that there is a feeling of unfairness, even along the North Wales coast. Having spoken to people who have moved into North Wales from England, I know that there is a feeling that there is something inequitable in the current devolution situation.

Saying that we need a constitutional convention to try to address the inequities is over-egging the cake. We have not been talking about the West Lothian question only since 1977, when Tam Dalyell started to talk about it; Gladstone talked about it back in the 19th century. We can talk about it until the cows come home, but really we need to take action. I genuinely believe that the inequity that currently exists is a bigger threat to the devolution settlement than doing nothing. I am afraid that the example from Scotland and other parts of the UK is that, often, constitutional conventions are set up when there is a desire to kick something into the long grass.

We need to ensure that laws that relate only to England can be influenced by Members from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but the main decision-making on those specific laws that are deemed English-only should be made by English MPs.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Guto Bebb: I will take only one intervention, because of the time.

Ian C. Lucas: What is an English-only law?

Guto Bebb: That is a key point. We have to have some confidence in the ability of this House and Parliament as a whole to come to a conclusion and define a specific law as English, English and Welsh, or UK-wide. The hon. Gentleman has highlighted a crucial point: we are talking as if a deal has been done, but the detail of the Government's proposals has not yet been announced—

Ian C. Lucas: Give us an example.

Guto Bebb: In my view, it is clear that many Bills will be categorised as English and Welsh. In many cases, they will be categorised as UK-wide. Nevertheless, we have to accept that there is a principle that needs to be dealt with.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), who was previously a colleague of mine in North Wales, made an important point: anyone who believes in devolution cannot be very pleased with how the Welsh Assembly has worked, because it has sucked power into Cardiff. I want to stress, however, that that is not necessarily a failure of devolution; I would argue that it is a failure of how the Labour party has dealt with devolution in Wales.

9.55 am

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I speak today as an English MP elected for the first time only a few weeks ago. I have already discovered a number of instances where decisions are made in Wales that affect my constituents, but it is very difficult to influence them or make representations. Members on the other side of the border clearly face the same challenge in reverse. I want to highlight some of the inequities in the current system that need to be resolved before we press ahead with further change.

The western boundary of my constituency, Ellesmere Port and Neston, forms part of the border with Wales—indeed, I can leave my home and be in that great country within 10 minutes. The western side of the constituency faces the River Dee, which forms a natural barrier, but, going inland, the border is firmly on the eastern side of the river, which lies on the cusp of English settlements, going so far into the neighbouring constituency, City of Chester, that it dissects Chester City football club's ground.

We have physical proximity, but we also share much in common with our colleagues over the border, culturally, economically and socially. For example, a great many people work on one side of the border and live on the other. Indeed, many of my early temporary jobs were in Deeside, and my most recent employer before entering the House had offices in both England and Wales—in Chester and Wrexham. Let us not forget that England and Wales share a common legal system. I hope that any proposals take that into account.

I want to highlight the work of the Mersey Dee Alliance, a partnership of Cheshire West and Chester Council, the University of Chester, Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council, Glyndwr University, Wirral Borough Council, Wrexham County Borough Council, the Welsh Assembly and Merseytravel that has been around since the 1990s. The alliance put it perfectly when it said that

“the area represents a single economic sub-region with a population of close to 1 million”

that just happens to be divided by a national boundary.

Transport is another key issue on which England and Wales cannot easily be separated. A recent example is at the Posthouse roundabout at the junction of the A483 and the A55, which set a record as a single set of roadworks causing chaos in two countries. In recent years, significant central Government funds have been invested in the local sustainable transport fund, thanks to a programme run by Cheshire West and Chester Council that recognises that the economic sub-region covers Chester, Ellesmere Port, Deeside, Wrexham and areas of Merseyside. I have already expressed my concern in the House about how the proposed devolution of the Borderlands Line rail franchise, as part of the Wrexham to Bidston proposals, will affect my constituents, it being the main route from Neston into Liverpool and Wales.

My constituents are at risk of being overlooked because there is currently no formal mechanism for conveying their views. The situation is unacceptable, and I intend to argue on behalf of my constituents so that they have a voice. It demonstrates amply the dangers of pushing ahead with a settlement that fails to give proper thought to how those who live either side of the border are properly represented.

Recently, issues have arisen that have highlighted the frustrations of cross-border concerns. I met constituents who are cockle fishers on the River Dee. They pay a licence fee to Natural Resources Wales but have no ability to influence decisions or make representations. The old adage, “No taxation without representation”, springs to mind. I am sure there are many similar examples.

Within a few weeks of entering Parliament, I have already found two significant examples of a failure to appreciate how decisions taken in one country can affect people in another. We need clarity on what matters are reserved for the Welsh Parliament and the mechanisms available for those on both sides of the border to make representations and influence decisions. Ultimately, we need to find a way to ensure accountability. I am concerned that, if we push ahead without much thought, we will end up with a system that is crude and simplistic, lacking in democratic legitimacy and accountability. Such a system will also be a barrier to economic growth in the area.

10 am

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): It is a huge pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I commend the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) on securing an important and timely debate. It is timely, of course, because we are currently considering a lot of constitutional legislation, including the Scotland Bill, which continues its Committee stage today, and the proposed procedural changes to the rules of the House.

I agree with most of the thrust of the hon. Gentleman’s argument. That said, the issue of fairness must also be considered. It cannot be fair that a Member of Parliament for a part of the country in which powers are totally devolved should have a vote—possibly a determinative vote—on matters that do not affect either that Member or their constituents. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), who illustrated the cross-border problems quite nicely. He neatly demonstrated the frustration of English Members that they often have no voice in any democratic assembly on issues concerning them and their constituents. That cannot be right.

The problem is that the devolution settlement imposed in 1999 is frankly not fit for purpose. It does not work; it is a lash-up and it needs to be revisited. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn talked about a constitutional convention, but the fact that he had to do so shows that he also recognises that what was put in place by the Blair Government back in 1999 is not fit for purpose and ill serves the people of both England and Wales.

Albert Owen: I will be brief, as I have already spoken at some length. As Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Gentleman’s answer to the problem was more devolution. He just added to the devolution settlement. We need a constitutional convention so that we can pause to consider and reflect on the matter at a UK level.

Mr Jones: I certainly believed in more devolution of taxing powers and was a firm advocate of that. The hon. Gentleman makes a different point, which I will focus on in the time remaining.

What we have in North Wales, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, is a wholly different state of affairs from that which prevails in South Wales. The Welsh devolution settlement was put in place by South Wales politicians who did not really understand North Wales, did not understand that North Wales is part of the North Wales economic region, did not understand the need of North Wales patients to access medical treatment in the north-west of England and did not understand the historical and cultural ties that bind the people of the north-west of England and North Wales.

I will support the procedural changes to the rules of the House provided that they fully reflect the interests of the people of North Wales and their representatives. I will join the hon. Member for Ynys Môn in pressing for that when the matter is considered by the House. More importantly, the Wales Bill to be introduced later in this Parliament presents an opportunity to address the whole issue of devolution and to sort out the problems that were identified by the hon. Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston and for Ynys Môn. We should take the opportunity to try to improve a devolution settlement that is unfit for purpose.

10.4 am

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I appreciate the opportunity to speak in this Westminster Hall debate on English votes for English laws and North Wales. The Government have managed to get themselves in a right guddle over this. Despite much conversation and much posturing, there is still a total lack of clarity about what will be classed as English only and what will be considered

[*Kirsty Blackman*]

by the whole House. The SNP is clear that Scottish or Welsh MPs should not be given second-class status in the House of Commons. We face the prospect of MPs being barred from votes, reducing our ability to help our constituents.

The process of certification as “England only” will be highly contentious and no doubt debated as the matter goes forward. Although I have much respect for both the office of Speaker and the Speaker himself, I cannot say that I envy the task he may be presented with. If the decision is taken to give the role to the Speaker, it is clear that provision needs to be written in for devolved legislatures to be consulted in advance of the Speaker’s decision. That currently happens in Scottish situations when neither Government have indicated a need for a Sewel motion in draft legislation, so the procedures are there. I am sure that none of us wants such issues to be decided in the courts, but it is surely of concern that the process of change through Standing Orders, rather than legislation, would mean that a contentious certification decision could not be challenged in any way, including through the courts. That is not right if people in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland are disadvantaged by legislation that their democratically elected MPs have been excluded from considering.

Antoinette Sandbach: The problem with going through the courts is the endless delays. We saw that in Wales with the Supreme Court’s decision regarding the Agricultural Wages Act 1948, which fundamentally altered the Act and moved Wales on to a reserved powers model. That is undemocratic because it is judicial decision making.

Kirsty Blackman: The point is that the core process is there. We need a process of legal challenge. We need to allow people to challenge decisions that are taken here. Making the change through the Standing Orders removes that right.

The key point is this. It would be ridiculous and undemocratic for Scottish or Welsh MPs to be excluded from any decision that could have a detrimental impact on the budgets of the devolved Administrations. Forty-five per cent of the Scottish people voted for independence and 55% voted to stay in the union. Not one of them voted to cede to others the ability to legislate. It would be utterly bizarre for such a significant constitutional change to be made by a change to the Standing Orders.

Susan Elan Jones: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kirsty Blackman: I will not, as I have only a short time remaining.

It would also be improper and unprecedented for any changes to the Standing Orders to be made without proper scrutiny. Such significant constitutional changes require significant scrutiny and debate, not a hurried announcement less than three weeks before the summer recess and with much scrabbling around to formulate a coherent policy. I urge the Minister, as I have in many written questions already, to allow extensive scrutiny of the matter. We do not need a change in the rules to determine what we can and cannot vote for. Scottish MPs already exclude ourselves from purely England-only

votes. It is pretty ironic that, on a day after English MPs vote down the will of the Scottish people on the Scotland Bill, a discussion is being held on how best to exclude Scottish MPs from English legislation. We simply cannot have this rushed through without proper consideration of the consequences.

10.7 am

James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) on securing this debate. I represent a constituency that is three seats into Wales, but none the less I have many constituents who daily cross the border into England, just 30 minutes away. We do not tend to hear about constitutional matters on the doorstep.

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a valid point about constitutional matters being a sleeping pill for most of the electorate. Does he agree that one of the greatest frustrations during the election campaign was the confusion over who is responsible for what? That great exasperation probably damages the reputation of politics in the eyes of the public. Whatever we do, we must address that point, rather than just talking about ourselves to ourselves.

James Davies: My hon. Friend is quite right: we must address those issues. I will come on to that point in a minute. On the doorstep, some people pointed out the unfairness of the current situation—with particular regard to Scottish MPs, in fact; Wales was mentioned to a lesser degree—and that unfairness is ultimately a consequence of devolution. The First Minister in Wales has said that laws that affect Wales should be made in Wales—meaning by Welsh politicians. The follow-on from that is that laws that affect England should be made in England by English politicians. People cannot have it both ways.

The proposals certainly have a good deal of pragmatism behind them. That said, Wales is in a different position from Scotland in many respects. In North Wales, many live near the border, and the political boundaries do not reflect the reality of people’s day-to-day lives—where they live and work. Yes, roads, universities, energy projects and environmental issues in England affect our constituents, but having said that, they need to travel out of North Wales for that to be the case.

Today I want to highlight the issue of health. As a doctor, I am well aware of the issues that have been brought up about hospitals in the north-west. The Countess of Chester hospital, where I have worked, was built on the basis that about a third of the patients would be from Flintshire, and that is still the case in many respects. Alder Hey, Gobowen, Broadgreen, Liverpool women’s, Arrows Park and Walton are all hospitals that rely on the throughput of North Wales patients—

Albert Owen: And the staff.

James Davies: And many of the staff live in Wales, of course. The services at those hospitals exist because of the North Wales patients. This happens the other way around, but to a lesser extent; there are not many services in North Wales to which English patients travel. That said, there are English patients registered with

Welsh GPs and vice versa. North Wales is a particular case; services in north-west England are designed for and accessed by North Wales patients. That perhaps does not apply in other areas.

Unfortunately, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) mentioned, many voters are unaware of the devolution settlement, or disregard such things. Some of the issues, to be honest, challenge the whole rationale of Welsh devolution, certainly in so far as North Wales is concerned. In summary, the key thing for me is that the decision as to what is an English-only matter will be difficult, requiring much consideration to ensure that the voices and interests of North Wales residents are not overlooked. I foresee that many issues will be both English and Welsh, and not English only.

10.12 am

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I entered the Chamber this morning equal to every other Member attending the debate. I have been a Member of Parliament for 23 years, during which time I have been equal to other Members. That includes the time when the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) was Secretary of State for Wales, even though the Government of which he was part had no mandate from elected Members of Parliament in Wales, and, likewise, the time when Lord Hunt was Secretary of State for Wales. I have been an MP at times when we had Labour Secretaries of State for Wales, and when the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) was Secretary of State for Wales.

Wales has a 170-mile border, and 50% of the population of Wales live within 25 miles of it. That means that my constituents access services, employment and a range of other things in England as well as Wales. It is important to recognise that, and to look at the key challenges mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen). We need to examine how we develop a constitutional settlement that reflects the needs and the real challenges of people who represent seats in England, but feel that they have no say on matters in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

A number of my constituents work for the fire service in Merseyside, Cheshire or Shropshire. I have key transport links in Crewe; the Halton curve provides a key link between Liverpool and services in North Wales, but it is in England. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) mentioned the line to Bidston from Wrexham, which goes through north Wales and is a key issue on both sides of the border. Arriva Trains Wales is devolved, but Virgin Trains provides a service that is not devolved.

There are health services in my constituency that are serviced by providers in England. Specialist services are at Clatterbridge, the Christie or the Royal Liverpool, because of the nature of our region. A third of my constituents were born in England—many at the Countess of Chester hospital, but some, like me, were born elsewhere in England. That even includes people who have played football for England, although they resided all their lives in Wales; they qualify for England because they were born in a hospital in England.

My next-door neighbours are teachers in England. I have constituents who are police officers in Merseyside, Cheshire or Shropshire. The nearest airports to my

constituency are Liverpool and Manchester. I have constituents who work at Vauxhall Ellesmere Port in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston, or in Chester at the banking and financial institutions there. Why is that important? When Vauxhall Ellesmere Port was under pressure and delegations went to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills in England about support funding to keep jobs in the area, I was able to participate. Furthermore, farmers from the constituency of the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) come to Mold market in my constituency. They come from England to sell their produce in North Wales. What matters in England matters to my constituents in Wales.

Mr David Jones: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Hanson: I only have a short time and I want to ask the key question: who decides what is a Welsh issue? Under the proposals, the Speaker is supposed to decide. What openness, transparency and representations will there be? How will the Speaker determine what is an English-only matter, particularly when the Government have said that they will extend the principle of English consent to financial matters? Who decides, and what does that mean for not only votes but key questions in the House of Commons? Will I be able to table parliamentary questions in the House of Commons as an equal Member? Will I be able to speak in Westminster Hall as an equal Member? Will I be able to ask for a meeting with the Minister of an English-only Department about matters to do with the fire service, the police, health, schools or employment in my area?

Ian C. Lucas: We don't know.

Mr Hanson: Will I be able to undertake—*[Interruption.]* The answer to the question, as my hon. Friend said, is that we do not know. We do not know as yet, because the proposals are not there. We need clarity.

Finally, this issue is important to the unity of the United Kingdom. I cannot believe that the Conservative and Unionist party has made such proposals. I made this point in the main Chamber the other week: Gordon Brown represented a seat in Scotland and was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom; Jim Callaghan represented a seat in Wales and was Prime Minister; and Andrew Bonar Law and Alec Douglas-Home represented seats in Scotland and were Conservative Prime Ministers. Are we saying that no such Prime Minister can ever stand at the Dispatch Box again, or that they would say, "I'm very sorry, I can't answer that question, because it is devolved to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland"? If that is the position of the Conservative and Unionist party, it has come an awful long way from the Conservative party I once knew.

10.17 am

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Thank you, Mr Crausby, for calling me to speak. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) for securing the debate. In reality, it is easy to answer the question of the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) about how to identify which votes are on English-only matters and which are not. We simply look at the Wales Act 2014, for example, and decide which powers have

[*Antoinette Sandbach*]

been devolved to Wales and which are reserved; that will identify them. It happens all the time in the National Assembly for Wales, with the process delegated to the Presiding Officer. I would, however, have a great deal more sympathy with the position of the right hon. Gentleman if he had not voted for that asymmetrical and uneven devolution settlement described by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn. We need to remember that all the arguments were made when the Government of Wales Acts were before Parliament. All those issues were identified.

I have a great deal of sympathy with the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) on his frustrations with Natural Resources Wales, a body that is incredibly inefficient and should never have been set up; I opposed it when I was in the Assembly. However, the hon. Gentleman still has an ability to influence it, and to contact it on behalf of his constituents, although he does not have an ability to vote on setting up that body—but that is the position that my constituents are in.

As described by the right hon. Member for Delyn, I have farmers who go over to Wales to sell their products in the market at Mold. They are subject to Welsh tuberculosis restrictions on pre-movement testing of cattle, but cannot vote on the matter. That constitutional settlement was put in place by the Labour party. All the arguments we have heard today were rehearsed then—we have been hearing them for years.

I accept all the points made by Members on both sides of the House about our strong links and ties, which have been there for generations, but we have to deal with the unfairness affecting England. That issue has been raised on the doorstep. The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) ought to realise that it is a great cause for concern when education or health matters, which are wholly devolved to the Scottish Government, can be voted on by Scottish MPs. In reality, she will have an opportunity to vote on financial matters that may affect her constituents, because there will be a vote on the Budget and an opportunity to debate those matters.

The unevenness of the constitutional settlement was recognised by the fact that the Conservative party secured a majority with an election manifesto commitment to deliver English votes for English laws. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (James Davies) was right to say that we cannot have it both ways. If something is in the Scotland Act 1998 or the Government of Wales Act 2006, it is devolved, and so what constitutes an English or Scottish matter will be very clear to the Speaker. Everyone will vote on the Budget—there is no suggestion that that will not happen—but English votes for English laws is a matter of fundamental fairness in this House, and needs to be addressed. If matters are devolved to Scotland or Wales, it should be English MPs who have the vote on those matters in England. Failing to address that fundamental unfairness undermines the integrity of this House.

Mr Andrew Turner: May I ask what the difference is between the system we are proposing and one that includes a long-term think about things, which is basically what the Labour party favours?

Antoinette Sandbach: The short answer is that I do not know, but the last time there was a constitutional convention, it took years; it was kicked into the long grass. Quite frankly, this situation needs to be dealt with now.

10.22 am

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) for securing this important debate.

I represent a border area, but in reality the border does not exist. As others have mentioned, many thousands of people from North Wales travel across it to go to work at Vauxhall in Ellesmere Port, and at many other employers in the north-west. Equally, many people from England travel the other way to work at Airbus, Toyota, Deeside industrial park and many other places. Our road and rail networks work east to west, but do not work particularly well north to south. The Mersey Dee Alliance has worked well to promote the region as economically important not only to North Wales but to the north-west of England.

I and many other MPs from North Wales rightfully think that we should have a view on what happens on both sides of the border, as it affects the people we represent, but clearly the Government, with their usual approach, are trying to find a short-term solution to a long-term problem and have come up with a bit of a dog's breakfast.

Mr David Jones: The hon. Gentleman speaks of short-termism. Does he not agree that the devolution settlement was lashed up hastily by the then Labour Government?

Mark Tami: I do not. The right hon. Gentleman is always blaming someone else. He and his party have been in government for some time now. Surely they should take some responsibility.

Time is short, so I will set out just one example: healthcare. People in Alyn and Deeside use healthcare on both sides of the border, as has been touched on. Our children's hospital is the Alder Hey, our heart hospital is Broadgreen, and we use services at Gobowen, the Christie and Clatterbridge.

The hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (James Davies) mentioned the Countess of Chester hospital. It may be in Chester, but it was built to serve the people of Chester and Deeside. The previous MP for Chester used to stand up in the Chamber and talk about thousands of people from north-east Wales flooding across the border to go to that hospital. It is their hospital; it was built to serve the people of both Chester and north-east Wales—in particular the people of Alyn and Deeside. There are representatives on its council of governors from Flintshire and Wrexham. They have their view, and rightfully so. If those Welsh patients did not use it and the hospital served only the catchment area of Chester, I question whether it would be viable. Many people in Alyn and Deeside are registered with doctors and dentists on the English side of the border and vice versa. We are a particular and very different region.

Where does this start and end? Are the Government saying that because policing and transport powers are devolved to the Mayor of London and the London

Assembly, London MPs should not have a view on those issues—is that what we are saying? We are talking about giving powers to city regions—will the MPs from those areas not be allowed to have a view? The question that no one has answered, although lots of Members have asked it, is: what is an English-only law? The Government need to decide where they stand. Are they going to treat people equally, and do they actually believe in the United Kingdom?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. Two Members are indicating that they still wish to speak, and there is not much time left, so I hope they will keep their remarks short.

10.27 am

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): I will be brief, Mr Crausby. The definition of an English-only law is crucial to this debate. The problem is that the Government are leaving us completely in the dark. We are having this debate only because my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), whom I congratulate, initiated it. I put down a question for the Secretary of State for Wales about what consultation he had had with the people of Wales on proposals for English votes for English laws. That question was transferred to the Leader of the House. I believe that virtually no consultation has taken place.

Guto Bebb *rose*—

Ian C. Lucas: I do not have time to give way, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

Not only has the Secretary of State not consulted the people of Wales, but he has not consulted Members of Parliament. There has been no discussion whatever with MPs on the issue. It is a crucial point. Mr Speaker will need to have the wisdom of Solomon to determine what is an English-only law. The first thing he should do is visit North Wales and Cheshire. Our region is unique in the United Kingdom and exemplifies why this question is so difficult.

I expect nationalists to divide, separate and try to have a culture of blame between each part of our country. I do not expect those of us who believe in the United Kingdom to argue in favour of division or separateness. Whatever our political backgrounds, we should stand together to work out a proper way of doing this, with consultation. That is what we need.

I will make a proposal. There are Members from North Wales who take a sensible approach to the matter. Representatives of the Mersey Dee Alliance are here in Parliament today. We need an all-party group for the Mersey-Dee region, to put the case in Parliament for a cross-border economic and cultural environment. We have that opportunity within the context of this debate. We need the Government to start to listen. Their ignorance is palpable, and they have closed their ears.

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): I ask for a very short contribution from Paul Flynn.

10.30 am

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Devolution as given by the English nationalist party is a grudging gift. The party has never been enthusiastic for it at all, but we see it doling out little bits of power here and there, as long as doing so can solve immediate problems. Now there is a crisis, because the terrifying experience for the English nationalist party of the Scottish referendum induced panic. It went along with a vow and then came back and introduced this false solution of EVEL—English votes for English laws. It is self-defeating for the party, because the more it feeds the beast of English nationalism, which has lain dormant for a long time, the more it will deepen the divide between England and Wales, England and Scotland and England and Ireland.

We used to talk about a slippery slope in 1979. Some people wanted devolution because they thought that it was a dangerous slippery slope, and others supported it because they knew that it was a beneficial one, but we are on a new slope now, and we are moving towards the breakup of the United Kingdom. The best way to achieve that, which I am sure is not the intention, is English votes for English laws.

10.31 am

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this morning, Mr Crausby. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) on securing this short but important debate. I have visited North Wales and his constituency and I canvassed there during the by-election for the Welsh Assembly—I must concede to the hon. Gentleman that it was not for his party. I was delighted with the result we saw for Plaid Cymru that evening.

We have never had a measure quite like English votes for English laws. We have heard a little about the historical context and precedents, but we have to go back to the days of Gladstone before we find anything like it being attempted in this House. In those days, there were Members of Parliament from a nation that decided that it wanted its own constitutional future, just as there are now. We can see what happened when the Government tried to impose such a law in the House then, and history's judgment. The Government of that day realised very quickly that the plans were unworkable and withdrew them.

One might think that something of such constitutional significance and historical importance would be subject to the utmost parliamentary scrutiny—wide-ranging consultative pre-legislative scrutiny and a full debate.

Susan Elan Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I am sorry, but I cannot give way, because I have to leave time for the Front Benchers.

Instead, the proposal has been rushed through at breakneck speed. We learned yesterday from the press that the Leader of the House of Commons intends to bring forward his proposals before recess—before anybody has had an opportunity to try to understand and assess what is going on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) and several other Members have consistently and continually asked the Leader of the House to start to explain a little about the process and

[*Pete Wishart*]

how this matter will be determined. All we hear in return is that he will bring his proposals to the House soon. I think we know that, because he has said it on several occasions, but why can he not answer basic questions about what is proposed? Is what the Government are trying to do with EVEL a state secret?

We need a debate. We have to understand what is going on, because it will impact on my rights to represent my constituents effectively in the House. It will have an impact on the ability of everyone who has contributed to the debate to represent properly the people who elected us to do our jobs here.

Mr Andrew Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I do not have time to take interventions.

It is important that we have a proper debate and proper scrutiny. We know a little about EVEL because William Hague presented his Command Paper at the end of the last Parliament. We have a sort of EVEL hokey cokey. It looks as though Welsh and Scottish Members will be gatekeepers to Bills—we will all get an opportunity to debate and vote on Second Reading. Then we will all be sent away and there will presumably be some sort of English Grand Committee, where the English Members will work on a Bill and cross the t's and dot the i's. The Bill will then come back to us again and, bizarrely, after English Members have done all the work on a Bill, we will get an opportunity to vote it down if we do not like it. Have you ever heard anything so bizarre or absurd, Mr Crausby? We will leave the English Members to do all the work and then decide whether we like what they have done. No wonder so many English Members are furious about the suggestion and do not like the proposals. It is a bizarre way to go forward.

The proposed arrangement will place the Speaker in the most invidious political situation possible, as it will be up to him to determine whether Bills are English only. We see in the Command Paper that the only people he will consult are the Clerks. He has to do better than that. He has to consult the Welsh Assembly. He has to consult the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament to ensure that there is no Scottish consequence or impact—these things need to be determined. And it will not be open to legal challenge—that is the real reason why the Government are not bringing forward legislation. The constitution unit told us clearly that if it was introduced through legislation, there would be the possibility and option of legal challenge—the constituents we represent would be able to challenge something decided in this House. The Government are pursuing the idea of Speaker certification to take it out of the hands of the law, so that no one will have the opportunity to raise questions about its legality. That is unfair and bizarre. It is no way to proceed with something so important. We must have a say. I pity the Speaker of the House of Commons; he will be placed in a political situation of determining whether something has an impact on or consequence for the constituents we represent. That is not fair. No wonder the Speaker is anxious and nervous about being given such powers.

Mr Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: Can he not hear? Is he incapable of hearing, Mr Crausby? [*Interruption.*]

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) is clearly not giving way.

Pete Wishart: I will finish with what has happened over the past few days. I am sure that Members from Wales, and certainly Members from Scotland, are carefully watching.

Albert Owen: And Northern Ireland.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman is right. In the past few days, we have had the Scotland Bill and a series of amendments that the Scottish Parliament decided were necessary. They were agreed with the Scottish Parliament. We put the amendments to the House—56 out of the 59 democratically elected MPs from Scotland, reflecting the will of the Scottish people in those amendments. What happened? English Members voted them down. If EVEL is good enough for them, what about WWVL, Welsh votes for Welsh laws, or ScVScL, Scots votes for Scots laws? English Members are happy to turn up to Scottish and Welsh questions, as they should, but this has to work both ways. We cannot have English Members voting down the settled will of the Scottish people that comes to this House though 56 out of the 59 MPs and then demanding that we have no say over legislation that will have an impact on—a severe one in some cases—and have financial consequences for our constituents.

There is an elegant solution. It is called federalism. It is called doing things properly, and that is what we again put to the House. We do everything in terms of collecting our taxes and making our own decisions, and we come together in the United Kingdom Parliament to determine foreign affairs and defence issues. We put that elegant solution to the House. As long as we have asymmetric devolution, which never seems to satisfy English Members, our Welsh friends or us, we will always be revisiting the arrangement and it will always be untidy. There will always be problems and issues, but that is what the Government want and they will have to accept the consequences. It will never be neat and tidy. We will always have issues to deal with and tidy up.

Unless we adopt the solution, which we will offer again and again throughout this Parliament, whereby this nation comes as close to federalism as possible, as was promised during the referendum, we will never resolve a situation in which one nation makes up something like 80% to 85% of the population of this country. Unless we get close to federalism, we will continue to revisit this issue, we will never resolve it and we will have debates, like this one, in which no one is happy about something in the United Kingdom. We have great unhappiness in Scotland, England and Wales. For goodness'

sake, let us sort it out and get it fixed. Let us have federalism and ensure that everybody knows what they are dealing with.

10.39 am

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) on obtaining the debate. The debate has been attended by 23 Members, which shows the level of interest in Parliament, although it is odd that no Plaid Cymru Members attended. However, the nationalist position was put well by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart).

The devolution genie is well and truly out of the bottle, which is probably a good thing, as it allows people to make decisions closer to their place of impact. However, here in the United Kingdom devolution is permissive, asymmetric and uneven. There is an understandable need to devolve more powers and responsibility to the English regions, but the thorny question is how to do that in a balanced, proper way. We have separate Assemblies in Wales, Northern Ireland and London, with a Parliament in Scotland, but nothing in England between the UK Government and local authorities. The space is now being filled with a rush to devolve powers to city regions such as Greater Manchester, which raises significant questions about accountability and generates a debate about the value and purpose of the United Kingdom, what powers it is appropriate to keep at which level, and what powers should be devolved and to whom. Those are difficult questions with uncertain answers.

Into that quagmire the Prime Minister went on the morning after the Scottish people spoke so clearly and strongly in favour of remaining in the United Kingdom, when he chose to proclaim boldly on the steps of Downing Street the notion of English votes for English laws. It was neither the time nor the place for him to behave as the leader of a political party rather than as the United Kingdom's Prime Minister. Mischief making and political posturing are not the way to determine how our nation should proceed on this difficult question. It is far too important for that. The challenge demands statesmanship, careful thought and inclusive action.

We are sometimes obsessed with borders, but the reality, as today's debate demonstrates, is that real people do not live contained and constrained by borders. As my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) perceptively observed, in reality the border does not exist. Real life is complicated and messy. In 2012 the McKay commission was quite properly given the task of considering how the House of Commons might deal with legislation that affected only part of the United Kingdom, following the devolution of certain legislative powers to the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the National Assembly for Wales. In the report of March 2013, McKay concluded that the

"use of a specially-constituted public bill committee with an English or English-and-Welsh party balance is the minimum needed as an effective means of allowing the voice from England (or England-and-Wales) to be heard; it would retain the opportunity at report stage for amendments to be made to a bill to implement compromises between the committee's amendments and the Government's view, or even— though we would expect rarely— overriding in the House what was done in committee".

Done in the right way, that has the potential to be a sensible reform, which would strengthen English and Welsh voices without creating two classes of MP. It must now be properly and fully considered.

We must not inadvertently undermine the union of nations that is the United Kingdom by pushing forward hasty proposals drawn up in secret or pursuing partisan positions. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire is right when he says that that needs the utmost scrutiny. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn is also right when he warns of the danger that English votes for English laws will be a sticking plaster that causes more problems, and when he calls for a UK convention on constitutional rights.

Albert Owen: One of the best examples of the anomalies in the proposal was transport in London. Is that an England-only or a London-only issue? It is not just a question of the three nations outside England; questions arise within England.

Nic Dakin: My hon. Friend is right, and further devolution across England raises more such questions. That is why the issue is complicated and messy, needing time to get it right, rather than a rush to something that will make things much worse.

Hon. Members have raised important questions, which should be properly considered. We need to ensure that the voices of residents of North Wales continue to be heard through their elected representatives. Wales is a small country, but it is well integrated within England, as we have heard. It has received more powers in the 16 years since the Welsh Assembly was created: it now has primary law-making powers, and it is getting financial powers in the form of control over stamp duty, landfill taxes and business rates. The Government, as the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones), reminded us, will introduce a Wales Bill later this year which will devolve further powers to Wales in the areas of energy, transport and the environment. We welcome that.

It is right that we recognise the need to reflect the devolution settlement in the way that Westminster works, but we must also take into account the integrated nature of the economy and society in North Wales. Many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), made it clear how closely interrelated the economies are.

Mr David Jones: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston, because he identified a democratic deficit where English Members are concerned. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Wales Bill offers a good opportunity to address those problems?

Nic Dakin: The Wales Bill represents an opportunity to explore those issues. I did not hear my hon. Friend say what the right hon. Gentleman did; I heard something quite different.

Economically the border with Wales is porous. Some 90% of the Welsh population—2.7 million people—live within 50 miles of the border on the Welsh side, and a further 13.7 million live within 50 miles of it on the English side. In aggregate, 30% of the population of

[*Nic Dakin*]

Wales and England, or more than 16 million people, live within 50 miles of the border between the two countries. It is estimated that 100,000 people travel between Wales and England for work, and just over half of that criss-cross border traffic is accounted for by people commuting in and out of North Wales. The A55 trunk road, which runs across North Wales connecting Holyhead with Chester, is crucial for business and residents.

Some people argue for Wales to take powers over income tax, but the Welsh Government already have the power to hold a referendum on whether and when to take those powers and the current Welsh Government do not see that as a priority. They argue that the more pressing issue of fair funding is the priority that must be resolved sooner rather than later. There is a danger that if income tax were to be included in EVEL and it was handled in a cack-handed way, thousands of workers who cross the border to work could find that their elected MP had a limited say over the income tax they would pay. That would be against their democratic rights.

Many people from North Wales use health services over the border in England. We have heard about the personal experience of the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (James Davies) in that respect. About 21,000 English patients are registered with Welsh or Welsh-registered GPs. Approximately 15,000 Welsh residents are registered with English or English-registered GPs. That means that about 6,000 patients flow into Welsh primary care from England. In addition, approximately 50,000 Welsh residents travelled to non-Welsh providers for treatment, including both emergency and elective patients. That far outweighs the number of non-Welsh patients admitted to Welsh hospitals; typically it is Welsh patients using specialist services at large hospitals in England, as we have heard in the debate.

Some 138 million journeys take place each year on roads and trains across the border—an average of 2.6 million journeys each week. The UK Department for Transport specifies and funds three of the four rail franchises that provide cross-border rail services between England and Wales, with the Welsh Government largely responsible for the fourth—the Wales and borders franchise. That franchise provides cross-border rail services to Manchester, Shrewsbury, Birmingham and Crewe, in addition to all rail services wholly within Wales, and is controlled by the Welsh Government. The UK Government have stated that Wales will benefit from HS2 because of additional capacity and reduced journey times on the west coast main line. Because of that it was considered a UK-wide project and no Barnett consequential was given to Wales.

All the areas I have outlined—the economy, health and transport—are examples of how defining an English policy area is not straightforward. That means that careful thought must be given to any proposals to restrict the voting rights of Welsh MPs. In any future arrangement, North Wales MPs need a full voice on matters affecting their people. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) perceptively said, everyone needs to be an equal Member in this House. I hope that the Deputy Leader of the House will unequivocally answer the question of what an English law is.

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): I call the Minister.

10.49 am

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): *Diolch yn fawr*, Mr Crausby. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) on securing this debate. The title of the debate could have led to a wide range of contributions about any aspect of North Wales, although given my connections with the area, I would have felt confident addressing some of those possible queries, and that is not just because I was a candidate in Wrexham in 2005. My mother grew up there, my relatives lived there, I went to school there and, indeed, my father is buried there; so I can assure hon. Members from North Wales and from across the border that North Wales is never far from my mind or, indeed, my heart.

Updating arrangements in this House to reflect the changing nature of the devolution settlement is important. To that end, this has been a useful and interesting debate. As promised in the Queen's Speech, the Government will bring forward changes to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons to ensure that decisions affecting England, or England and Wales, can be taken only with the consent of the majority of Members of Parliament representing constituencies in those parts of the United Kingdom. We do that in the context of further devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Government have demonstrated that they will meet their commitments to devolve further powers to those countries. It is right that that is balanced by addressing the English question. Taken as a whole, the package will deliver a fair and sustainable settlement for the whole of the Union.

Paul Flynn: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr Coffey: I shall address some points that have been raised in the debate. If I have time at the end, the hon. Gentleman may well be able to intervene then.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn said that we needed a proper convention and that the proposals are a sticking plaster. Not only did the House not support that point of view last month in a vote, but I suggest to him that that would be a handbrake on making progress with a Wales Bill and the Scotland Bill. We are making progress with the Silk commission and, as he knows, we intend to introduce a Wales Bill, and it is important that we do not add unnecessary delay to those kinds of things.

The hon. Gentleman and some of his hon. Friends have suggested that they are being denied a voice on many issues, but there is nothing in the proposals published by the Conservative party to that effect. Although there will of course be many points of detail that we will discuss and debate in due course, I genuinely assure him that many of the points raised today will, I am sure, be addressed when we publish our detailed proposals, which will happen soon, and there will be time for scrutiny.

In the meantime, I will set out some points of principle that will underpin our approach, as set out in the Conservative party's manifesto on which we won the election, including gaining a seat in North Wales—I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (James Davies) in his place. I should point out that this idea is nothing new. It was also in our 2010 manifesto, and the hon. Member for Ynys Môn contributed to a debate on the issue in 2009, so the idea is not novel.

In changing the way the House of Commons legislates, we have to balance the need for the Commons as a whole to express the voice of our entire United Kingdom with the need for English and Welsh MPs to express their voice on matters affecting England and Wales only. Our proposals will reflect that need and respect that balance by ensuring that all MPs continue to take part in the legislative process, but that relevant measures must also have the explicit support of a majority of MPs representing constituencies in England, for an England-only matter, or in England and Wales, as the case may be.

In that way, we will resolve the current position, which has now become increasingly untenable, that English or English and Welsh laws can be made without the explicit consent of the MPs whose constituents are affected. It is particularly right to progress with these proposals so that we can rectify the situation whereby hon. Members from outwith England could have a decisive impact on legislation on English constituents, not only on subject areas for which they cannot vote for their own constituents, but contrary to the views of the majority of English MPs.

Ian C. Lucas: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Coffey: I will take interventions in a bit, including from the hon. Gentleman.

I hope that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn reflects objectively on the situation I have described. Our proposals will recognise that many laws apply to England and Wales and that the West Lothian question is as relevant in Cardiff as it is in Carlisle—I suppose it could become the Delyn or the Denbigh dilemma. That is why both English and English and Welsh laws will require the explicit approval of the MPs whose constituents are affected by them.

As has been set out repeatedly by hon. Members today—and as I recognise—constituents often access services across the border, as well as councils and other trade bodies that, as we have heard, work very well together. The border is not a barrier, as the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) recognised, and I assure hon. Members that our proposals that we will introduce soon will not stop access to services for constituents nor hinder the ability of any MP to either hold the Government to account or stop them voting on legislation that affects those services. This is a popular policy, and not just in England. A study in January 2015 in Scotland found that over 50% of people supported the concept of English votes for English laws.

Let me turn to some other points made today. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) that this is an important point of principle. I recognise that, as the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) said, close working across the border matters. My right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West alluded to a potential issue, but I honestly encourage the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston to raise existing problems directly with the Welsh Assembly Government or with his Labour colleagues who are representatives in the Welsh Assembly.

As for the points made by the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman)—and stretching somewhat into those made by the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart)—I do not agree that what is proposed will create a second-class status of MPs. The hon. Lady referred to being barred from being able to help constituents, but she should recognise that she is barred now from voting to help her constituents on devolved matters. Indeed, in the last Parliament, I think the Education Bill was an England-only Bill, and I think I am also right in saying that SNP Members decided not to vote on the Second Reading of the Education and Adoption Bill. I would have thought that given the similar approach and the consistency that the SNP has shown, hon. Members should be genuinely assured that we are not seeking to do something different in that regard.

Ian C. Lucas: Does the Minister find it extraordinary that she is calling in aid a nationalist approach to legislation within the United Kingdom to justify the approach that she is now taking? Does that not mean that she is advancing a nationalist argument in favour of her case, because this is a nationalist proposal?

Dr Coffey: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman; I do not see this as a nationalist proposal. Devolution is now supported on both sides of the House, but this addresses the imbalance that English constituents feel about what has happened on the journey of devolution. I do not know why the Labour Government at the time chose not to address this issue. Perhaps the reason was that when Tony Blair was leader of the Labour party, they won elections with a majority of MPs in England and so perhaps felt unable to do that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Dr Coffey: Let me just finish addressing the issues that have been raised. I should point out that the Speaker, who is of course elected by the whole House, is already required to certify Bills, such as money Bills—I am sure that some Scottish MPs may remember the Scottish Grand Committee being convened, but I do not think it has been in over a decade. However, the situation has not proved problematic so far. There have been no legal challenges, and during a Committee on the Floor of the House, the Speaker selects the amendments on which there will be votes, so in effect he already has the power to decide who can amend laws.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Dr Coffey: I will take an intervention from my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West.

Mr David Jones: The Minister speaks of an imbalance, and I fully understand that procedural changes are necessary at this moment. In the long term, would that imbalance not be better addressed by reviewing the Welsh devolution settlement, and would a good opportunity for that not be the Wales Bill?

Dr Coffey: My right hon. Friend will have the opportunity to make that point as and when the Wales Bill is debated. Given his former office, I am sure that he is already in discussions on that point.

Mark Tami: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Coffey: I am short of time—I literally have less than a minute—so I will not be able to.

The right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) said that he might lose his voice, but he clearly has not. When we were talking about devolved Administrations and devolved matters last month, he said:

“I understand the need to ensure that people in England cannot have a say on some of those issues”—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 661.]

However, he seems to want it the other way around.

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) asked about the definition of an English-only law, and I have referred to the Education Act 2011, which went through the last Parliament. This is not about having a panic or break-up of the Union, but about settling that balance.

I wish I had time to cover all the other issues, but I just remind the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), who suggested that these things have been drawn up in secret, that Labour was invited to participate in the Cabinet Committee but refused to last year. Labour had the chance but decided not to do so.

In conclusion, we will take action to answer the West Lothian question and ensure that our constitutional settlement is fair and sustainable in the light of further devolution, and I believe that that will strengthen the Union.

10.59 am

Albert Owen: I do not think the English question has been answered, and the North Wales question has certainly not been answered when it comes to devolution. One thing that has been left hanging, even though the Minister had the opportunity to deal with it, is whether, if there was a London transport issue, that would be voted on only by London Members or by those from the rest of England—it would not be England-only, but London-only. We are talking about the UK transport system having all UK MPs—from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales—all voting with equal status. That was the purpose of today’s debate. That is how we should be going forward.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered English Votes for English Laws and North Wales.

Fibromyalgia

11 am

Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered treatment of fibromyalgia.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time in this Parliament, Mr Crausby. I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to his place. He did brilliant work in his two Departments in the last Parliament, and I am sure that he will continue to excel during this Parliament.

I want to use this debate to throw a spotlight on a not particularly well known or medically well researched, but incredibly debilitating condition: fibromyalgia. I shall set out the views of some of those suffering from the condition, highlight the treatment currently available to help sufferers and, ultimately, make a few suggestions as to what can practically be done to improve life quality for those debilitated by fibromyalgia.

The last debate that I held in Westminster Hall was on sentencing for dangerous driving. That attracted a significant level of interest from and participation by fellow Members from across the House. As you can see, Mr Crausby, today’s debate has attracted a more modest level of interest. That is not because fibromyalgia is not a serious medical condition, but simply because it is not particularly well known, not least within some parts of the medical community.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a critical issue is awareness—both public awareness and the awareness of sufferers themselves of what help is available? To give just one example, local support groups can be tremendously helpful. This is a two-track issue: it is about public awareness and the awareness of sufferers themselves.

Alok Sharma: Yes, of course; the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I shall go on to provide more details of what is going on locally and perhaps what we ought to be doing nationally.

I first learnt about the condition almost by accident a few years ago, through a chance conversation with some constituents. Since then, through the work of the excellent Reading fibromyalgia support group, which meets regularly in my constituency, I have been able to learn more about fibromyalgia and meet many of the people locally who are trying to cope with the condition, as well as medical practitioners who are focused on helping sufferers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this issue to Westminster Hall for consideration. In my constituency, many people have come to me with disability living allowance claims, which is where my interest in and knowledge of fibromyalgia comes from. What concerns me greatly as a result of the correspondence and communication that I have had with my constituents is that GPs seem not always to be aware of the symptoms of fibromyalgia. That means that the figure for diagnosis in Northern Ireland is only 3%, yet we have a significantly larger number of people who have the disease. Does the hon. Gentleman think we need greater awareness among GPs to start with and then we can address the issue?

Alok Sharma: Yes, of course; the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. A common theme is emerging among colleagues participating in the debate.

Let me describe fibromyalgia. It is a long-term condition that causes pain all over the body. As well as widespread pain, people with fibromyalgia may have increased sensitivity to pain, fatigue, muscle stiffness, difficulty sleeping, problems with mental processes, headaches and problems with their bowel and stomach.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He mentions the severe pain that sufferers endure. My constituent, Mrs Joanne Kirkby, suffers from this terrible condition. Is he aware that most of the pain relief treatment centres in mainland Great Britain are within England and that if a patient comes from Wales, it is necessary to go through an extremely lengthy and complicated bureaucratic process to access treatment at, for example, the Bath pain relief centre?

Alok Sharma: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. Perhaps the Minister, in his response, will comment on where treatment is available and where pain clinics are situated.

The exact cause of fibromyalgia is unknown, but it is thought to be related to abnormal levels of certain chemicals in the brain and changes in the way the central nervous system processes pain messages carried around the body. It is also suggested that some people are more likely to develop fibromyalgia because of genes inherited from their parents. In many cases, the condition appears to be triggered by a physically or emotionally stressful event, such as an injury or infection, giving birth, having an operation, the breakdown of a relationship or the death of a loved one. The key point is that anyone can develop fibromyalgia, although it affects about seven times more women than men.

The condition typically develops between the ages of 30 and 50, but can occur in people of any age, including children and the elderly. Exactly how many people are affected by fibromyalgia is not clear, although research has suggested that it could be a relatively common condition. Some estimates suggest that nearly one in 20 people in the UK may be affected by the condition to some degree. Of course, one of the main reasons why it is not clear precisely how many people are affected is that fibromyalgia can be difficult to diagnose. There is no specific test for the condition, and the symptoms can be similar to those of a number of other ailments.

Living with fibromyalgia can be incredibly debilitating. Ahead of today's debate, a number of local people emailed me about their experiences of coping with fibromyalgia. I want to read out some extracts from the heartfelt and moving words that they sent me. A father of young children writes:

"I have had Fibromyalgia for a couple of years now. My life and that of immediate family has changed significantly in adapting to and attempting to cope with my condition.

I am unable to continue working as a qualified accountant, as my ability to read, write and concentrate have all been significantly affected. I suffer with 'Fibro-fog', a difficulty in recalling words or train of thought where the mind goes blank...I find it impossible to switch off from the pain, as it is constantly moving as though it is being scattered around my body.

I, and many of the members of the Reading Fibromyalgia group, experience the lack of understanding of others due to the ignorance relating to this condition that we suffer. As we appear whole there is often a lack of compassion from others and we can be made to feel as though we are malingerers. I have always had a strong work ethic and believe in setting a good example to my children; if I could work then I would work.

My hope now is that there will be a greater understanding of Fibromyalgia and how limiting this condition can be on the individual."

A female sufferer writes:

"My typical day starts with trying to get my body working. My joints are so stiff with pain that I have to sit on the side of the bed and massage my shoulders, lower back, my knees, elbows and hands. It takes an hour to get showered and dressed. I do feel a failure if I have to get my husband to come and help me.

After having problems with pain, exhaustion and fatigue for several years, they then turned into depression, stress and anxiety. My G.P. finally diagnosed me with Fibromyalgia.

In 2013 I went along to our local Fibromyalgia Support Group...I went in the room and saw that there was 'nothing different' with these people. I was reduced to tears to find that they were all like me, young and old, male or female, and that I was 'Not a Fraud'."

Another submission that I received was from a male sufferer. He writes:

"Living with Fibro is often difficult and it's like we have a volume control button that is broken at maximum setting—sometimes the pain and stiffness abate with medication, exercise where we are able to do so and so forth but it always comes back later in the day or within a day or two of doing too much activity.

Depression in people with Fibro is common" because of

"the life we used to live but many no longer can. This adds to the stress and tension and it can become a vicious circle. Exhaustion is common as well.

The lack of understanding and sympathy from other people including importantly the medical profession makes it all the harder to bear. Yet Fibromyalgia has been recognised by the World Health Organisation since the 1970s as a chronic and long-term health condition. Thousands if not millions of people worldwide have Fibro either diagnosed or not so but they display the symptoms.

Yet people still think we're making it up, which is very disheartening to us; some even are abusive to us because they don't understand."

Ahead of this debate, I spoke to many fibromyalgia sufferers, and colleagues who have contributed have clearly done the same. They will have heard the same things as I heard from constituents and in emails from people across the country, detailing their own experiences of coping with this debilitating condition. Three common themes emerge. First, fibromyalgia is not well enough understood by GPs and the medical profession, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, and there seems to be no significant research effort to find a cure. Secondly, as a result, there is no consistency of approach or care across the country in helping sufferers to deal with the effects of fibromyalgia—exactly the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones). Thirdly, the condition is not well enough understood by the general public or employers, and sufferers have told me that they have faced discrimination in the workplace as well as the wider community. That is completely unacceptable.

At this point, I want to mention the good work of the Fibromyalgia Association UK, which today merges with FibroAction to speak up with a louder voice for sufferers

[Alok Sharma]

of fibromyalgia, provide national helplines and raise awareness of the condition with GPs. Although knowledge is inconsistent within the GP and health community, there are pockets of excellence. Last October I was invited to the one-year anniversary celebrations of the re-launched Reading fibromyalgia support group. There I met with Dr Antoni Chan, a consultant rheumatologist and physician at the Royal Berkshire hospital, who gave a presentation on the ongoing research aimed at understanding the condition and developing treatments. I also met Dr Deepak Ravindran, a consultant pain specialist at the Berkshire pain clinic. The clinic offers a comprehensive service, starting with expert diagnosis and followed up by medical treatment, which is complemented by good support from specialists in physiotherapy and psychology—a truly multi-disciplinary approach. I pay tribute to Dr Chan and Dr Ravindran for the excellent work they are doing to help fibromyalgia sufferers in Berkshire.

As a result of that meeting, I wrote to north-west Reading clinical commissioning group last November, providing a copy of the pamphlet on fibromyalgia that Dr Ravindran has produced and asking the CCG to promote understanding of the condition among the local general practitioner community. Dr Ravindran recently informed me that the need for an integrated and collaborative approach to managing fibromyalgia has been recognised locally, and a community pain service in the Reading area will start in September. That will be a collaboration between the Royal Berkshire hospital and the Berkshire healthcare NHS foundation trust, and its vision is to provide fibromyalgia-specific pain management programmes. That is good news for fibromyalgia sufferers in Reading and Berkshire, but, as other colleagues and I have remarked, the approach is inconsistent across the country.

I have three asks for the Minister and the NHS. First, education and knowledge of fibromyalgia must be improved among GPs and other healthcare professionals, and awareness of new diagnostic criteria must be increased and disseminated more widely. Secondly, strategies that provide an integrated and holistic service with patient empowerment as key must be promoted and developed, because patients need to be involved in decision making and the management of their condition. Thirdly, the aim should be to set up a network of fibromyalgia clinics across the country, so that patients who have had a flare-up of the condition have somewhere to go for treatment other than A&E or hospital.

My final point is about raising awareness of the condition more generally. Jeanne Hambleton, a freelance journalist and health writer, has informed me that last year she wrote to two well-known TV soap operas and asked whether one of the characters could be diagnosed with fibromyalgia to raise viewers' awareness of the condition. Sadly, she did not hear back from the producers of either programme. I have no doubt that many people watch debates on Parliament TV, but it is safe to venture that many, many more watch soap operas. If the producers of "Casualty" or "Holby City" are watching the debate, they may want to get back to Ms Hambleton about her suggestion. I look forward to the Minister's response.

11.14 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences (George Freeman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma) on securing a debate on this important issue. In his constituency, he has shown great support for his local fibromyalgia patient group by advocating on its behalf, raising money and raising the profile of the disease, which is so debilitating for its sufferers. He has helped the group to continue its important work of improving awareness of the condition and providing advice to patients and their families. I pay tribute to the work of FMA UK, other fibromyalgia charities and the many patient support groups around the country who work tirelessly to raise the profile of the disease and support those who are affected by it. I welcome today's merger of FMA UK and FibroAction, which will help to give a stronger patient voice to those who are affected.

Fibromyalgia is an incurable musculoskeletal condition of unknown cause that can have a debilitating impact on those who are affected. Although no exact figures are available, research suggests that fibromyalgia affects around 2.5 million patients in the UK, the majority of whom are women over the age of 40. Fibromyalgia symptoms affect the soft tissues, muscles, tendons and ligaments of the body and result in widespread and variable pain throughout the body. Poor-quality, non-refreshing sleep contributes to an ongoing cycle of chronic pain and fatigue, and, in some cases, poor concentration and short-term memory problems. Irritable bowel syndrome, restless legs, head and neck pain and sensitivity to temperature change are also associated symptoms of fibromyalgia. The symptoms and their severity differ from patient to patient.

Diagnosing the symptoms of fibromyalgia can be challenging for GPs. Some 20% of the general population consult their GP about a musculoskeletal problem each year, which amounts to more than 100,000 consultations a day. The symptoms of fibromyalgia are common to other conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, lupus and chronic fatigue syndrome. In addition, patients with fibromyalgia can often visibly appear well, despite their symptoms. GPs face a further obstacle because there is no diagnostic test that accurately identifies the condition. A diagnosis is usually made via a process of diagnostic investigation to exclude other potential causes of the patient's ill health. It is, therefore, important that clinicians have the training, tools and resources to help them identify fibromyalgia symptoms when a patient presents.

Musculoskeletal conditions are a key part of the generalist undergraduate MBBS medical curriculum. The General Medical Council requires that the MBBS curriculum provides enough structured clinical placements to enable students to demonstrate the outcomes for graduates across a range of clinical specialties, including musculoskeletal health. Musculoskeletal health is also a key component of GP training, and the Royal College of General Practitioners' curriculum statement on musculoskeletal conditions sets out that GPs should be able to diagnose and manage common regional pain syndromes such as fibromyalgia.

In addition to their clinical training and experience, GPs have at their disposal a number of tools and resources. They include: the Map of Medicine, an online evidence-based guide and clinical decision support tool

available to GPs and other healthcare professionals in the NHS, which has a fibromyalgia and chronic pain pathway, and helps clinicians to identify the symptoms and make the right referral; a free e-learning course on musculoskeletal care, including fibromyalgia, developed by the RCGP and Arthritis Research UK, which aims to improve skills in diagnosing and managing musculoskeletal conditions; NHS evidence services, which provide access to a vast online repository of clinical knowledge and guidance covering a wide range of conditions, including fibromyalgia; and a fibromyalgia medical guide for health professionals developed by FMA UK.

Once a patient is diagnosed with fibromyalgia, a number of treatment options are available to them. In the absence of a cure, relieving pain and restoring quality of life are the primary clinical goals. Treatment options include pain relieving medication, physiotherapy, dietary and exercise advice, counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy, and self-management programmes to give patients the skills and confidence to manage their condition. The routine assessment and management of pain is a required competency of all health professionals. Many patients can have their fibromyalgia successfully managed through routine access to locally commissioned services via GPs, and community and secondary care services. I will turn to my hon. Friend's point about specialist clinics in a moment.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma) and I asked how we can raise awareness within the GP profession to ensure that GPs understand the symptoms of fibromyalgia and diagnose it earlier. As I pointed out in my intervention, only 3% of people in Northern Ireland have been diagnosed with the condition, but the number of people who suffer from it is far larger. There seems to be a gap between those who have been diagnosed and those who have not. Is that because GPs are not really aware of the condition? How can we make them more aware?

George Freeman: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point, and he is helping to raise awareness today. I will pass on the points made today to the team at NHS England with responsibility for this issue. The answer to the question on awareness is to support debates such as this, and to promote the work of the charity and the patient advocacy groups.

The routine assessment of pain is a required competency for all healthcare professionals. However, patients who remain in high levels of pain after conventional approaches to treatment have failed are able to access specialised pain services, which are nationally commissioned by NHS England. Patients referred to such services receive multidisciplinary team care from clinicians with expertise in pain management.

Mr David Jones: The Minister heard my earlier intervention, and he now mentions specialised pain relief centres, most of which are located in England. He also heard my points about the bureaucratic difficulties experienced by patients living in Wales when accessing such centres in England. Will he liaise with his colleagues in the Welsh Government on whether a smoother path can be achieved for patients from Wales?

George Freeman: My right hon. Friend is an outspoken advocate for addressing such needs in Wales, in health as in other issues. He will know that pain centres in England are distributed evenly, but they are a devolved matter in Wales and the other devolved Administrations. I will happily write to the relevant people in Wales to highlight the importance of this condition and what we are trying to do in England, and to encourage them to adopt similar best practice. I cannot vouch for their response and, as in other areas, it is a matter for the local Assembly, but I will happily pick that up.

In addition to the specialised pain services that are available, a number of NHS trusts provide dedicated fibromyalgia clinics, such as that at the Royal National hospital for rheumatic diseases in Bath. That clinic offers expert support and advice, as well as a fibromyalgia coping skills programme to facilitate self-management. Some constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Reading West have raised concerns about the co-ordination of their care; I reassure him and them that improving care and support for people with long-term conditions, and improving the co-ordination of that care, is a central ambition of this Government, as reflected in our mandate to the NHS.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Is there not also a social aspect to this—the issue of sufferers being able to support each other? I am delighted to hear the Minister's point about co-ordination, because improving co-ordination is crucial to such support being more widely and more consistently available across the UK.

George Freeman: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Such co-ordination is happening across different therapeutic areas. Charities have a role in providing a strong voice for patient empowerment. Patient networks, increasingly including social media, allow us to advance the voice of disease sufferers in research, treatment and patient support. I am delighted by the news of today's amalgamation of the two charities, which can only be a good thing for developing wider understanding and a patient voice in new treatment pathways.

We want everyone with a long-term condition—currently around 15 million people—to be offered a personalised care plan that sets out their needs and preferences for care. Martin McShane, who is responsible for improving outcomes for long-term conditions at NHS England, and Peter Kay, the national clinical director for musculoskeletal care, are working hard to make that happen. I will ensure that the points raised today are passed on to them as part of that work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading West mentioned research. Nationally, the Department of Health has substantially increased overall medical research investment from £885 million a year in 2010 to the more than £1 billion allocated for 2015-16. The usual practice of the Department's National Institute for Health Research, for which I am responsible, is not to ring-fence funds for expenditure on particular topics but to invite and assess research proposals in all areas. Although no fibromyalgia projects are currently funded by the NIHR, the European Commission is contributing nearly €6 million to a project seeking better ways of treating chronic pain, including fibromyalgia. I look forward to the results after the project ends in 2018, and I urge hon. and right hon.

[George Freeman]

Members who are present, Fibromyalgia Action UK and the patients it represents to feed their comments into that project and to welcome the results.

We are considering further ways to showcase the world-class research funded by the NIHR, and we are working in this place, and with the public and charities, to drive accountability. I am working with the NIHR to put together a parliamentary open day to allow Members such as those who have spoken today to see where the £1 billion a year is spent, and to work with charities and patient groups on making applications.

A number of colleagues on both sides of the House have talked about discrimination in the workplace, which is a serious concern for people both in my hon. Friend's constituency and in local fibromyalgia support groups. It is completely unacceptable if patients with long-term conditions are misrepresented as malingerers at work. Historically, we have seen that happen with other conditions, and as research and understanding of the disease develop, we need to be aware that people who present with conditions that are not well understood may be suffering from diseases that have yet to be properly diagnosed. People with long-term disabling conditions are rightly protected from discrimination in the workplace under the Equality Act 2010. Where a disability, such as one arising from a long-term condition, has been established, the Act requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that the disabled are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared with their non-disabled colleagues. Failure of an employer in that regard could amount to direct disability discrimination under the Act.

My hon. Friend and a number of others spoke about the establishment of a network of specialist fibromyalgia clinics. We are aware of a number of dedicated fibromyalgia clinics across the UK, including the UK's leading centre at the Royal National hospital for rheumatic diseases in Bath, but I will write to Martin McShane, the head of long-term conditions at NHS England, to ask whether more formal networks can be established and whether, with the support of active patients and charities, there is more we can do to develop such groups and to help them to support research into developing new treatments and pathways.

I genuinely thank my hon. Friend for his tireless constituency work to raise this issue, and I congratulate him on securing this debate. So much medicine begins with the small voice of misunderstood patients who get together through charities to promote research, to raise the profile of a disease in this place and elsewhere, to build a head of steam, to bid for research projects—the NIHR stands open and ready to receive bids—and to build cross-party support. I have no doubt that, in the years to come, this work, this discussion and this topic will come to be seen as one of those occasions when the more we come to understand a condition, the more we drive research into cure and diagnosis and the more we improve treatment across the NHS. I warmly welcome his leadership in bringing fibromyalgia to the House's attention today.

Question put and agreed to.

11.28 am

Sitting suspended.

Operational Productivity in NHS Providers

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Given the temperature today, colleagues may remove their jackets if they so choose.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered operational productivity in NHS providers.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard, and I welcome the Minister to his role. I believe this may be his first Westminster Hall debate, and I am greatly pleased that I am the Member who secured the debate.

The national health service featured heavily in the recent general election campaign. I recall speaking at several hustings and telling my constituents that I recognised that this Parliament would witness an increasing demand on NHS services. On occasion I was challenged on how the additional £8 billion highlighted by the Stevens review would be found. My response, then and now, is that the greatest efficiencies can be identified within current services without undermining patient care. Such a view is shared by Simon Stevens, but most interestingly it is a view shared by others, including my constituents Philip Braham and David Green, who established a medical recruitment company called Remedium Partners. I am pleased that both gentlemen are here today in the Public Gallery.

Having met Mr Braham and Mr Green before the election, I was eager to re-establish contact with them earlier this month to discuss their ideas about NHS efficiency in employment. It is possible that more cynical Members will say that this is more evidence of the Conservative party seeking to introduce greater private sector involvement in the NHS for others to make a profit, but that would be an incorrect assertion to make. In fact, I found our discussion focusing on opportunities to save the NHS more money and prevent its resources being plundered by unscrupulous individuals.

The publication of Lord Carter of Coles' interim report, "Review of Operational Productivity in NHS providers"—the title of this debate—two days before our meeting could not have been more fortuitous. The report outlined four areas where Lord Carter believes greater efficiencies could be achieved to allow additional moneys to be spent on front-line care. One objective in seeking today's debate was to air the issues and to place them on the public record. Lord Carter's efficiencies within the NHS include saving £1 billion from improved hospital pharmacy and medicines optimisation, £1 billion from the NHS estate, £1 billion from improvements to procurement management, and £2 billion from improvements in workflow and encompassing workforce costs.

Workforce costs is the area that I intend to focus on in this debate, as I have discussed it directly with my constituents and because just a 1% increase in workforce productivity could achieve as much as £400 million of savings. This is a significant and important area of the

work of the NHS. Lord Carter believes that the £2 billion figure would be achieved without making anyone redundant and without seeking to increase the responsibilities of staff, nor would it mean decreased levels of remuneration for future employees. What it does mean is a greater command of management control on non-productive time, which are the periods when staff emphasis is not on direct patient care—days and shifts of annual leave, sickness and training. It also includes better management of rosters, improved guidance on appropriate staffing levels and skill ranges for certain types of wards.

The NHS is one of the largest employers in this country, employing more than 1.3 million staff in more than 300 different types of roles. In the last year that figures were available, the cost to the NHS budget was £45.3 billion, the largest proportion of the £118 billion budget. The cost of nurses alone totals £19 billion, and with the increased number required for safer staffing and a third increase in the number of nurses leaving the profession in the past two years, the reliance on agency nurses will see this figure rising.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): When the hon. Gentleman talks about increasing the productivity of staff, can he itemise which staff he is referring to and say how much would actually be saved?

Dr Offord: We are talking about all the different staff. There are 300 different roles of employment in the NHS, so we are talking about everyone across the NHS, but I hope later in my speech to come to the specifics of clinicians and the use of agency staff for that sort of role.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. In my constituency in north Cumbria there is a hospital with a large number of agency staff, which has been a problem for some considerable time. I understand the need to employ agency staff, but does he agree that it would be far better to have staff employed directly by the hospital, as that would improve patient care and staff morale and also—to echo his point—improve the costs and productivity of that hospital?

Dr Offord: I certainly do agree with that point, and I hope to elaborate further on that. I also wish to touch on the use of bank nurses, or bank employees, who periodically work for parts of the NHS. I agree that for patient care it would be best to have full-time permanent staff who not only know the patients and the hospitals, but know the other employees they work with on a day-to-day basis.

Most worryingly, Lord Carter identified the fact that, in some of the 22 hospitals he surveyed, bank nurses are remunerated at a level that does not discourage them from remaining with, or moving to, agencies. I looked at the website of one of the trusts that took part in the review by Lord Carter and was surprised to see the range and number of bank employees—including, ironically, the position of the e-roster co-ordinator. I will not name that particular trust, as this debate is not a “name and shame” exercise, but I raise it to illustrate the point, because if such a role is vacant, what hope can there be to ensure that other clinical positions are staffed suitably?

The e-roster co-ordinator is in the best position to monitor employment and identify irregularities in work patterns to prevent fraudulent practices. The majority of people who work for the NHS are honest, but there are a minority who seek to defraud its resources. I want to highlight the types of fraud that occur. Such fraud involves staff and professionals who claim money for services not provided or more money than they are entitled to, or who divert funds to themselves. It can also involve external organisations that provide false or misleading information, including invoices, to claim money they are not entitled to. Some of these frauds can be fairly low value, but they can often cost the NHS hundreds of thousands of pounds.

One example is Michael Botham, a hospital worker in Stoke-on-Trent who claimed nearly £20,000 for shifts he did not work. He applied for work via a recruitment agency, AMG Nursing and Care Services, in October 2007. He was then assigned as an unqualified healthcare worker to Bucknall hospital in Stoke-on-Trent, where he worked in the complex needs ward. Most worryingly, it took a ward manager to identify an overspend and to report their suspicions about Botham to the trust’s local counter-fraud specialist team. When the team analysed his timesheets, they revealed that he had submitted false claims for work from 1 January to 26 July 2009, complete with forged authorisation. In fact, he had worked only one shift during that period.

Botham also claimed payment for four shifts at Bradwell hospital, part of the same trust, in January 2009. Again, he had not worked those shifts and the authorising signatures were also false. In total, the trust overpaid £19,362 as a result of his false claims to the agency, which invoiced the trust in good faith on a weekly basis, but subsequently, to its credit, offered to pay back its fees of £3,956.50. This is a clear case of an individual deciding to defraud the NHS, but what is concerning is that the problem emerged only as a result of the scrutiny of another member of staff whose role was not to look for fraud.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I worked for a clinical commissioning group in Bristol. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one reason why that would have happened is that all members of NHS staff have to undergo mandatory and statutory training to recognise and counter fraud?

Dr Offord: I do, but I am saying that this should have been picked up by an individual with a strategic, holistic approach to staffing and staffing budgets, rather than leaving it to one individual on the ward who realised there was a problem with the budgets. There are processes in place to ensure that fraud does not happen, and I would like all hospital trusts to introduce such processes. In his report, Lord Carter highlights a case where one provider identified 20 cases of counter-fraud when they reviewed and strengthened their sickness and annual reporting leave. That prompts the question of why such abuses continue to be left unchecked.

There is another case of fraud that I want to highlight, which has been judged more harshly, although it can be argued that it is certainly not as deceptive because the individual actually undertook the work. Simon Olufemi Ajani was sentenced to 12 months’ imprisonment following a fraud investigation by NHS Protect after he had

[*Dr Offord*]

produced a false passport and certificate of entitlement to the right of abode in the UK. That enabled him to obtain work with patients at East London NHS Foundation Trust, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, and other London trusts through NHS Professionals, the agency that supplies temporary staff to the NHS. His fraud was first uncovered through a data-matching exercise that highlighted inconsistencies between UK Border Agency records and NHS payroll records.

The difference between those two cases is that Ajani worked the hours that he was paid for, even though he was not entitled to be employed in this country, while Botham was just a crook stealing money directly from the NHS and patient care. These examples lead me to ask the Minister about the employment of those from outside the EU, an issue I have discussed recently with my constituents, as I mentioned. There is some criticism about the use of foreign doctors in the NHS, and some people consider that these jobs have been taken out of the reach of British people. However, we all know that the NHS does not have the numbers of doctors and nurses that it needs and there is not the capacity within the population of the United Kingdom to provide them. That is why some agency staff are required.

For some medical practitioners, however, remaining a locum is an alternative to having a permanent position. Some doctors are able to earn between £1,400 and £1,500 for a 12-hour shift, while the on-costs payable to agencies mean that hundreds of thousands of pounds a year are being charged to health trusts around the country for employment of temporary staff. One alternative to the costly system of locums could be the employment of a permanent doctor from overseas who could earn a salary of between £75,000 and £120,000. I need not ask the Minister whether he feels that this is better value for money than having a locum.

The NHS is an employer of those considered to have skills that are needed in this country, and a tier 2 visa allows “skilled workers” from outside the European economic area with a job offer to enter the UK. However, it has been established that the immigration health surcharge is levied against non-EU citizens. This requires every applicant and their dependents to pay not only their visa fees but a further £200 each year for up to three years. It strikes me as perverse that the very people needed to work in the NHS are being penalised by paying an additional amount that should perhaps be part of their terms and conditions of employment. Can the Minister explain in his summing up how the figure of £200 was reached and whether he feels that levying this tith against NHS employees is counterproductive?

Lord Carter’s report goes on to identify opportunities in managing annual leave—what he terms the largest part of non-productive time. There are many ways in which NHS employers can ensure they manage staff leave. I am not going to stand here and say that the Minister should micro-manage the NHS in England, but even simple practices do not appear to be implemented in some NHS trusts. We all agree that, while the needs of patients must be considered when managing annual leave, people do need time off. Introducing a notice period of a month for leave requests of, say, more than three or four days would allow NHS managers the time

to plan ahead, but that is not happening uniformly, thereby ensuring that agency staff are needed as an emergency measure.

Can the Minister therefore confirm that measures introduced by the Secretary of State to reduce agency locum spend will include a requirement for trusts to ensure that their employment practices and policies include such conditions as notice periods to book leave, that trusts consider employing e-roster co-ordinators and that trusts examine their employment policies so that they can compare themselves to their peers and undertake a skill mix review, the combination of which would reduce the need for spending on agency staff?

A fear raised with me by my constituents concerns the revalidation of full-time locum doctors. It is well known that locum doctors can experience a variety of challenges with revalidation, largely due to the peripatetic nature of their work, but annual appraisals are the backbone of revalidation and fundamental to demonstrating the fitness of medical professionals to practise. Revalidation should be carried out by the framework suppliers—the agencies that supply staff—but I have heard anecdotal reports that agencies do not revalidate, and it has been alleged that some health professionals are even practising outside their qualifications and skill range. Can the Minister tell us how the Department will ensure that the revalidation of all full-time locum medical professionals is carried out by the framework suppliers?

The final issue about the use of agency staff I want to raise is the use of master vendor contracts between health trusts and employment agencies. The use of this practice creates an opportunity for collusion within the employment industry to seek maximum financial gain through the use of exclusive contracts. While such contracts may be an easy option for the employer—in this case, the health trust—the agency can ask premium prices for a service that could be provided more cheaply if it were opened up to competition. Such a practice effectively introduces a closed shop and prevents smaller employment agencies from being able to enter the health market. Can the Minister advise us how the Department can ensure that the use of master vendors does not result in tacit collusion in the employment industry for exclusive contracts that cost the NHS in excess of what it might pay for the services elsewhere?

In conclusion, this debate is not a negative criticism of employment agencies or the work of people in the NHS; in fact, it is the opposite. I congratulate the people who work in the NHS and I want to ensure that more people are employed in the NHS. I am framing this debate as an opportunity to assist the Government in ensuring that the resources needed by the NHS and identified by the Stevens review are made available. It is an opportunity to start the process by recognising where we can work smarter to ensure a better NHS for all and identify opportunities to achieve economies that do not undermine patient care, but in fact achieve the opposite, by ensuring the correct number of appropriately qualified staff in the NHS, working confidently, diligently and at a pace that ensures the best care for patients.

2.45 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Pritchard, for calling me to speak.

I agree with the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) that of course there are always efficiencies to be made, and ways of considering how they can be made; NHS managers and staff, including clinical staff, spend a great deal of their time doing that. My intervention about counter-fraud was meant to suggest that that work becomes part of the way that people start thinking about their work as public servants. However, this debate needs to be widened out beyond the individual savings that have been mentioned. As the King's Fund has said, the greatest savings achieved in the NHS since 1948 were made since 2010, largely through reductions to pay and central budgets, and some restructuring. Having said that, I am slightly sceptical about the savings that can be made through restructuring.

We need to move this debate on to a discussion about quality in its widest sense, because quality is an organising principle of the NHS; ultimately, quality will deliver greater savings and contribute towards the £22 billion target. It will also involve people much more in the management of their healthcare, so that we save money that is currently spent on public health interventions. We must also ensure that when people use the health service, they understand where savings can be made. If we were able to involve patients and others much more in that debate, we would find more good examples of what we have been discussing. There are some great examples from Bristol, particularly around environmental savings. There have been some fantastic projects to reduce consumption of energy, both at Universities Hospital Bristol NHS Foundation Trust, and at North Bristol NHS Trust. There is also the reskilling that takes place within the community services organisations, to make better use of the highly skilled community nurses and to help people with the flow in and out of hospital.

However, all these measures require the system to be stable and require some transitional support to allow the transformation to happen. At the moment, I am not sure that the NHS feels it has the support to make that happen, as individual examples that will not yield overall results are being picked out. I welcome this debate about productivity, but I hope that we can have a degree of political honesty about the scale of the challenge of the £22 billion cuts.

Mr Jim Cunningham: The hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) talked about efficiency, which is one thing; productivity is something totally different. Productivity is what the individual produces, whereas efficiency is really about how the individual works. Does the hon. Lady agree?

Karin Smyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is the environment in which an individual works and is supported into work that helps to boost productivity. I think we would all agree that generally people want to be as productive in the service as they can be, and they are very cognisant of their role as public servants. As I say, I would like to see political honesty and discussion about the scale of the £22 billion cuts. It is hard to see where they will come from, regardless of pay restraint, cuts to services and major reconfigurations. Those changes may need to happen, but there needs to be honesty across all parties in the House to support their introduction.

There is wide-scale agreement about the problems that the NHS faces, beyond the items that the hon. Member for Hendon mentioned, but now that the election has passed it is time for us to consider the solutions that can be achieved to support staff in making that transformation, and in making the NHS highly productive, as well as one of the most efficient services in the world.

2.50 pm

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): I am glad to speak in this important debate under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) on securing it.

Obviously, in Scotland the situation is slightly different, because the NHS is devolved, but many issues cross over, wherever our health services are located. I was very interested in some of the points made. NHS Scotland has produced a framework for efficiency and productivity going up to 2015. We recognise that it is essential to be more efficient and productive, to ensure careful use of the public purse.

To an extent, the situation in Scotland is slightly different, because the NHS budget has been protected from cuts as a result of the Scottish Government's action. However, we still face inflationary pressures arising from demographic changes and increasing drugs and staff costs, which mean that NHS boards will need to make a minimum of 3% efficiency savings just to break even.

I was interested in what the hon. Gentleman said about the many issues faced by the NHS, particularly in England. I understand that much of the savings to date have been made by freezing staff salaries, squeezing prices paid to hospitals for the treatment they provide and cutting management costs. I wonder whether there is a correlation between those savings and the frauds and difficulties in some hospitals, which he mentioned. We all want to cut management costs, but sometimes there is a cost to doing that, because if management is cut back it cannot have the same hands-on experience of what is going on in all areas of the operation. That has to be weighed in the balance when we consider such savings.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the Carter review and the time spent by people on the frontline, whether with patients or doing other things. Again, that has to be built in. The hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) made a good point about the difference between productivity and efficiency. A staff member could be deemed much more efficient if they just dealt with patients, but down time for staff has to be worked into the system, because any doctor, nurse, or other NHS staff member will be working at a high level for very long periods. There are dangers if down time is not built in.

All of us would want savings made where they can be safely made, but the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) made an interesting point about the King's Fund, which estimates that another £30 billion of savings will be required by 2020-21. The Government have made much of the fact that they will put another £8 billion into the NHS. Although I am sure that is welcome, it still leaves £22 billion in savings to be achieved through productivity improvements. With the best will in the world, I find it difficult to envisage

[Mike Weir]

£22 billion of savings being made through productivity improvements in the NHS. If it can be achieved, that is fair and well, but it does seem a very tall order, as the King's Fund stated.

An organisation cannot keep freezing staff wages forever; there will have to be a change in that regard. Management costs cannot be cut indefinitely, because, again, management is needed to run the system.

Mr Jim Cunningham: Admittedly, it has been some years since I was involved in negotiations relating to productivity, and so forth, but the fact remains that there are consequences if people are not paid a decent wage. I worked in industries where wages were frozen and saw the consequences. The only way to increase productivity in the NHS and maybe save money—I use the word “maybe” advisedly—is by having incentives. That is the only way it can be done. It was not clear, in the speech made by the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord), what percentage of people would have time off. There is a tolerable, acceptable percentage in that regard, but I was not clear what the percentages were.

Mike Weir: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. He is right about incentives. A happy workforce will be a much more productive workforce. There is a danger of putting increasing pressure on the workforce, especially in the NHS, where mistakes can be disastrous and can do a lot of damage in the long term, both to the system and patients. We have to be careful about some of these things. I was interested in what the hon. Member for Hendon said about the cost of agency workers. I think we would all agree on that point. It would be preferable to have full-time staff in the NHS, but agency workers are used for a reason: shortages.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about people from outside the EU working in the NHS, but again, this shows that there needs to be a more holistic Government policy. The Government recently announced an earnings threshold of £36,000, under immigration policy, for those who have been working in this country for six years. Many nurses working in the NHS throughout the United Kingdom are not earning that sort of money and have been in the NHS for many years. The Royal College of Nursing stated that if this policy was imposed, thousands of nurses could leave the NHS and could have to leave the UK. That is not in the best interests of the health service at the moment. When considering efficiency savings and how the NHS can better work for all our constituents throughout the UK, we have to think about such things.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making an important point. Would it not be counterproductive if NHS nurses left to work abroad? That would leave a massive gap in the NHS workforce, probably requiring an increase in agency workers, which would cost the NHS more.

Mike Weir: The hon. Gentleman read my mind: that was my next point. Agency nurses are causing a drain on resources, because we have to employ so many already. That will not get any better if nurses cannot work in the NHS because of immigration policy. These

people have not just come to this country a few months ago; some have been here for many years. Many of these nurses are working in hospitals in all parts of the UK, whether Scotland, Northern Ireland or England. They are also working in the care system.

The Government are making a bad situation worse, perhaps because of other pressures on them to do with immigration, and are not dealing with the realities of the health service. Training new nurses to take the place of those who may leave will not happen overnight. It takes years to train a nurse properly. If these people have to leave suddenly, they will leave a huge hole in the NHS. That raises a question about the sustainability of the system. In summing up, the Minister might like to consider that; and perhaps he will take the matter up with Home Office colleagues and discuss the impact this policy may have on the NHS.

Efficiency savings are fine where they can be made. We are all looking for efficiency savings, and we understand that there can be some. For example, there are some interesting responses in the Carter review on medicines and prescriptions. Savings could be made there. A lot of medicines can be wasted if prescriptions are too large. Such system changes can save money, but it is wrong to look for the silver bullet that is going to change things and produce the £22 billion in efficiency and improvement savings.

Mr Jim Cunningham: If the hon. Gentleman thinks back 12 months or so, he may remember that it took a long time for the Secretary of State to reach an agreement with the pharmaceutical companies because some issues were held up. We should consider that. It seems to me that a gun was held to the Secretary of State's head on costs.

Mike Weir: Again, the hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. One difficulty with the NHS is the cost of medicines. All our constituents are pushing us to get costly new medicines on the NHS for diseases, including rare diseases. They might be extremely costly in the first instance for good reasons, but demand always increases costs in the system, and it is difficult to deal with that. The pharmaceutical companies have a role to play in that, because much of their business comes through the national health service. If cost savings can be made by negotiating with those companies, that should be done. I am sure that the Secretary of State will at all times try to persuade them on that point, but I am not so sure how well he will do, given the competing pressures from constituents and Members for new drugs to be made available on the NHS. None of these issues are easy, and I have some sympathy for Ministers who are struggling with them, especially given the pressures on all areas of Government spending, but I urge caution in looking for simple solutions.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): While it will be unorthodox, it is not irregular for me to call Jim Shannon, who briefly left the Chamber during a very good speech from Karin Smyth that was slightly shorter than I expected.

3.1 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Pritchard. I apologise for having to step out of the

Chamber for a minute or two. I expected the speech of the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) to be a wee bit longer. It is always a pleasure to speak on these issues, and I thank the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) for bringing this subject to the House for our consideration.

The Carter report is important. Members will know that health is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland, and the responsibility for health falls clearly on the Northern Ireland Assembly and my party colleague Simon Hamilton, but it is important that we consider the issues and the recommendations in the report. I will speak to that in a few minutes, but first I pay tribute to all those who, despite the numerous difficulties facing us, make our NHS one of the premier care services in the world.

The tireless work of the doctors, nurses, surgeons, technicians, pharmacists, auxiliaries, cleaners, cooks, porters and those who work in admin behind the scenes has not gone unnoticed. I am sure everyone here would start by thanking them for their contributions, their efforts and the exhausting work they do. I thank them for their smiles to the patients and families, sometimes when the workers are so exhausted they can barely stand. I thank them for staying those extra 10 and 15 minutes beyond what they are paid for to make a patient comfortable. I thank them for choosing to come to work and sometimes having to face abuse from tired and perhaps frightened people. I thank them for retaining their dignity and helpful nature. In this debate, we do not stand in judgment on the NHS or the workers; rather, we look at the procedures in place and how we as Members of Parliament can help to make the NHS, which we are fortunate to have across all the regions, more effective for everyone.

Mr Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman mentioned long hours. Some of the young trainee doctors are doing a 12-hour day, seven days a week. That can go on for months. That is not exactly conducive to good morale in the national health service, is it?

Jim Shannon: None of us here said that it was. It is important that our doctors and the staff are not over-tired.

The Carter report sets out how efficiencies can be delivered. The hon. Member for Angus (Mike Weir) who spoke before me clearly outlined the issues. The title of the debate refers to Lord Carter's review of productivity in hospitals, and the interim report of that review, "Review of operational productivity in NHS providers", which was published on 11 June. We all know that Lord Carter of Coles was appointed by the Health Secretary to chair the NHS procurement and efficiency board in June 2014, to review the operational productivity of NHS hospitals and to establish the opportunities for efficiency savings across the NHS. To do that, Lord Carter and the review board worked with a group of 22 NHS providers across England, and I think that what they have found in England will be replicated for us in Northern Ireland and for our colleagues in Scotland and Wales. There are lessons to learn, so we should take note of what the report says.

As I said, an interim report was published on 11 June outlining the work that has been carried out and the interim recommendations and next steps. The full report is to come in the autumn, and I look forward to seeing

what it says. Back home, people are sick to death of the term "efficiency savings", the idiotic behaviour of Sinn Féin and the Social Democratic and Labour party and others and the funding penalties we are facing. Our NHS is being asked to do the impossible and be more efficient than it is, but when I look at the findings of the interim report, I see things that may extend to our running of the NHS in Northern Ireland. That is what the Carter report is about, and I am sure the Minister will give his thoughts on that shortly. The report sets out ways we could ease the pressure off front-line services and enable the functioning of our country while we wait for action to cease the penalties and see Northern Ireland receiving what she is entitled to—what we would be getting, were it not for the inability of Sinn Féin to do what its Members were elected to do and work for the people. That, however, is a different debate for another day, and I accept that.

The interim report suggests that the NHS in England could look to make savings of some £5 billion per annum by 2019-20 and reports three major areas of opportunity. The first is hospitals getting a stronger grip on the utilisation of resources, particularly in four areas: workforce, hospital pharmacy and medicines, estates management and procurement. The second is achieving greater productivity in hospital workflow—how patients move through the system—and the subsequent use of assets such as operating theatres. I have always felt we could look at that, and the Carter report has examined it and offered some ideas on how it could work. The final area is gaining a better understanding of the need for hospitals to develop sub-acute services, either on their own or in collaboration with others, to facilitate the discharge of patients. It is about making it work better together.

We need a way of ensuring the highest quality of patient care, delivered at the lowest price possible to ensure that more funding can be diverted to cancer drugs. Members will know that I have advocated ensuring the availability of cancer drugs across the whole United Kingdom, rather than that being down to postcode. In Northern Ireland, we would like to use prescription charges to put some money towards cancer drugs. I know that the Government have given a commitment and that there is some help for the devolved Administrations when it comes to cancer drugs, but not to the extent that we would like. We also need more funding diverted to research and other areas.

I was surprised to see in the report that one hospital could save up to £750,000 a year by improving the way it deals with staff rosters, annual leave, sickness and flexible working. That was just one example, which would regain the £10,000 a month the hospital was losing due to people claiming too much annual leave. That is an easy way of getting money back in to hospitals. Ensuring every hospital pays the best price for medicines and supplies would save money that could be invested in front-line care. One hospital with 23 operating theatres improved the way it tracks the products used during surgery and saved £230,000 in the first year alone. I am not saying that every hospital could do that, but it is an example of what can be done, and it would be unwise to ignore it.

When the *Hansard* report of this debate becomes available, I will send a copy to my colleague, the Health Minister in Northern Ireland, Simon Hamilton, to make

[*Jim Shannon*]

him aware of the Carter report and this debate. Helpful lessons may emerge that we could use. For example, a hospital was using the soluble version of a steroid for multiple illnesses and paying £1.50 a tablet when the solid version costs just 2p a tablet. Using the soluble version only for children and patients who have trouble swallowing saved £40,000 every year. Those may be small examples, but they collectively show how something could happen. I have some concerns. Cheap is not always best, and we have many examples of the copying of tablets in China and elsewhere. Those tablets are not as effective and may be harmful, so we have to monitor how we best ensure that cheaper drugs are effective and tackle the diseases they are designed to tackle.

We must take these issues in hand if we are to see the best possible use of funding. With the publication of the full report in the autumn, we will have a better idea of where we are. I hope that that report will be seen not as a stick to beat the NHS with—if it is, that will be for the wrong reasons—but as a ray of light that will help make things better. I very much look forward to seeing what it says about how we can improve things here in England, because we will then, I hope, be able to use that example to improve things across the water in Northern Ireland and perhaps in Scotland, for my colleague and friend, the hon. Member for Angus.

3.10 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) on securing this important debate. We have had a good debate, although fairly brief, and some important issues have been raised.

I formally welcome the Minister. We have had Health Questions and an Opposition day debate on health since he assumed his role, but this is my first opportunity to welcome him. I trust that his time at the Department of Health will be enjoyable and successful.

I am pleased to respond to the debate on behalf of the Opposition. The hon. Member for Hendon is right: the efficiency challenge for the coming years will dominate the debate about healthcare and shape our NHS in England for decades. As Members know—indeed, several referred to it specifically—the Government are committed to seeing £22 billion of efficiency savings in the NHS by 2020 to meet the £30 billion funding challenge. We have not yet heard any details of where the £8 billion in funding will come from; perhaps I can tease some of the detail out of the Minister. I do not wish to prejudge what may or may not be in the Budget, but it would be nice to have some indication, aside from the usual spin about a growing economy, of where he thinks the £8 billion will come from. Setting aside that question, we need to think carefully about how to meet the £22 billion gap that will remain once that £8 billion is found. To achieve savings on that scale would be a huge ask at any time, but when NHS trusts have huge deficits to tackle and providers say they are experiencing the biggest financial pressures they have ever seen, making these efficiencies will be a huge challenge.

It is probably appropriate at this stage for me to place on record my appreciation of and thanks to those who

work in our national health service—at every level. It is not always popular to praise managers, but to meet the challenge the NHS will need a great deal of expert management. We therefore need to praise the work of not just the doctors, nurses, clinicians, porters and support staff, but the good managers, because they will face the real challenge of finding these efficiencies.

It is vital, not just for us but for all those who work in the NHS, that the Minister is as open and honest as he can be today about where the efficiencies will come from. One of the few people who has seen the detail of the planned efficiency savings is the former Care Minister, the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). Just last week, he said that the £22 billion efficiency savings in the five-year forward view are “virtually impossible” to achieve—words that will not fill people with confidence.

As the Minister knows, the Opposition have pressed the Government on a number of occasions to publish the assumptions underlying the £22 billion figure. I hope he will take that message back to the Secretary of State today, because we need to have a properly informed debate about the NHS’s long-term funding requirements. That is true not just of England, because the proposals will have knock-on consequences for the NHS in all the constituent parts of the United Kingdom, including Scotland and Northern Ireland, which have been represented in the debate.

We need to be honest about the fact that, whatever the scale of the efficiencies that need to be found, there will be no quick fix—a point eloquently made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth). However, when budgets are tight, it is right that we debate how money can be better spent to meet the growing cost of delivering world-class healthcare.

With that in mind, let me cover a couple of pertinent areas. The first is procurement. Any doctor will tell us of sales representatives pushing every bit of kit and course of medicine under the sun—that is just the nature of salespeople, and that is what they do. In the NHS, there are around 500,000 product lines for everyday consumables, with cost variances of sometimes more than 35%, which is massive. The Carter review suggested that a catalogue of 6,000 to 9,000 product lines represents best practice. In part, the huge variety of products is a symptom of a more fragmented NHS. These days, we do not have the opportunity to use the NHS’s national purchasing muscle as much as we did, which is a shame and a wasted opportunity. However, having a reduced range of products—perhaps set out in a national catalogue, but definitely coming through the NHS supply chain—would be good for cost-effectiveness. I hope the Minister can take that point on board.

Part of the problem is the army of sales representatives, who are proliferating at all levels of the NHS. Their very existence represents a large dead-weight cost to providers. They can provide a useful service when it comes to selecting the best product for practitioners’ needs, but it is obviously not in their interests to provide products at the lowest practical cost; nor is it in their interests to promote other products or to give practitioners more information about the choices that may be available to them and their patients. It is, to some extent, an imperfect market, with smaller suppliers pushed out from the very beginning. There will always be a need for companies to provide high-end support and advice, but

while representatives have a big influence on buying decisions, we must ensure that that influence is at least partly tracked.

Let me talk briefly about the cost of competition. The Minister is new to his post, but he will have paid close attention to the many debates we had on these issues before the election, so he will be aware of the Opposition's concerns about the competition rules introduced in the Health and Social Care Act 2012. We know that the new competition framework is causing "significant cost to the system"—

not my words, but those of the former chief executive of the NHS. Last year, we identified at least £100 million that in trusts and clinical commissioning groups alone was being spent on staff and lawyers to analyse tenders and to administer the tendering process. If the Minister is serious about making substantial savings, may I gently advise him that it would be a good start to look at the waste generated by the Act's competition provisions?

One crucial area to analyse is the poor workflow in hospitals, and specifically the lack of adequate sub-acute services. At the moment, many discharged patients, particularly elderly ones, have nowhere to go. That is attributable mainly to the drastic cuts to adult social care we have seen in recent years. Sadly, I can only anticipate that those pressures will remain, and perhaps become more acute with coming spending reviews. We all know that if patients are not discharged, hospital beds are wasted and hospital workflow is disrupted, which costs the system an absolute fortune. That is to leave aside the fact that hospital is not the best or most appropriate place for such patients to be or for their care to be delivered.

Karin Smyth: The consequences of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 included fragmentation of responsibility for the flow of patients through the system. Different commissioning organisations now commission primary care to support the patient outside hospital, there is separate provision of community services, and NHS England has an oversight role as well as a role in commissioning specialised services. In Bristol there are two major acute trusts that are largely commissioned by three different clinical commissioning groups, supported by NHS England and involving the Trust Development Authority and Monitor. A large room is needed for people to get around the table at meetings to consider things such as flow, and it is very complicated.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head, describing the complexities of the NHS in England. We have talked for several years in the House of Commons about the need for a properly integrated health and social care system. My hon. Friend has set out a prime example of the reason we need that.

I anticipate that the Minister will argue that some of the inefficiencies we have discussed will be addressed through integration. My problem is that many of the competition rules and requirements in the 2012 Act work against such an integrated health and social care system, even though both sides of the House want it. The Government will have to look carefully at the role of some of the rules and regulations they introduced, when local health economies reach the point of developing integrated care models. It is clear that representatives of a hospital trust, local authority adult social care and

children's care services, and the clinical commissioning group cannot sit around a table to plan an integrated health and social care system while many of the requirements placed on the NHS by the 2012 Act continue to apply.

To return to the issue of transfer and delays in hospitals, we all know that the NHS operates something of a just-in-time system. Such systems are used in industry, particularly for international stock control, and they make sure that nothing is wasted. There is little room for slack: if a patient is admitted for longer than necessary because of avoidable shortfalls elsewhere in the system, that can lead to the atrocious scenes that happen when desperately sick and injured people are left lying in corridors. I think that on one occasion, somewhere near the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South, someone was treated in a tent in a hospital car park. We hoped such images had long gone from the NHS.

I want to say politely but firmly to the Minister that the NHS is affected by what goes on in the social care system. Social care cuts are to all intents and purposes NHS cuts. I hope that he will get that message loudly and clearly and that the Prime Minister will stop insisting otherwise. All that demonstrates, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South eloquently stated in her intervention, the need for a properly joined-up service. The Labour Front Bench has argued for that for some time and the previous Government were moving towards it. I am happy to provide guidance to the Minister on what we think should happen to that end, and to provide stern criticism if Ministers do not deliver.

I also want to talk briefly about the cost of agency workers, which the hon. Member for Angus (Mike Weir) touched on. The Health Secretary has belatedly sought to address that issue, but it has been years in the making. Ministers will know that hospitals have consistently cited recruitment difficulties, particularly for qualified nursing and medical staff and in accident and emergency departments. It is welcome that the number of training places has been increased in recent years, but it was a short-sighted mistake to cut the number of those places early in the previous Parliament. That has led in part to the present recruitment issues.

The Minister will know that the rising number of staff suffering from work-related stress has resulted in even more workforce pressures in the NHS. He will also know that the decision to cut nurse training posts has meant that many hospitals must either recruit from overseas or hire expensive agency workers. Health Ministers must make strong representations to Home Office Ministers, because if there was ever a sign of disjointed Government decisions, it was the recent announcement of changes to immigration policy. As we have already discussed, those changes may cause massive problems to some NHS trusts across the United Kingdom that already face challenges and have recruited from overseas.

The savings that the NHS will need to make in coming years are far more difficult than the low-hanging fruit or quick wins that some may think are available. All of us across the parties and across the constituent parts of the United Kingdom need to acknowledge that there will be no quick fixes to the challenge. There should be no mistaking how difficult things have been for many trusts in the past few years. The coming years will be just as difficult for them, if not more so. I hope

[*Andrew Gwynne*]

that the Minister will agree in that context that we need a proper open debate, with all the facts, figures and information before us about where we can make the savings, and how we can ensure that more of the NHS's funding is spent on what it does best—delivering high-quality patient care across the United Kingdom.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the Minister I remind hon. Members of the new standing orders that allow the mover of the motion to wind up if there is time available. I am sure that the Minister will be mindful of that, with 30-plus minutes on the clock.

3.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. It is indeed my first appearance in this role in Westminster Hall and, therefore, under your chairmanship here.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) on securing this important debate. I suspect that, in raising the important matters that he took up in his speech, he did not anticipate the glimpse of the promised land that the debate would give us. I have never sat in a debate on the NHS in this House—I have only been here for five years—when there was such a productive, interesting and bipartisan approach to such an important matter. I hope that it will be a model for things to come.

In seriousness, the differences between us, across the Floor, are far fewer than the things we agree on when we consider the NHS. A new Member, the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth), said in her speech that now the election is over we have a fantastic opportunity to forge a greater consensus on the NHS, which will be better for the service and patients, and especially, in the present context, for the people who work in it. They get fed up with the politicisation of the NHS, which has happened since its creation in 1948.

The hon. Member for Bristol South hit the nail on the head in her excellent speech: efficiency really comes from quality. We begin to get an NHS system that is truly efficient in using the resources that the taxpayer puts at its disposal and the hard work of those who work in it when the first consideration is care quality and safety. If we try to build a system around quality and safety, the efficiencies will flow from that and excessive costs will start to fall out. Part of the problem with trying to find efficiency savings in the NHS—indeed, in any public body or private organisation—is that a purely cost-cutting approach will almost certainly fail, in terms of not only the quality of the product being delivered, but the efficiencies being sought. I very much welcome the hon. Lady's intervention on that point, because that is where we need to begin.

All of that lies at the heart of Lord Carter's excellent report. It is an interim report—he will publish his final report, with a great deal more detail, in the autumn—but he has understood that it is the patient who feels the effects of inefficiency first and foremost. Their experience of care is not what it should be, because of how rostering is arranged or medicines are dispensed and administered. He gave specific instances in his interim report—for

example, the range of products available for hip replacements—of where choosing one product over another can mean dramatic differences in the occurrence of revisions. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said in his speech, cheapest is not always best. Sometimes, a slightly more expensive hip replacement joint can mean a much higher chance that someone does not have to come back for surgery again in a few years' time. Such decisions about balance lie at the heart of patient care. If we get the balance right, we have a huge prize: better patient care and a more efficient, cost-effective service.

I want to run through the main points of Lord Carter's report and reflect on them in the terms raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon. The NHS provides a varied picture of efficiency. The service has some of the most efficient hospitals in the world, but also some fantastically inefficient ones. That variation lies at the heart of the problem that we have to square in the next few years, which I will come to shortly when I address the specific points about the £22 billion target. As MPs, we all have anecdotal impressions from speaking to chief executives and managers in the NHS: they have come up with great ideas locally, but one knows immediately that no one is learning from that across the system. That was the case before the 2012 reorganisation, and it was case before all the previous reorganisations; it has been problem in the NHS since its inception.

We must also learn from best practice around the world. There is some fantastic practice around, and not only in France, Spain—specifically Valencia—and Germany; some of the best practice in the world for creating efficient healthcare is in American hospitals. I find it very exciting that there is some fantastic practice coming from Indian hospitals, because it shows how the world is changing. If we can draw in that expertise, we will do better for the NHS. I hope that, at the same time, we will export some of the best practice we have developed here—much of which has come from places not a million miles from the shadow Minister's constituency—to hospitals and health systems around the world.

The changes in efficiency and productivity gains in the past few years have been considerable. Traditionally, the NHS has lagged behind in productivity improvements, but in the past few years it has overtaken productivity gains in the rest of the economy. Some of that has come from wage restraint, but there has been a genuine improvement in productivity, although it is not as much as we hope, anticipate and need to come over the next five years from system change, rather than just from wage restraint.

Lord Carter's review covers some of the efficiency savings that can be made, especially in the provider sector. He has identified £5 billion of savings, of which £2 billion can come from improving workflow and workforce costs and £3 billion from static costs related to pharmacies, estates and procurement. As has been mentioned already, he has identified the fact that although there is much dispersed good practice, it is not shared, and there is no common understanding of what a good hospital looks like. On the back of Lord Carter's principal recommendation, we are going to construct a good hospital. It will be a virtual hospital, so people will not be able to visit it, but they will be able to go to parts of it, because we are going to take the best practice and codify it.

Lord Carter has created a system called the adjusted treatment index, which is a rather dry term for an exciting idea. We will say, "This index is the best that the NHS is doing and we're going to measure you all against it." Every chief executive, manager and clinician will be able to see where their particular unit sits against the very best in the country. That will immediately prompt some questions: "Why are we not the best? Why are we a third or half of the way down? What can we do to close the gap?"

The second output from Lord Carter's report is to provide a suggestion, in base terms, of how the poorest performing hospitals, along with those in the middle and those near the top, can improve and become the best. His final report will give far more detail, but this is of course a living process. We want to create a manual that will help clinicians to constantly improve their performance, measured against the very best—and the very best in the NHS will be measured against the very best in the world, so that our target keeps moving upward.

Lord Carter also identified issues with staffing, agency spend and locums, which formed the meat of the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon. I will quickly go through what we plan to do. In the long term, it is clear that the expansion of nursing recruitment places will meet our objective to improve staffing ratios and the quality of care in hospitals, but we do have a backlog to fill. I do not want to break the bipartisan consensus, but the fall-off in recruitment places did begin before 2010. It picked up again in 2012-13, partly in response to the recommendations of the Francis report, but we still have some way to go to ensure that we are up to pace.

It has become clear that although there was a need for agency staffing to plug the shortfall, some have been abusing that position. Now that we are getting more and more nurses into the system, it is the right time to bear down on agency costs, which is why the measures outlined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State a couple of weeks ago will make such a difference, by giving chief executives the tools to ensure that they are not paying over the odds on agency spend.

Karin Smyth: On agency recruitment, does the Minister agree that we should encourage more young people to see the NHS as a good career? Young people such as those in my constituency, Bristol South, do not always get the advantages of university and further and higher education qualifications, and they do not see working for the NHS as a good and positive career. It is still a very good career—well paid and well remunerated by pensions and so on—but it is no one's job, directly, to sell a career in the NHS in order to bring through the next generation of young people in places such as Bristol South to work in the NHS. That is not a hospital's direct role. Health Education England is a new organisation and has that responsibility, but, in the spirit of bipartisanship and cross-departmental working, will the Minister take our advice and talk to colleagues in skills and development and support apprenticeships to encourage young people to come through and fill the gap currently filled by agencies?

Ben Gummer: I do not want to ruin the hon. Lady's nascent reputation by agreeing with her again—happily, there are very few Opposition Members present to

notice, although that is not an implied criticism—but she is absolutely right. We are lucky that nursing places are quite significantly over-subscribed. The position is popular, but she is absolutely right that we need to not only make far greater use of apprenticeships but widen the skills base in nursing full stop. We are actively working on that in the Department—I have spent much of the day on it, and I am sure there will be more to come.

To help chief executives in this interim period, we have forced all agencies that want to offer their services to ensure that they are doing so through framework contracts, and we are ensuring that there is an hourly cap on the rate that can be charged. We have also taken additional measures on managerial salaries, along with a few other measures, to ensure that managers have the opportunity to be able to manage costs as they wish. We understand, however, that this is the first stage of a much deeper programme of reform that is needed. Lord Carter's report points in that direction by suggesting that we use our existing workforce far better, so that people are doing the job that they are suited to and qualified for and that their time is not wasted. That is the great win, not only for efficiency and patient care, but for staff enjoyment of their jobs.

The hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) made some helpful interventions about NHS workers' quality of life. It has been a sad but persistent truth of the NHS for many years—decades, in fact—that staff-reported incidents of harassment and bullying have been higher than the national average and that workforce stress and illness is higher than average. Some of that is to be expected—parts of the NHS are extremely stressful working environments—but we can do much more. Part of that is about ensuring, when people turn up to work, that they are doing the job they wanted to do, with a suitable but not excessive degree of pressure, and that the system is not wasting their time. If we make them happier in their jobs, their patient care will improve and their commitment to the service will be even greater. I am therefore aware of the prize, not just in pounds, shillings and pence, but in an improvement to staff morale and therefore patient care.

Jim Shannon: One of the things that concerns me from a Northern Ireland perspective—this has also been raised in discussions with other Members in the Chamber today and outside—is that the NHS greatly relies on, in our case, Filipino workers, which is an immigration issue. Has the Minister had any discussions with the Minister for Immigration, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), to ensure that there will be no shortfall when the gaps left by those who are here on work visas need to be filled and that the quality service in the NHS will not be lost? The hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) referred to training people to ensure that keen, interested and able replacements are available. Has the Minister given any thought to that?

Ben Gummer: I was going to come on to that, so I shall do so now that he has prompted me. There have been long and deep discussions about this. Our estimate is that no more than 700 nurses will be affected by the time the new rules are in place, which is a different number from that given by the Royal College of Nursing,

[*Ben Gummer*]

whose number we do not recognise. It is small challenge given the scale of the workforce and one that we will surmount at the time, but we must see it within the broader policy of reducing immigration to this country from the hundreds of thousands to the tens of thousands—a policy that has broad support across the House and certainly in the country at large. It would be wrong for the largest employer in the country—one of the largest employers in the world—to exempt itself from that overall ambition.

In the end, we will achieve a sustainable workforce in this country only if we do all we can to ensure that those who are British and have grown up here and want to work in the NHS have the opportunity to do so. That is why it is important that we widen and open the avenues into working in the NHS, as the hon. Member for Bristol South suggested, over the next few years, in order to meet the challenge to which the hon. Member for Strangford alluded.

I want to quickly run through the other issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon. On master vendors, he has a specific issue regarding some constituents with whom he has been dealing, but I understand that master vendors are managed under a series of arrangements with the Crown Commercial Service. Officials will meet with that organisation soon to discuss the overall issues around master vendors. It is for individual trusts to make such purchasing decisions, but I understand the issue he has raised and the terms in which he put it, and I will ensure that it is investigated properly.

My hon. Friend identified two areas involving agencies and fraud. Fraud is of course unacceptable, and the NHS has quite good systems for identifying it. Given the scale of the NHS, I find it surprising—it is entirely to the credit of those who work in the NHS—that fraud makes up such a tiny proportion of the excessive costs in the NHS.

On the revalidation of locum doctors, for which the General Medical Council is responsible, some doctors find it difficult to gather all the required supporting information needed for revalidation due to the peripatetic nature of the work. To help with that, specific guidance is available for both the doctors and their employers via NHS England and NHS Employers. Locum doctors are part of a larger issue about agency spend and foreign workers working in the NHS. I imagine that the three organisations will come together in the next few years to produce a more stable situation.

[*MR JAMES GRAY in the Chair*]

Let me turn to the remaining points of the hon. Member for Bristol South. On the stability of the system, I hope and anticipate that one product of the general election is that the system will be broadly stable over the next five years. We intend to continue with the current structure of the NHS. There will be some small changes, such as that identified by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last week concerning the NHS Trust Development Authority and Monitor, but we are broadly content with how the system is set up. We must now proceed to ensure that it works.

The shadow Minister made a point about structures and fragmentation. There will always be a genuine dilemma here, because one can approach any system

and say that change can be achieved by altering structures, but changing structures can lead to the same outcome. That has been the story of the NHS since its inception. It would be a mistake to think—the hon. Member for Bristol South and the shadow Minister were not suggesting this—that a structural change would somehow produce the outcomes that we all want. The priority is to ensure that the system's wiring works correctly—that everyone's interests are aligned and that the incentives are correct—so that people want to sit around the table and come to a considered decision, which can too often not be the case when there is an adversarial relationship between providers, producers and purchasers. That is why I hope that the system's stability over the next five years will allow us to focus on the significant challenges mentioned by the shadow Minister.

Andrew Gwynne: When discussing competition rules, we often talk of public versus private, but two public parts of the NHS can also compete. Another NHS trust might have the tender for providing a service in another area and an integrated care organisation might want to bring that back in-house.

Ben Gummer: Absolutely. There are examples of that all over the country, but there are also examples of people working together in what might be considered competitive situations, so it is about ensuring that we copy the best and delete the worst.

Before I turn to the shadow Minister's comments, I want to reflect on the contribution of the hon. Member for Angus (Mike Weir). The SNP spokesperson on health, the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), has used a constructive tone in the Chamber so far, bringing some of her expert experiences as a clinician and also the experiences from Scotland. It is nice to be able to sit here and hear the experiences of people in Northern Ireland and in Scotland, and it would have been nice to have heard from Wales in this debate. Indeed, we do not yet properly learn from the best in Scotland, which would be all to our good, let alone the best in America or India.

The £22 billion in savings is an estimate not from the King's Fund but from NHS England. It formed part of its plan, devised at the end of last year and some years in the making, which identified £30 billion of additional money that needs to be put into the service over the next five years. It stated that £22 billion could be generated internally—that was Simon Stevens' estimate—which leaves an £8 billion shortfall. That is what we are pledged to provide. None the less, he, like everyone in the Chamber, has correctly seen that £22 billion is a large number and one that will take a great deal of intellectual and moral work to deliver. I welcome the tone with which everyone has approached this challenge in the debate.

Mike Weir: The reference to the King's Fund was to make the point that it said that this was a tall order, as I think the Minister himself is admitting.

Ben Gummer: It is not a tall order, but it is a challenging one. Whoever was sitting in my place, from whatever party, would be facing a similar challenge, no matter how the needs over the next five years were framed. The challenge must be addressed, and it is better addressed if we all come together to do so.

The hon. Gentleman touched on pharmaceutical savings, which I have not yet addressed, and Lord Carter's comments on them. Lord Carter will make more detailed recommendations later in the year, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that there is much to be done to ensure that we save money on the provision and purchasing of drugs and by not wasting them. Lord Carter is looking at that, and the service is already implementing his initial recommendations.

New drugs are a problem faced by health services across the world. Indeed, it is a profound challenge, because the new drugs coming online are of an expense that has never been experienced in health systems before. They are also for increasingly small numbers of patients, precisely because they are personalised, which drives up the cost even further. That is why the Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), is bringing forward his accelerated access review and doing some exciting work, trying to use the muscle of the NHS—our ability to be a research lab, effectively—for those developing new drugs, so that we can use the NHS to drive costs down and provide patients with treatments earlier and more cheaply. There is a win-win there, but it requires a fundamental change in the system, which at the moment is not working.

Finally, I turn to the comments of the shadow Minister, mindful of the need to give my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon time to wrap up. I thank the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish for his kind welcome; it was good of him to say that. I hope that over the next couple of years we will be able to thrash out some of these difficult issues in the manner in which he has begun the process. If we do so, we will come to a better understanding of what is needed in our national health service.

The hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions, such as where the £8 billion is coming from. I believe it is coming from general taxation—my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be providing greater details of that in the Budget next week. The hon. Gentleman also asked where the £22 billion was coming from. NHS England has devised the plan. It is NHS England's plan to implement, and it will provide further detail about the £22 billion shortly. It will be an evolving plan that will necessarily change over the five years. NHS England is confident that it is achievable, but it will take some incredible heavy lifting by all of us and, dare I say it, the dropping of political shibboleths throughout the House—if one can drop a shibboleth; I am not sure.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of provider deficits, which is a problem across the system. He will know that there was a similar issue towards the end of the Labour Administration—in CCGs, rather than in hospitals. It does not necessarily require more money; it requires getting a grip on where the problem is. We have started that with announcements on agency spending. Many trusts in the country are doing well financially. Not surprisingly, they are often the trusts that are also delivering good care, because—to return to the comments of the hon. Member for Bristol South—if the care is right, the money flows from it. That is why Lord Carter's review and a concentration on care quality will, we hope, produce the savings that we need, not just at this immediate moment to address provider deficits, but to achieve the £22 billion.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish also mentioned sales reps and procurement. I absolutely agree that the subject is covered in the report from Lord Carter. The numbers of product lines certainly should come down. I am not sure that the NHS, before having greater responsibility for purchasing, was any better at buying, but we need to be better at it. Procurement is a science. It is not one that I pretend to know a great deal about, but I know that in the end we will always end up in not quite the right place, because we might centralise too much, which takes away decision-making from the trust responsible. That is why we have to get the balance right.

On the cost of competition, the hon. Gentleman quoted a figure of £100 million. However, I understand that the costs of the reorganisation have been outweighed by the benefits, to the tune of about £1.5 billion annually. I think we all agree across the House on the producer-provider split. There will always be a degree of competition in the NHS; it is about getting the balance right between competition and collaboration.

In the last 30 seconds, let me touch on sub-acute services. The hon. Gentleman made his most pointed—and fair—remarks about the need to integrate social care with the NHS. The Government's contention is that creating a new national structure for health and social care does not produce the end that we all want to see. That is why we want to see local solutions—we believe a good one is already emerging in Manchester—across the country, which will suit different areas according to their needs. In the end, we come back to money. We all know that money will be tight in local government. Our aim over the next few years is to ensure that as much of the resources that we can put into local government are going towards social care. That is the essence of the better care fund, which lies at the heart of what we are doing on integration over the next five years. I know the hon. Gentleman will want to comment on that as we proceed on those lines.

I thank all Members who have spoken in what has been an invigorating debate from which I have learnt a great deal. I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon for raising these important issues.

3.56 pm

Dr Offord: It was a pleasure to start the debate under the chairmanship of Mr Pritchard and, indeed, it is a pleasure to finish under you, Mr Gray.

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Covering all your bases.

Dr Offord: The debate was fantastic, but not entirely what I expected. The NHS is often used as a political football. I thank the Members present for their contributions and for highlighting some issues for me to consider, as well as for the Department and the Minister to consider.

The personal NHS experience of the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) is welcome not only in the debate, but in the House as a whole, and I look forward to her contribution to other debates. I thank her for today's contribution, which was important.

I was surprised at first by the hon. Member for Angus (Mike Weir), because the Carter review looked at England, and I wondered where the hon. Gentleman's contributions

[*Dr Offord*]

would go, but I am pleased that both he and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke about the devolved institutions and the lessons that can be learned throughout the United Kingdom from Lord Carter's report. That is a great way for us to work as a one nation country.

I am grateful for the comments of the shadow Minister, who made some points about NHS procurement. Some issues about extraction from European Union procurement programmes still need to be resolved—I understand that the shadow Health Secretary, the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), says that that can happen, but Simon Stevens does not believe that is correct—so there are some good things for the Minister to go away and think about. I will certainly take them away too, and I am grateful for that.

In the short time I have available, I want to say a little about the response to the Carter review. There has been a positive response from the Royal College of Nursing, which not only acknowledged that nursing numbers have not been meeting demand, but stated:

“It is clear that there is waste in the NHS, which is holding it back from directing its resources to frontline patient care. Lord Carter's review is a welcome illustration of how the NHS and individual hospitals could be much more effective in how they procure equipment, drugs, and above all staff.”

As the Minister said, we as parliamentarians therefore have a great opportunity to engage in the issue. As I said at the start of my speech, it came up at many hustings. It is often said that the Conservatives are not strong on the NHS, but I think we have a good story to tell. If we carry on in the same vein, and if the Minister carries on in the way he spoke today and in the recent debate in the main Chamber, that will please me and other colleagues.

I have been unfortunate enough in the past nine months to have need of the NHS, but I have been fortunate enough that it has been there. I am grateful. I have attended Moorfields, the BMI in east London and the Whittington with fairly serious issues. Indeed, my father-in-law had a hip operation on Friday, so I am grateful to the hospital in Swindon as well for making that happen. The care that he and I received has been second to none and I am grateful. I hope that it may continue to be such and that today's debate will continue our efforts to make the NHS the best national health system in the world.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered operational productivity in NHS providers.

Colin Worton

4 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the case of Colin Worton and compensation following an acquittal.

The case of Colin Worton is an indictment of the justice system and how it operated in Northern Ireland. I ask Members to cast their minds back 32 years, to when Northern Ireland was in the midst of the troubles. At that time, a Roman Catholic workman, Adrian Carroll, was murdered, gunned down in the streets of the city of Armagh. That was an injustice that has not been properly addressed. In fact, 32 years ago, a double injustice was done, when Colin Worton, a serving soldier in the Ulster Defence Regiment, was arrested, held, questioned and subsequently charged. He was held behind bars for several years awaiting trial, where the case was thrown out because it was deemed by the judge that the statement he had made had come about under severe duress.

That injustice affected Colin Worton's entire life and all his family. His father had already lost one son to terrorism, gunned down in the Kingsmill massacre. He then effectively lost his other son, Colin—a man who was serving Queen and country—along with Colin's good character, through a smear and a charge that he was somehow a terrorist.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Colin Worton served in the Ulster Defence Regiment, as did I. He worked long hours, at unsociable times. Is it not despicably wrong that a man who gave so much for Queen and country and for his neighbours and his friends—indeed, to protect his enemies as well—is still waiting on justice today?

Ian Paisley: My hon. Friend's comments echo and amplify the indictment of a system that has blinded itself. Justice has to be fair, but when it blinds itself so much to an injustice that it cannot find a mechanism or way to clear and compensate a man properly, something is fundamentally wrong with the system.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on obtaining this debate. As he knows, many of us in this House have been trying to get a debate on the issue for quite some time, so we are glad it is happening. There is something fundamentally wrong, as our hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has said, when someone who has served his country has to fight to bring his case to this House to try to get justice, rather than getting it, as he should, through the normal system.

Ian Paisley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I commend his actions. He has campaigned for years on this case and has tried to help Colin in the many different forums in which he has been a representative. He has also lobbied constantly and, more important, kept applying for a debate as well. It was really only the luck of the draw, so to speak, that my name came up. I am delighted that he has been so supportive of this case over the years.

As I said, Colin Worton never had his name cleared properly. I welcome the statement of the Northern Ireland Justice Minister, Minister Ford, of a couple of months ago that

“there is no stain on Colin Worton’s character”,

but unfortunately those words are not matched by actions. If there is no stain on the character of a soldier, why for the past 32 years has it been impossible for him to get back his job in the Ulster Defence Regiment? If there is no stain on his character and he can hold his head high, as he has been told by officialdom, why does he not have the simple right to have his job back, to serve his Province and his people?

I will tell the House why: because there is a stain, which has prevented him from going back to his job and from having a proper income-generating life. As a result, he has been forced to do menial jobs around the country, because people whisper behind their hands, “He’s the boy who was part of that murder team that killed an innocent man.” We need to nail that, and nail it loud and clear. We need to point out that if there is no stain on the character of Colin Worton then, given that he has not been able to have his job back for the past 32 years, he must now be properly compensated under existing mechanisms. I will come to those mechanism, because the Minister for Justice in Northern Ireland could use his powers in a discretionary way, and he should be encouraged by this House and this Government to do so. It is no way to treat a citizen of the United Kingdom and former soldier of Her Majesty’s forces. In essence, compensation should be paid to Colin Worton for his loss.

The effect of wrongful arrest and imprisonment—wrongful waste of life—on any person is devastating, and that situation is always wrong. But when a person sees three of his colleagues having their convictions overturned on appeal and being given substantial compensation—rightly so; those three were all also soldiers in Her Majesty’s forces, I should add—he must feel doubly indicted and abused. It seems he is not entitled to the same level of compensation or the same sense that not only has he got overturned something that was wrongly said about him, but the state that did that has been forced to pay for that injustice.

According to the available information, previous Secretaries of State and the Northern Ireland Justice Minister have indicated that, under section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, Mr Worton does not qualify for compensation. I believe that they are wrong in their interpretation of that section. I set that against the fact that we live in an era when the Northern Ireland Attorney General feels at liberty to recommend that there should be an amnesty system for terrorists to come forward to give evidence in historical cases without the risk of being prosecuted; it simply beggars belief that a man at the opposite end of the spectrum—a former soldier who has been told there is no stain on his character—is being punished for something he did not do in that same era. He is forced to live a life of little opportunity, with the stigma of a horrific murder latching itself to his hip despite his absolute innocence.

For Colin Worton to be told he falls outside the boundary of entitlement to compensation is wrong. The Northern Ireland Minister and the numerous Secretaries of State who come to Northern Ireland,

should be encouraged to themselves encourage the devolution system to demonstrate the flexibility that it should have by addressing this particular injustice.

At Mr Worton’s initial trial, his so-called confession statement was deemed inadmissible as evidence because it had been extracted under extreme duress. Let me put that in the language of the street. Mr Worton had the crap kicked out of him until he said the right things. Once he had said them and had signed the right confession, he was going to be banged up in jail. That is what happened to three of his colleagues. Fifteen years later, those convictions were overturned and they were released. When Mr Worton’s case came to trial in 1986, the judge was so perplexed by what he saw that he immediately deemed that Mr Worton’s statement could not be used as evidence, and on that basis told Worton to leave the court room—he was a free man. That did nothing to compensate for the two and a half years he spent lingering in jail for the trial, and it did nothing to compensate him for the loss of his promising career in the services. It did nothing to compensate him for the now decades of financial loss and it certainly did not clear his name. When he left that courtroom, in the eyes of the general public, he got off. They thought, “He got off—he was lucky.”

That, unfortunately, has been the character of the case. There has been a very deliberate effort by many to continue to perpetuate the myth that these were lucky men. But no; these were innocent men, who were wrongly tried and wrongly convicted, and who eventually—thankfully—had their convictions overturned. There needs to be recognition of the serious nature of the case and of the fact that the overturning of the original trial of what became known as the UDR Four meant that convictions against soldiers in Northern Ireland for crimes halved. So few were ever convicted, and so few were ever involved in anything wrong, that this case was held up as an example of how soldiers had been involved in wrongdoing. When the case was thrown out, it halved the number of cases that could be pointed at to show that soldiers had done something wrong in Northern Ireland. That is why it is such an important example and such an important case, and why it has to be put right.

A false confession made under interrogation, of course, implies improper behaviour by the individuals who extracted it. There was therefore a “serious default”, or rather a lack of those words coming from the judge’s mouth. The judge should have recognised that that “serious default” was in place, and if he had recognised that and said so when he put Worton out of the trial, Worton would have been granted compensation. However, because of the lack of those two words, he did not get compensation under the scheme.

These are the words of the Justice Minister in Northern Ireland in a recent debate:

“The general principle behind any payment of compensation is to make reparation where the normal machinery of justice has demonstrably failed the accused person.”

In that debate in the Northern Ireland Assembly, 54 Assembly Members agreed that Worton should be compensated, whereas 27 Assembly Members did not. On that basis, there is a strong momentum to ensure that Mr Worton is properly compensated for this injustice.

[*Ian Paisley*]

If he had been compensated in the 1980s when it happened, the matter would have gone away a long time ago.

It says something of the man himself that he has continued to campaign tirelessly, year in, year out, decade in, decade out, to clear his name, because he is so incensed by what has happened to him. His family are equally incensed, and rightly so. Mr Worton has, in my view, conducted this business well and in a dignified manner. He has never stopped in his mission to have his name properly cleared and to have compensation. This is a man whose brother was murdered by the Provisional IRA, and who served in the Ulster Defence Regiment to help protect the Province and its people he so dearly loved. This is a man who had every reason to hate the Irish Republican Army for what they did, yet he worked on behalf of this Government's security forces to help bring peace to Northern Ireland.

Mr Worton's father died having had one son murdered by terrorists and another one labelled a murdering terrorist. That injustice to his entire family must be properly addressed. That is why I am pleased that this matter has got the Floor of this House and pleased that it is recognised nationally that there is an issue which the devolved Administration in Northern Ireland must address expeditiously. It has been long enough in the making. They have time now in which they could address this case.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene, as I know he is winding up. I congratulate him on securing the debate, on the eloquence and force with which he is putting the case, and on the work that he and others have done to get justice, not just for Colin Worton, but for the other members of the UDR Four. Does he agree that although the Minister may say, "This is a devolved matter; it is for the Minister of Justice, the Assembly and so on," this case is to do with the past in Northern Ireland, which is the responsibility of the Government here, and they have a major role to play? It is not a question of saying, "It is a matter for Northern Ireland Ministers." This is a matter that involves the legacy of the past, and therefore it falls to people here to address it as well.

Ian Paisley: I thank my right hon. Friend for making that point. He really gets to the crux of the matter: how we find the mechanics to solve this issue? How do we ultimately address it?

I hope that the Whips Office carries back to the Northern Ireland Office a very strong message. Heads have to be put together between the Northern Ireland Office and the Justice Ministry to find a way of resolving this legacy case once and for all. Resources are found for all sorts of things in Northern Ireland, and indeed, for all sorts of things across the United Kingdom. It would be very easy to solve this matter, and I hope that that message is carried back. My right hon. Friend has probably predicted the entirety of the speech of the Minister today. I understand why Ministers' could be tied to such a degree, but there has to be some recognition that the devolved Administration have flexibility. They have the ability to find a mechanism—a special measure—

through which they could address this case. I hope that they do. I hope that they are given the encouragement, and, if you like, the cover to allow them to act in this way, sure that what they are doing is right and what they are doing is proper.

4.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): Good afternoon, Mr Gray. It is, as always, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) on bringing this debate to the House. I am aware that he has championed Mr Worton's case in the House on previous occasions, and he continues to do so. I very much recognise the challenges that Mr Worton has faced. He has suffered a great deal as a result of the terrible events of 8 November 1983, and no doubt has suffered a great deal as a result of the appalling loss of his brother, one of 10 Protestant workmen killed by the IRA at Kingsmill in 1976. Equally, our thoughts today are with the family of Adrian Carroll. Mr Carroll, a 24-year-old Catholic man, was murdered on 8 November 1983. He was shot outside his home in the city of Armagh as he returned from work. It is important, when we speak of these cases in the House and elsewhere, that we remember the pain and the ongoing needs of all those who have to live with the deadly legacy of Northern Ireland's troubled past. The families who lost loved ones carry their burdens to this day, and those burdens do not get any easier.

On 21 June 2011, the Northern Ireland Justice Minister, David Ford, made a statement to the Stormont Assembly on Mr Worton's case. Although I have no doubt that Mr Ford is better versed in the detail of the case than I am, the fact is clear that Mr Worton was acquitted of any involvement in Mr Carroll's murder at the first instance. Unfortunately, the matter of Mr Worton's clear acquittal is more straightforward than the issue of compensation. As the hon. Member for North Antrim made clear, Mr Worton has been campaigning for many years for compensation for unlawful detention, and his case has been considered by successive Secretaries of State and Ministers in the devolved Administration. I am aware that Mr Worton applied for compensation in 1992, but failed to qualify for the statutory scheme in operation at the time, because he was not convicted.

An application was also considered under the *ex gratia* compensation arrangements in place at the time. Those were set out in 1985 in a written House of Commons statement by the then Home Secretary. The Home Secretary's statement provided that compensation could be paid to individuals who had spent time in custody following a wrongful conviction or charge where that had resulted from serious default on the part of a member of a police force or another public authority. The statement also confirmed that in exceptional circumstances—in particular, where facts emerged at trial or on appeal that completely exonerated the accused person—compensation could also be paid. That is opposed to having been acquitted because the prosecution had failed to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt.

Successive Secretaries of State reviewed Mr Worton's case for an *ex gratia* payment. They concluded that Mr Worton's case did not meet the serious default or exceptional circumstances criteria. I am aware that the then Secretary of State's decision was judicially reviewed, and in February

2010 a court upheld the decision of the Secretary of State to conclude that there was no serious default on the part of the police.

On devolution of policing and justice in 2010, responsibility for any ongoing consideration of Mr Worton's application for compensation transferred to the devolved Administration and, in particular, to the Northern Ireland Department of Justice. At that time, Justice Minister David Ford advised that he would look again at Mr Worton's case to consider whether an ex gratia award of compensation would be appropriate. I am aware that Minister Ford considered all available evidence, including official advice, and the outcome of the historical inquiry into Mr Carroll's murder. Minister Ford subsequently met Mr Worton, on 17 April 2013, and confirmed that he was not entitled to compensation under the statutory scheme or the ex gratia scheme. It has been made clear to Mr Worton that consideration will be given to any new information that might affect his case.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for North Antrim for bringing forward this debate, and to colleagues from across the House for their thoughtful and considered comments. This is clearly a difficult case, and I am sure that the Northern Ireland Department of Justice, as the responsible office for consideration of cases such as this, will note with great care the comments made today. I simply conclude as I started, by remembering all the families who lost loved ones as a result of Northern Ireland's troubled past.

Question put and agreed to.

4.22 pm

Sitting suspended.

Tyne and Wear Metro

4.30 pm

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. Before we start, I think it is reasonable, despite my natural inclinations, to say that gentlemen may, if they wish, remove their jackets—if they have not already done so.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the performance of the Tyne and Wear Metro.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I secured the debate because my constituents are quickly losing patience with the Metro service, which is unreliable and overdue for investment. Barely a week goes by without me being contacted by people who are fed up with delayed or cancelled services making them late for work, preventing them from getting their kids to school, or keeping them from important appointments. A quick glance at Metro's Twitter feed shows why. On most days, some sort of delay or cancellation is reported, not to mention the numerous other faults that disrupt passengers' journeys, such as broken ticket machines—that happened again today—and information boards that give out misleading or incorrect information. Last winter, the service was so poor that only 64.5% of trains arrived on time, which means that more than one in three trains was late.

These problems occur so frequently that commuters have created a Facebook group called "Sort out the Metro", which attracted hundreds of members in only a couple of weeks. Nearly 3,000 people have signed a petition calling for the Department for Transport to begin an independent review of our Metro services. These are not just annoyances; people rely on public transport to get them to where they need to be, and there are real consequences when the network fails them. One woman from my constituency wrote to me to explain the effect that delayed services have on her family. She explained that her husband uses the Metro to travel to his job in Gateshead, but failed trains mean that he can never guarantee that he will arrive on time. When he is three minutes late for work, he is docked 15 minutes' wages. When he is 15 minutes late, he loses half an hour's pay. Those may seem like relatively small sums of money individually, but when multiple journeys are delayed each week, the amounts soon add up.

The problems do not end there for my constituent. She explained that she works evening shifts, so if her husband's train home is delayed, there is no one to take care of their young child. Either she has to be late for work, or she has to find a last-minute babysitter. Public transport is supposed to make people's lives more convenient, but for her family it is doing just the opposite.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and on the excellent points that she is making about the importance of the Tyne and Wear Metro. I am probably showing my age by saying that I remember the Tyne and Wear Metro launching. I remember how proud we were that it was the first light rail system in the country to be entirely disabled-accessible. Looking back, can we not

[*Chi Onwurah*]

see that the current problems are testament to a failure of investment, which we need right now in the Tyne and Wear Metro?

Mrs Lewell-Buck: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, which I will come to later. When the investment is there and our Metro is working properly, it is brilliant and it serves our area well. At the moment, however, the lack of investment really shows, and it has an impact on all our constituents.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this timely debate. No doubt the Minister, in responding to the debate, will point to the current significant investment programme in the Metro, but that investment is in infrastructure, ticketing and barriers, not in the rail cars, which are the most vital component. They are 40 years old and deeply in need of replacement to alleviate problems such as the regular electricity fires on the service.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: That is a point that I will make later in my speech. The Metro cars are grossly outdated, and they cause the bulk of the delays in the system. The constituent I mentioned is not the only person who feels that they have to organise their family's life around the unreliable service. One young man wrote to me to say that he actively avoided taking the Metro to college, even though it was theoretically the most convenient route, because he simply could not rely on the service. He said that some days he found it easier to stay with his grandparents in another area, because they live closer to his college, rather than relying on the Metro to get him to class on time.

We need to think about the economic impact of an unreliable service. A single person being half an hour late for work may have a relatively small impact, but we should remember that when a fault occurs during peak time, hundreds of journeys are disrupted. Metro figures show that more than 50,000 minutes of delays occurred last year, which is more than 800 hours. That is a lot of working time wasted. When companies look for a place to locate their business, one of the top items on their checklist is the transport infrastructure. They want to know that there is a reliable transport network that will allow them to attract employees from as wide an area as possible. If we want our regional economy to do well, we need a transport system that is up to the job.

It is clear that the Metro is simply not coping at the moment, and most of the problems that commuters experience come from the fact that the network's trains and infrastructure are on their last legs. The Metro is long overdue for an upgrade, and trains that were expected to retire from service in 2010 have been patched up and are now expected to carry passengers until 2025. Commuters and my hon. Friends know that that is not a real solution. Our oldest train cars have been in service for 40 years, and no amount of refurbishment or repair can disguise the fact that they are falling apart. Our fleet has been refurbished at a cost of £30 million, but that does not appear to have helped things. Power failures and door failures, which are the two biggest culprits in delays, are happening more frequently than they did only a year ago. The number of power failures

has increased by 49% and the number of door failures by 29%. The number of passenger complaints is on the rise, and of 502 complaints reported in April, more than 300 related to train performance.

The trains are not the only problem for our passengers. Brand new ticket machines and barriers malfunction far too often, and the departure boards on station platforms often display incorrect information. That can be particularly irritating for my constituents because South Shields is at the end of the Metro line, so boards that display incorrect destinations can mislead passengers. Support for passengers whose trains are delayed is not good enough, and passengers whose journeys are disrupted are given little time to find alternative routes to their destinations. The "Sort out the Metro" group believes that as many as half of the disruptions are not reported on social media, which means that passengers who rely on such sources of information are left in the dark about delays.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making some excellent points, and the debate is much needed and valuable. Is she aware of a report by the Institute for Public Policy Research in 2014 that showed that Londoners receive £5,203 more per head in capital investment than do those in the north-east? London is the capital, so we would expect it to receive a little bit more, but does she think that £5,203 more per head is an acceptable amount?

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I do not think that that is an acceptable amount at all. In fact, I think it is an insult to the people of the north-east that so little is spent on us per head, when it comes to transport.

Some of the problems are a matter for Metro's management, and I have taken them up with Nexus and the North East combined authority. Nexus has, to its credit, made some changes to improve customer service, and earlier this month it announced £40 million of investment, which will include a new rail traffic management system. The North East combined authority has also taken the issue up, and it is clear that there is a willingness locally to improve the service. Fines have been imposed on the operator, DB Regio Tyne and Wear. It is important that the operator is continually held to account for poor service.

Many of the problems also stem from a lack of investment, so the Government have to answer questions. More than half of the problems result from mechanical failures, and it is an unavoidable fact that our trains are far too old and need to be replaced. They should have been replaced years ago, but now it looks as if passengers will be waiting another decade before that happens. Instead, tens of millions of pounds have been spent on trying to patch up the existing rolling stock—money that would have been better spent on a more permanent solution. In 2010, the previous Labour Government made an important commitment to invest nearly £400 million in our Metro. The incoming coalition considered scrapping that commitment, and our local authorities fought tooth and nail to protect it. The investment was essential, not least because the Metro continues, despite all the faults, to have growing passenger numbers each year. Last year, passenger growth was the fastest outside London.

If the Metro is to meet demand, it needs clarity about its future funding. Nexus is waiting for confirmation on £46 million of funding for the Metro service from 2016 onwards. Can the Minister give us any further information about the status of that funding? It is important that the money be smartly invested. Recent projects have shown that well targeted upgrades can have an impact. New technology for cleaning rails has reduced the number of incidents resulting from low rail adhesion. The announcement that the new traffic management system will be in place sooner than originally planned is also welcome news. However, as long as the issue of our trains goes unresolved, we will not see the dramatic service improvements that our passengers expect.

Ian Mearns: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about the Metro system. In case the Minister thinks this is just a number of north-east MPs complaining about historical issues, I checked the Twitter feed before I came to this debate. Today we have had:

“No trains South Gosforth - Monkseaton due to signalling problems.”

Another Twitter message stated:

“Most Metro ticket machines are back up and running.”

That implies that the ticket machines had not been up and running. A third message said:

“Disruption cleared at 12:25.”

Another message said that a train had been withdrawn from stations between St James and South Gosforth. These ongoing problems occur daily.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I thank my observant hon. Friend. He is, of course, correct. Since I started this campaign and made it public that I had secured this debate, my office has received an influx of complaints from across our region about the poor performance of the Metro.

Our local councils and Nexus have shown a willingness to invest in our local transport. There is clearly local demand, but we need a similar commitment from central Government. Today I want to hear what plans the Minister has to support the purchase of new rolling stock for the Metro as quickly as possible. In a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson), the Department for Transport said that it has

“engaged in preliminary discussions...for the replacement of rolling stock”.

Can the Minister give us any more detail about those discussions? Bearing in mind the concerns that have been raised, will he look favourably on a request for funding for new Metro cars?

This debate is a chance for the Government to demonstrate that they are truly committed to investing in the north-east, and to delivering their promises to our region. Many of my constituents remain cynical about the Chancellor's sudden conversion to the cause of investing in northern cities just a few months before the last general election. It is notable that a number of the transport infrastructure projects announced for our region in the pre-election Budget were in fact re-announcements, not new money. In any case, it remains unclear where the north-east fits into his northern powerhouse, if it fits at all.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) has said, it remains the case that the Government spend £5,426 a year on transport for every person living in London, but for the north-east they spend just £223 a year. If the Government are serious about rebalancing the economy, investing in new trains for our Metro would be a good start.

Mrs Hodgson: Obviously we need to fix what we have before we go any further. Is my hon. Friend aware that, with a population of some 55,000 people, Washington is the largest conurbation in the area not to be covered by the Tyne and Wear Metro? As well as giving us the money we need to make the Metro fit for purpose, we also need to ensure that the Metro covers the whole of Tyne and Wear.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I could not agree more. Investment is needed so that we can roll out the Metro, because that would help our economy, although we need to fix the faults first. It is not right that a large part of our area is not accessible by the Metro.

I suspect that the Minister will try to sidestep my constituents' complaints by saying that the running of the Metro is a devolved matter. It is right that regions and cities should have control over transport, and Opposition Members have been pushing for even greater devolution. Nexus and the North East combined authority have been holding DB Regio Tyne and Wear to account by imposing penalties where appropriate, but it would be wrong to say that all the issues we are seeing can be attributed to the operator. Even the best management cannot compensate for trains that have come to the end of their lifespan and can no longer be relied on. There is a clear need for investment.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent contribution. Although the Tyne and Wear Metro does not extend to Northumberland, I am sure the Minister will give a cast-iron guarantee that that is only a matter of time. Does my hon. Friend agree that, although the Tyne and Wear Metro has a fantastic workforce, from the drivers to the cleaners, the one problem it has is that workforce numbers have dropped from 315 to 281? Eighteen drivers have left over the past year, which is nearly double the average over the past three years. If the Metro does not have the workforce or the staff, does she agree that it is highly likely that its productivity will be reduced?

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I agree with my hon. Friend. For the Metro to work, it needs to have the staff and structure. I have already spoken to Nexus about staffing and the lack of staff available on the platform to advise passengers when there have been problems. There is clearly a need for investment. The Metro will not serve our area without that investment. I hope the Minister will recognise that today and tell us more about what the Government can do to bring that investment forward.

4.47 pm

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): As ever, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck), my constituency neighbour, on securing this important debate, which

[Julie Elliott]

centres on the performance of the Tyne and Wear Metro service, but I will also address the service's future, to which she alluded.

In the past nine months for which figures are available, 42,749 excess minutes were recorded, which is more than double the Metro's target. Causes include power failures, leaves on the line and train malfunctions. The majority of complaints received were due to train service performance. I live near a Metro station, so my family and I understand the Metro's benefits all too well. The Metro is and has been a great service, and I remember when it first started. [Interruption.] We are all showing our age this afternoon.

The Metro has not been reliable over the past few years. If I turn up in the morning to catch the Metro to Newcastle to get a train down here—when I am not getting a Sunderland train—a delay can make the difference between catching my train and not catching my train. The Metro runs to the airport, so it has to be reliable. People have to be at the airport a certain amount of time in advance, and people have complained to me that they have missed flights because of problems with the Metro. Part of the issue is that there are not many public transport alternatives. It is not like London, where if the buses go off, the tube is there; or if the tube goes off, there are lots of buses. In the north-east, people who live within travelling distance of the Tyne and Wear Metro rely on that service and, historically, it was very reliable. The benefits of living near the Metro are great, but the problem is that it needs to be reliable.

People are not just being penalised for losing minutes at work; they can lose their job if they are consistently late for work. Employers are not interested in why people are late for work, but in whether they are there on time to do the job they are paid to do, and I totally understand that. It is a very serious problem. Of the 502 complaints in April and May this year, most were to do with train service performance. It is a real issue across the piece.

Chi Onwurah: My hon. Friend makes a very important point about the impact of train delays. Does she agree that productivity is one of the key challenges that we face, as the acting leader of the Labour party, our right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), said this morning? We are 30% behind other countries when it comes to productivity. Excellent transport links are important for productivity, but my hon. Friend has given various examples that show how it is being undermined by bad transport.

Julie Elliott: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. It is absolutely true that productivity is essential. Economically, the north-east is one of the most productive regions in the country. We are still the only region that has a positive balance of trade. We export enormously, which is something to be proud of, but people have to get to their jobs to be able to create that productivity.

It is clear that Nexus will have to procure a new fleet of trains to meet identified customer demand. The number of people travelling on public transport goes up all the time. From an environmental point of view, that is important. As has been said, the fleet started carrying passengers in 1980. The refurbishment going on at the

moment will take it to around 2025, but further refurbishment is not cost-effective. The trains are cranky and noisy, and there is a limit to what can be done with old stock. By the middle of the next decade, the trains will represent 50-year-old technology, with all the problems that go with that, including low levels of reliability, poor energy efficiency and poor compliance with accessibility legislation. When they were introduced, they were trailblazing, but they are now old hat. As someone over 50, I understand the problems that getting older creates: you are not quite as good as you were a few years ago. New trains are critical. They will improve reliability and punctuality for the more than 38 million passengers who use the service every year.

I want to move on to the disparity in funding between the regions. According to recent research undertaken by the Equality Trust, if we combine bus and rail, the average amount of money in Government subsidy spent on transport for each household in the north-east is £139 a year. For those in the south-east it is £204. The figures speak for themselves. If the northern powerhouse is to amount to anything more than a vanity project for the Chancellor, he needs to put his money where his mouth is, and he needs to use the Budget next week to direct extra money into public transport in our region. A new fleet is central to securing a better, more punctual and energy-efficient Metro service. Given the costs involved, Government financing will be crucial. These things inevitably take time, so I urge the Minister to begin talks now to ensure that passengers in Sunderland, who rely on the Metro to go to work, attend hospital appointments and visit family and friends, get the service they need and deserve.

4.53 pm

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) on securing this important debate.

The Tyne and Wear Metro is a critical part of the north-east's transport infrastructure. For decades it has provided high levels of service, punctuality and customer satisfaction, running millions of journeys every year to ensure that the people of the north-east could get around quickly and efficiently. I am concerned to hear so many of the points raised by my hon. Friends today regarding the drop in operating performance. Valid concerns have been raised. Journeys are being affected by the age and need for upkeep of the rolling stock in use. Punctuality performance during the period of DB Regio's operation has declined significantly: it is on average 8% lower than this time last year. Many travellers have also complained that when things go wrong, there is no information about what is happening and few viable alternative means of completing their journey.

I hope that as a result of today's debate progress can be made to ensure that the Metro provides a reliable and affordable service. However, the Government have a role to play in ensuring that the Metro can meet its targets. One way to ensure that Nexus meets the plans it published last year in its "Metro Strategy 2030" document is for the Government to provide the funding necessary to secure a new fleet. This would reduce the number of technical issues that have arisen as a result of the 40-year-old rolling stock. We need upgrades to be carried out.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) about the need to extend the Metro to Washington. That is certainly something that my constituents would support. The re-opening of the Leamside line would benefit many people across Sunderland. Another proposed extension is the new line that would run from Doxford International business park in my constituency. This would transform transport links in my area, giving local people rapid access to other parts of the city and the wider region, and it would allow local businesses to grow and create jobs through improved transport links.

The people in Houghton and Sunderland South deserve to see real improvements. The north-east continues to get a raw deal on public transport investment compared with other parts of the country. In London, when things go wrong, commuters have a wealth of options available, but when we have a problem on one part of the network in Tyne and Wear, there is a knock-on effect. In the north-east, when there is a problem with the Metro or when local buses do not run, passengers can be left stranded.

If the Government are serious about creating a so-called northern powerhouse in the north-east to drive economic growth, they must match their rhetoric with action and invest to create a truly integrated transport network. Joining up the Metro, local buses and other transport options will give passengers genuine choice as to how they travel, and options when things go wrong. It will also help commuters get to work, improve transport links for businesses and spur job creation.

Chi Onwurah: My hon. Friend makes very important points about increased investment, the extension of the Tyne and Wear Metro and integrated transport. This morning I headed off to an event outside Westminster. I used the new Tottenham Court Road station, which is part of the Crossrail investment. It is a beautiful station; I think it is excellent. Crossrail represents billions of pounds of investment in London. Does my hon. Friend agree that the north-east needs a suitably ambitious investment programme for its transport infrastructure?

Bridget Phillipson: Of course our capital city needs investment in the rail network to ensure it can function properly, so that we can attract jobs and investment, but so does the north-east. Unfortunately, in recent weeks we have had further confirmation that the Government remain lacking in commitment when it comes to investment in transport infrastructure in the north. In my constituency, we do not benefit at all from the Tyne and Wear Metro. Many people use it, but we do not have direct links within the constituency, and for many of my constituents, the only option is bus travel. That is why I have campaigned so much to support what the combined authority has done on introducing a quality contract scheme.

If businesses are to continue to invest in the region and jobs are to be created, we need a more integrated network. We need a joined-up network so that people can be confident of getting to work on time, and so that businesses know that they can invest in an area with excellent transport links. The north-east has many excellent road networks and good links in many respects, but we are let down by public transport. The proposed Metro extension to Doxford is absolutely critical, and I hope to see the extension proposals in “Metro Strategy 2030” become a reality.

I look forward to the Minister’s response. I want to hear him outline the work that he will do, through the Department, to make sure that the Metro receives the investment it needs in the short term, and how he will work with Nexus and the combined authority to deliver the long-term investment in transport infrastructure that the north-east needs, particularly the investment needed over the next 20 to 30 years to extend the Metro and offer better transport options for the region to support the businesses, job creation and growth that we all want to see.

4.58 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) on securing this important debate, and on setting out so clearly how the Metro service affects the lives of her constituents and the wider area. She has made a powerful case for investment in the north-east’s local transport infrastructure. I also welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), to his place. I am sure that this will be the first of many Westminster Hall debates on light rail that he will respond to, and I wish him well in his new post.

We heard important speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) and for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson), and many valuable contributions from other hon. Friends who represent Tyne and Wear constituencies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central said, reliable services are vital to people in her area—not only those working locally, but those connecting to inter-city rail services and flights from the airport. My hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South spelled out the important role that modern rolling stock can play in ensuring a punctual service, and how an expanded and integrated network could benefit businesses in her constituency. It is clear that the Tyne and Wear Metro plays a crucial role in supporting the local economy, and my hon. Friends are rightly ambitious for their region.

The existence of the Metro is a testament to the planners who, 40 years ago, had the foresight to take the run-down Tyneside Electrics network, which was ironically converted to diesel under British Rail, and transform it into the first modern light rail service in the country. It is fair to say that while the Tyne and Wear Metro owes more to conventional rail lines than most light rail networks, it pioneered the conversion of disused or underused rail lines, a practice that has been integral to the success of the Manchester Metrolink, the docklands light railway, and—I hope that I do not have to declare an interest here, Mr Gray—the Nottingham express transit system. I am sure that everyone in this House welcomes the investment in those systems in recent years.

The 2002 extension to Sunderland increased the size of the Metro network by around a third, and a £580 million funding package was awarded under the last Labour Government, with £350 million earmarked for investment and £230 million reserved for meeting running costs. It is a cause for concern that, as has been set out today, there are ongoing challenges to do with performance

[Lilian Greenwood]

and the quality of services for passengers. It is certainly worrying that while tram and light rail use continue to grow in London, ridership has fallen on most systems since 2009-10, and the Tyne and Wear Metro is no exception. The network carried 40.8 million passengers five years ago, but that figure fell to 38.1 million in 2014-15, despite the fact that people who live within the Nexus passenger transport executive boundaries are more disposed to travel by light rail than those in any other area.

Of course, that decline might have something to do with worsening punctuality. As the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), said in a recent written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields, punctuality declined from 87% in 2010-11 to just 80% in 2014-15. Although the Metro is not included in Passenger Transport's recent passenger satisfaction surveys, according to information collected as a condition of the operator's concession agreement, passenger satisfaction is also below target, and of course that was borne out in my hon. Friends' comments today. Passengers deserve better, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to the points ably put by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields and her colleagues.

The Metro network's ageing rolling stock undoubtedly plays a part in those reduced passenger satisfaction ratings, and as my hon. Friends have said, it also impacts on the Metro's operating performance. As was said, the Metro's vehicles date from the 1970s and the early 1980s; they are as old as the system itself, and Nexus regards their replacement as "essential". When the Minister responds to the debate, will he say what progress has been made in the Department's discussions with Nexus on this point, and what options are available to the Department to support the procurement of new vehicles?

In addition to answering my hon. Friends' questions, I would be grateful if the Minister could say a few words about the potential for integrating Metro and bus services. My hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South raised that point, and she has been a powerful advocate for the importance of integrated transport, and particularly the importance of improving bus services in the Tyne and Wear area.

During the 1970s and through to the mid-1980s, Tyne and Wear was well known—both locally, and in public transport enthusiasts' circles—for its highly integrated ticketing system. Sadly, those arrangements were mostly lost following the deregulation of bus services from 1986 onwards. Does the Minister agree that local authorities should have the power to integrate timetables and ticketing over different modes to improve services for passengers, however that integration is delivered, and that tendering for bus services is an important tool that should be available to local authorities and passenger transport executives? In addition, does he agree that more co-ordinated bus and metro services might increase passenger satisfaction on both modes of transport? Finally, can he explain why, according to reports, there will be a disparity in the forthcoming buses Bill between the powers given to areas that have metro mayors and those that do not, and will he say when that Bill will be published?

This has been a valuable debate. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields has made a number of important points on behalf of passengers in her constituency, and they have been taken up by hon. Friends from across the wider Tyne and Wear area. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to all the questions that have been put; I hope that he will address them in full.

5.5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): Thank you very much, Mr Gray, for calling me to speak. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for what I think is the first time in my new role.

I congratulate the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) on securing the debate and on highlighting the importance of the Metro system to her area, as well as the problems with its services that local people are experiencing. Those problems came across strongly in the remarks by her colleagues from across the area, and I know that Nexus is also listening to this debate.

The Government recognise the important role that the Tyne and Wear Metro has played in the life of the north-east. I too remember it arriving; I suspect that those of us of a certain age—our early fifties—all remember it. It was exciting—an indication of confidence and a little bit of pride. Apart from the transport infrastructure benefits it provided, the Metro was a sign of resurgence and growth, and it has played an important role in the north-east. Light rail and local transport play an important role in the whole area.

Ian Lavery: Local transport is important, but the problem in my constituency, which is in the south-east of Northumberland, is that the Metro does not go anywhere near it, which presents a problem of connectivity for anyone seeking employment and so on in the big cities. Will the Minister agree to support the reintroduction of the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line, which would eventually link up with the Metro, hopefully at Regent Centre, and give greater connectivity and more opportunities to people in my constituency?

Andrew Jones: I cannot make pledges off the cuff, as I think the hon. Gentleman knows, but do I think that rail investment drives economic growth? Do I think that we are struggling with our capacity? Our rail network is a victim of its success. There are as many passengers using our network now as there were in the late 1920s, but the network is only a fraction of the size it was then. During the last 20 years, passenger journeys have gone up from 750 million per year to more than 1.6 billion per year. That is the driver of some of the congestion and pressures that we now see—it is coping with success. Also, part of the challenge is the long-term historical underinvestment in our railways, which has taken place under Governments of both colours over many years, and we are now playing catch-up with our infrastructure. So can I back the hon. Gentleman's campaign immediately? I cannot make that pledge and I think he knows that—I can tell from his little smile just now that he probably knows that. But on the general principle of whether we can do more to invest, I say yes—but goodness, this Government are doing that already.

Let me go back to Metro as it stands. I recognise that other Members have talked about the capacity to extend Metro and I can see much appeal in that. I think it was the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) who made the point that the constant desire to see Metro extended to new destinations just underlines how important it is in the area and how popular it is with passengers. I hope the potential for new extensions will grow. The extensions to the light rail services in Manchester and Nottingham have been very positive developments, and I hope that the North East combined authority considers such an extension as part of its transport plan. I would support such a proposal.

Metro is an important and formidable asset for the area. It copes magnificently with certain big events in the area, such as carrying 100,000 people for the Great North Run. Metro is a success story. Notwithstanding the operational problems detailed by hon. Members, this is the busiest light rail network outside London, and the fastest growing. Passenger journey numbers have increased by 2 million in the past year, and there are now more than 38 million in total. The revenues of Nexus, which owns and manages Metro, have grown by 4.4% and it now funds its day-to-day operation entirely from fares revenue and central Government metropolitan rail grant, without having to ask the local authorities for funding, as in the past. The Government have supported Nexus in its 11-year £350 million capital investment programme. As the hon. Member for South Shields highlighted, the programme—essentially one of asset renewal—is still running. It is delivering significant benefits now and will continue to do so over the next few years.

I take a keen interest in the performance of all rail services in the country, but the performance of Metro is a devolved matter. Nexus and its operating concessionaire provide regular updates at meetings of the North East combined authority, where its performance has been scrutinised. I understand that Nexus's performance will be on the agenda at an authority meeting next week, on 9 July, and local councillors can directly question the senior management team from Nexus and the operator.

I have had a brief conversation with Nexus and undertaken to visit it in the next few weeks. It accepts that the day-to-day performance of Metro does not match the standards it sets for itself and which passengers expect. The main reasons for poor performance are clearly the train fleet's reliability and the availability of train drivers. Nexus, the public body owning the network, has instigated a performance improvement plan, working closely with its concessionaire to identify the most common and recurring causes of faults in the trains and the actions needed to address them. As a result, the most common problem—door faults—have come down by one third since April, and train power faults have been reduced by a half compared with the previous quarter.

The operator has accelerated its recruitment and training process for drivers, which the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) mentioned. The company has suffered from the impact of an ageing workforce: many drivers who started with Metro in the early 1980s are now reaching retirement age. The operator is taking on 24 new drivers this year, and two thirds have already completed training or are about to do so. As a result,

train cancellations due to no driver being available have been reduced and will continue to fall. There is also recognition that communications with customers need to improve, particularly when Metro is not running to timetable. The operator is committed to new training for its front-line staff and Nexus is to invest more than £20 million in new radio and train management systems as part of its investment in Metro, supporting better communication right through the system. Although there is further to go, Metro is heading in the right direction, and we want to be in a position to support it.

The Government are committed to the long-term investment plan, launched by the previous Labour Government, which will continue until 2021. In the last financial year, under that plan, we invested £30.9 million in securing Metro for some decades to come, and we are looking to invest a similar amount in this financial year. The real value of that investment is in giving Nexus the strength and security to plan projects over a number of years, in the same way that the Government structures investment in national rail infrastructure. One problem in our rail sector has been a stop-start—frequently stop—approach to investment over many years, which has meant that we do not have some of the skills or continuity of supply in industry to deliver our aspirations and expectations. That is part of the long-term failure to invest in transport that I mentioned earlier. This investment has focused on the key engineering assets on which Metro and its passengers rely, including new track, replacement of cable routes and renewal of lifts and escalators at stations. This investment has already improved the service for passengers by reducing faults.

Long-term planning and security of investment has helped Nexus to drive down projects' overheads by a quarter, releasing a further £20 million that will be invested where it is needed in new assets for Metro. The investment has allowed Nexus to invest in people as well as infrastructure—for example, it has taken on 30 new apprentices in the last three years. Those young people can look forward to rewarding careers in engineering, thanks to that investment.

Government investment has also gone towards refurbishment of stations and trains. We have talked quite a bit about rolling stock, which I will come to in a moment. The investment has been focused on raising accessibility to modern standards as part of a commitment to providing a railway open to all. The refurbished trains provide more space for passengers, while refurbished stations offer tactile surfaces, double handrails, better lighting and proper bench seats to cater for the needs of all.

Alongside this programme, Nexus has, with the support of the Department for Transport, invested in smartcard travel. The smartcard is the reason Nexus has invited me to visit and see its operation. It is already used by more than 100,000 local people on the system. High-quality cycle storage at stations—another part of the integration that colleagues have talked about—which goes right across the system, is funded through the local sustainable transport fund.

It might help if I highlight the impact of ongoing investment. That is not to say that there have not been operational difficulties, because there clearly have been, and Nexus know it, but work is under-way to get this right. Nexus is trying to do a good job.

[Andrew Jones]

Metro is owned and run locally, but the Department works with it and in support of it. The Department is now working with Nexus and NECA to understand what future investment is required, to ensure that it continues to play a vital role in making the north-east economy work. Our discussions on replacement of rolling stock are at the very earliest stages. Colleagues have asked if I can make a commitment on rolling stock. I cannot make that commitment today, but I recognise that 40-year-old rolling stock—by the way, that is not unusual in our rail infrastructure—is coming to the end of its life and we are looking towards a new train fleet. The refurbishment will see the fleet through for a period, but it will not make it fit for decades into the future. Future rail fleets will certainly be required.

Bridget Phillipson: I welcome the Minister's discussions with Nexus and the combined authority about investment in rolling stock. During those discussions, will he undertake to discuss the long-term investment that will be needed in the Metro network if there is to be expansion? That will require significant Government investment. I appreciate that this is a long-term strategy, but there are proposals in place that would bring significant benefits to the region. I know he cannot commit today to any particular schemes, but will he discuss that and bear in mind the economic benefits that those proposals could bring?

Andrew Jones: I am happy to make that commitment. We should be making long-decisions and doing long-term planning, not just for our rail sector but for other sectors, too. With long-term commitments, we will be able to tackle some questions that have not been tackled for years. Part of today's business was a statement on a new airport runway in the south-east of England. That debate started about 50 years ago. We in this country are not great at tackling long-term decisions.

Winning financial commitment over a period, which has been forthcoming from this Government, enables contractors to scale up their operation to deliver this Government's aspirations for a step change in our investment. I am happy to make that commitment to the hon. Lady. I fully buy into the principle that long-term planning and investment in transport are key ingredients in economic growth.

As hon. Members have said throughout this debate, if we want a thriving UK economy we need a thriving northern economy. There can be no thriving northern powerhouse unless we make significant investment to deal with clogged up roads, for example. I hope that the hon. Member for South Shields noted Highways England's announcement, published this morning, about the £600 million investment in the A1 and A19, and other investments in the area. That investment is starting to flow through. The northern powerhouse is a powerful idea that is partly to do with connectivity, but it is partly to do with devolution, too, and it allows us to start to rebalance our economy.

The lack of balance in our economy has been an enormous problem over many years. It is not just bad for the north; it is bad for the entire country. Over the past decade, around half the UK's growth has been concentrated in London and the surrounding districts.

I am a northern Member of Parliament. Although my constituency is not quite as far north as the north-east, it is not too far away, in North Yorkshire.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: For us, that is the south.

Andrew Jones: That may be so, but you, Mr Gray, will firmly consider it to be the north. I am sure there is no disagreement that we need a better deal for the north, and I am confident that that is exactly what we can get.

Lilian Greenwood: Some Opposition Members may be somewhat surprised to hear how the Minister speaks about the northern powerhouse when only last week the Government paused important investment in the north. That is precisely the sort of stop-start approach that he decries.

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. I think comments should perhaps be in the context of the performance of the Tyne and Wear Metro.

Andrew Jones: That pause, which does not affect the performance of the Tyne and Wear Metro—

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. It may be best to leave that argument for another debate.

Andrew Jones: Perhaps I will have that conversation with the shadow Minister after the debate. There is no question at all about the principle that transport investment and the performance of the Tyne and Wear Metro will drive the local economy. I mentioned that we are facing an infrastructure deficit in our country and that we are playing catch-up, and I regard investment in road, rail, light rail and connectivity as central to addressing that.

I will deal with a couple of other points that were raised. On the potential for integrating bus and Metro, the first point to make is that we have a competitive bus market, so it has the capacity to be responsive to customer need. Nothing is stopping councils from working with bus companies, but I view that as a matter of partnership rather than one of principle.

The buses Bill was mentioned by the hon. Member for South Shields. I think it will be an enabling Bill, but we have not drafted it in full yet. We are working through the ideas, which will be about creating the opportunity for franchising. That follows through on the pledge of devolution to Manchester, which has been so welcomed in Greater Manchester. By working together with a set of partner authorities in a combined authority, Manchester has shown a clear pair of heels to other parts of the north. The message I have been hearing from local council leaders in my area is that they want some of those powers, alongside which will come the requirement for democratic accountability, and that goes back to the elected mayor principle.

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. In the context of Tyne and Wear Metro?

Andrew Jones: Indeed, as in the context of Tyne and Wear Metro.

Bridget Phillipson: In the context of integrating transport between Metro and buses, the Minister will no doubt be aware of the quality contract scheme for local buses that is under way in Tyne and Wear. I urge the Government to consider how that will impact on the buses Bill and vice versa. It is not clear how those two things will be brought together, and the Government will need to address that inconsistency when legislation is published.

Andrew Jones: In the context of the performance of the Tyne and Wear Metro, I am not sure there is an inconsistency. I think we will see different arrangements in different places as different combined authorities or county councils—whoever it may be—choose different models of operation in their area. That is absolutely fine. We should be working on the principle of local solutions for local problems. That will mean different things in different places, and devolution could operate at different paces in different places. That does not trouble me at all. We must ensure that we have a system that delivers decision making as near as possible to the point where a service is delivered.

That point goes back to Metro performance. Control is local. We have operational performance issues, but they are being tackled locally. My Department will offer support by sharing best practice and allocating committed cash. I am keen to see that relationship continue, as with all light-rail schemes around the country. It is about a principle of partnership, through sharing best practice and helping with finance, but with local control and local delivery that is responsive to local needs. It should operate to a high level and deliver good-quality solutions. That is what should be happening in this case.

I recognise the point about long-term investment, which will be a mixture of local growth deal funding into which the Department for Transport will put more than £1 billion a year. We will see more work by the

Department for Communities and Local Government and the Treasury, but the principle of long-term commitments with extra capital is clearly in place.

I hope that I have been helpful in explaining how the Department for Transport will work with Nexus to improve and support Metro, which is an important and growing part of the north-east economy. It is growing in terms of passenger numbers, the services it offers and, potentially, the geography it covers. There is great demand for it, as shown by passenger numbers rising by more than 2 million in the past year. Finally, I will ensure that I am very involved in the process. I will be up to see Nexus's smart ticketing operation quite soon, and I will pick up all the points that we have discussed when I head north, which I look forward to doing shortly.

5.26 pm

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I thank all my hon. Friends who have taken part in today's debate, and I welcome the Minister to his post. I also welcome the Minister's ongoing dialogue with Nexus. I am pleased that he seems to get the point that patching up the system and refurbishment are not the final answer—we need investment in the existing rolling stock. I just hope that he can get the Chancellor to understand that as well, because my constituents and, I am sure, those of my hon. Friends are fed up with being short-changed, frankly. I welcome the fact that the Minister will be talking to Nexus very soon, and I hope that he and I can discuss that ongoing dialogue. The sooner our rolling stock is replaced, the better for all of us in the north-east.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the performance of the Tyne and Wear Metro.

5.27 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 1 July 2015

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Statutory Guidance (Review Provision Requirements) and Statement on Definition of Control

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): I am publishing today a guidance document and a statement to assist Departments in implementing the provisions of the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015 (the Act).

The guidance sets out the test to be applied in circumstances where Departments think that it may not be appropriate to include a review provision in new secondary legislation. It must be taken into account by any Minister making such a determination.

The statement clarifies how Departments should determine whether regulated activities are carried out by public sector bodies. Regulatory impacts and regulations on public sector bodies are outside the scope of the business impact target, and the new duty relating to review provisions.

There have been no changes to either document from the drafts that were published in February this year in parallel with the passage of the Act.

The documents can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/small-business-enterprise-and-employment-act-statutory-review-requirements>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/small-business-enterprise-and-employment-bill-statement-control-by-a-public-authority>

Copies of the documents will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS73]

EDUCATION

Design and Technology GCSE

The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb): We are reforming GCSEs to make sure that they give students the best possible preparation for further and higher education, and for employment. We want new GCSEs to set expectations which match those of the best education systems in the world, with rigorous assessment that provides a reliable measure of students' achievement. The reforms are extensive and represent a new qualification gold standard.

Today we are publishing design and technology GCSE content that will assess both breadth and depth of knowledge, without limiting students on the materials they can work with. Current design and technology GCSEs have a wide range of titles each of which is focused on separate material areas—such as resistant materials, textiles or graphics. The new content will support a single qualification title, a change which subject experts felt is critical to the development of a qualification that requires students to have a broad knowledge of the design processes, materials, techniques and equipment that are core to the subject.

The content emphasises iterative processes of designing which all students should understand and be able to demonstrate. Subject experts have advised that such processes are at the core of contemporary practice. By teaching students this approach, the new qualification will prepare them for further study and careers in design, engineering, manufacturing and related areas.

The content also sets out, in detail, the mathematical and scientific content that students must know and use that relate closely to design and technology.

Together these changes aim to ensure that all students have the knowledge and skills to design and make products or prototypes, using the best material, equipment and techniques, to solve real world and relevant problems across a range of contexts.

[HCWS74]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council and General Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 22 June. The Foreign Affairs Council was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. She also hosted the Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon for a working lunch with EU Foreign Ministers. The General Affairs Council was chaired by the Latvian presidency. The meetings were held in Luxembourg.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

A provisional report of the meeting and conclusions adopted can be found at:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2015/06/22/>

Mediterranean migration

The Council approved the Council decision to launch the EU CSDP operation in the southern central Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED), activating phase I—deployment and assessment. Ms Mogherini was grateful to member states for launching the operation in record time. The Foreign Secretary said that the UK supported the operation, and was contributing a ship, HMS Enterprise, and a Merlin helicopter. The Foreign Secretary called for an audit of additional EU activity in source and transit countries to be presented at the July FAC, work on a stronger evidence base on migrant movements in source and transit countries, enhanced EU investment and a clear roadmap to the Valletta summit.

Energy diplomacy

The Council discussed how to use EU foreign policy most effectively to meet the growing geopolitical risks associated with energy, with a focus on diversification, alternative routes, EU unity and work with a wider set of partner countries. The Foreign Secretary underlined the necessity of rapidly completing the internal single market in energy, noting the importance of harmonising strategic energy goals with market incentives.

Asia

The Council held a strategic discussion on EU relations with Asia. There was general support for the need to continue to strengthen relations at a multilateral level, as part of a re-energised EU approach to the region. There was an emphasis on trade and economic co-operation, including in the exchange of views on relations with China, ahead of the EU-China summit, which took place on 29 June 2015. There was also discussion of developing better connectivity in Asia, with a focus on ensuring compatibility with European transport networks.

EU-UN co-operation

During lunch UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, focused on preparations for forthcoming UN high-level events, including those taking place in Addis Ababa in July on financing for development, in New York in September on the post-2015 agenda and the climate change COP21 in Paris in December. The discussion also covered EU-UN co-operation in tackling a number of current crises, and the Council approved EU priorities for the UN General Assembly.

Macedonia

The Council discussed the political situation in Macedonia. Ms Mogherini expressed grave concern regarding the ongoing political crisis, and welcomed the close co-operation between the EEAS and Commission. There was wide agreement that the current situation was unacceptable. Conclusions were subsequently adopted by the General Affairs Council on 23 June.

*Any other business**Middle east peace process*

Ms Mogherini briefed the Council following her recent trip to Jerusalem and Ramallah. Discussion centred on how the EU and its member states could most effectively support the peace process. The Foreign Secretary emphasised the need for a coherent approach, and noted the important role of the EU, particularly on issues around settlements and Gaza. Ms Mogherini proposed a discussion item on the middle east peace process at the 20 July FAC.

Ministers agreed without discussion a number of measures:

The Council launched the EU naval operation to disrupt human smuggling in the Mediterranean;

The Council adopted the EU priorities at the United Nations and the 17th UN General Assembly—September 2015 to September 2016;

The Council adopted conclusions on EU-ASEAN relations;

The Council adopted conclusions on the forthcoming elections in Burma;

The Council adopted conclusions on the EU strategy for central Asia;

The Council adopted conclusions on Burundi;

The Council adopted conclusions on Lebanon;

The Council extended the EU economic sanctions, which responded to Russia's destabilising role in eastern Ukraine, until 31 January 2016;

The Council approved the EU annual report on human rights and democracy in the world in 2014;

The Council adopted conclusions on common principles for multi-purpose cash-based assistance to respond to humanitarian needs;

The Council extended the mandate of Mr Lars-Gunnar Wigemark as European Union special representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina for a further four months—until 31 October 2015;

The Council amended the EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime.

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

A provisional report of the meeting can be found at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2015/06/23/>

The General Affairs Council (GAC) on 23 June focused on: Macedonia; preparation of the European Council on 25 and 26 June 2015; the 2015 European semester; and the better regulation agenda.

Macedonia

The GAC adopted Council conclusions in response to the ongoing political crisis in Macedonia.

These call on the political parties to honour their 2 June agreement and implement all the recommendations of the European Commission, starting with urgent reform priorities in relation to rule of law issues confirmed by, or arising out of, the current crisis. The Council will revert to the issue in the next months.

Preparation of the June European Council

The GAC prepared the 25 and 26 June European Council, which the Prime Minister attended. The June European Council focused on: migration, including follow up to the April European Council; security issues including common security and defence policy, the European security strategy and follow-up to the February European Council on terrorism; and economic and competitiveness issues including the digital single market, 2015 European semester, TTIP and economic governance in the euro area.

I emphasised the importance of a comprehensive approach to the Mediterranean migration situation including conclusions language on tackling the smugglers and the root causes of migration. I reiterated the Prime Minister's recent announcement of the extension of the Syria vulnerable persons scheme, and that the UK did not intend to participate in EU burden-sharing proposals.

I also stressed the importance of progress on the digital single market, one of the biggest opportunities for the EU to reinforce competitiveness and innovation and focus on consumers, including a swift end to mobile roaming charges in the EU.

European semester

The GAC considered the country specific recommendations (CSRs), published by the Commission to all non-programme EU member states on 13 May, as part of the European semester process. CSRs were also considered by the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council on 18 to 19 June and the Economic and Financial Affairs Council on 19 June.

The advice to the UK is to continue reducing the deficit, boost housing supply and address problems in the labour market, in line with the Government's long-term economic plan.

Better regulation agenda

The GAC held an initial discussion on the recently published better regulation package by the European Commission. The key part of the package is the inter-institutional agreement (IIA) on better regulation, which focuses on

red tape in the EU and the institutional co-operation among the Council of Ministers, the Commission and the European Parliament. The negotiations on the IIA are expected to commence shortly and expected to continue through the Luxembourg presidency of the EU.

I welcomed the Commission's proposal and highlighted the importance of specifying regulatory burden reduction targets—in particular for SMEs—an independent assessment board, and the use of subsidiarity, proportionality, and national parliaments as the key vehicles to deliver democratic accountability to the EU.

[HCWS77]

JUSTICE

Victims' Commissioner's Annual Report

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): I am pleased to announce that the Victims' Commissioner, Baroness Newlove of Warrington, has today published her annual report. I have placed a copy in the Libraries of both Houses.

The role of the Victims' Commissioner, as set out in the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, is to promote the interests of victims and witnesses, encourage good practice in their treatment and keep under review the operation of the statutory victims' code.

The report outlines the impressive work undertaken by the Victims' Commissioner during her second year of office and highlights her priorities for the coming year.

The Victims' Commissioner will continue to ensure that the views of victims are represented to Government and I welcome the insight and challenge that she provides.

[HCWS76]

Self-inflicted Deaths in Custody

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): We are today publishing the independent review report into self-inflicted deaths of young adults aged 18 to 24 in National Offender Management Service (NOMS) prison custody. The review, announced to this House on 6 February 2014 by the coalition Government, was carried out by the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody under the leadership of Lord Harris of Haringey.

I wish to thank Lord Harris of Haringey and the independent advisory panel for their work on this important review. Every death in custody is a tragedy. I thank the families of those who have taken their own lives, who gave evidence to this review in order to help avoid this happening to another family.

The independent report makes wide-ranging recommendations about the care and management of vulnerable young adults in custody to reduce the risk of future deaths. We will consider these carefully and respond to the report in the autumn.

[HCWS75]

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