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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 2 March 2016

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

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Exports

1. **Chris White** (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive on increasing the level of exports from Northern Ireland. [903780]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Ben Wallace): The Secretary of State and I hold regular discussions with Executive Ministers on a range of issues impacting the Northern Ireland economy. I welcome the recent visits to Northern Ireland by the Prime Minister, the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise and the Mayor of London to see at first hand the businesses and people who make the country's strong export record a reality.

Chris White: I welcome the Government's ambition to increase the number of companies in the UK that export by 100,000 by 2020. What steps are being taken, alongside the Executive, to ensure that Northern Ireland plays a major role in achieving that target?

Mr Wallace: As a consequence of both the Northern Ireland Executive's efforts and this Government's long-term economic plan, I am delighted to report that Northern Ireland's exports have grown 4% over the year—higher than those of any other country in the United Kingdom.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): The Secretary of State will be aware that the agri-food sector in Northern Ireland employs about 100,000 people. Will she assure us that she will work alongside Ministers in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to try to find new markets, which are essential to the agri-food sector, such as India, Mexico and Brazil?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman is right about the importance of the agri-food business. Indeed, on Monday night my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I met Moy foods, one of the biggest employers in Northern Ireland. New markets around the world are key to growing the agri-food business, not only in the EU but in China and elsewhere. That is why I am delighted that in May the GREAT campaign to promote Britain and United Kingdom exports will be visiting Northern Ireland.

I look forward to working with the Northern Ireland Executive to help that promotion to go from strength to strength.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State commit to commissioning research into the possible effects of leaving the EU on Northern Ireland's exports and wider economy? Will she further commit to making a statement to the House on the economic effects on Northern Ireland of a UK withdrawal from the EU thereafter?

Mr Wallace: The Government are very clear that being in the EU makes us better off, stronger and safer. I do not think that we will be diverted by commissioning external reports about what may or may not happen. The United Kingdom knows exactly what being in the EU looks like, because we are in it now. The reforms that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has got will achieve that goal.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Earlier this week, a Cabinet Office report was published that stated that leaving the EU would result in the imposition of customs checks at the Irish border. Do the Minister and the Secretary of State accept the assessment of the Cabinet Office? What impact do the Government expect customs checks to have on Northern Irish exports to the south—and this is being positive?

Mr Wallace: Of course, as a member of the Government, I accept the Cabinet Office's views. We should not forget that Ireland and the United Kingdom have a long-standing agreement, the common travel area, which would mean that certain barriers would not be in place. However, should we leave the European Union, we will be outside the customs union, and that will inevitably lead to some form of extra barriers to trade.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I do not know how the Minister keeps a straight face in some of his answers. It is no wonder that the Secretary of State is again avoiding answering these questions on the economy. Has the Minister discussed with Executive Ministers the survey by the Northern Ireland chamber of commerce, which showed that 81% of businesses in Northern Ireland support continued EU membership? Is it the case that there is little surprise in that finding, given that 60% of Northern Ireland's exports—a higher percentage than in any other part of the UK—go to the EU?

Mr Wallace: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I discussed that with the Northern Ireland chamber of commerce at a reception on Monday night in Northern Ireland. If the hon. Gentleman wants to know how I keep a straight face, let me tell him that I look across the Dispatch Box at two Labour Members who are in favour of replacing Trident, and I remember that their leader has no intention whatsoever of using it or replacing it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: I do not think that that is germane to the matter of exports from Northern Ireland.

Vernon Coaker: We are all amazed by the Minister's response. That really was going to the bottom of the barrel to try to find something to say.

Building on the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie), has the Minister discussed with Ministers in the Executive the fact that more than a third of exports to the EU—well over £1 billion a year—go to the Republic? She referred to a report. The Government report was published today, and her remarks are supported by the Newry chamber of commerce. There are very real concerns about customs checks having to be put in place at the border, because that would be a border between the UK and the EU. I discussed that last night in Belfast with Nigel Farage. We had a big debate about it. Let me say to the Minister that it deserves a better answer than, “It’ll be all right on the night.”

Mr Wallace: I think I would rather have seen Adele last night, who is playing in Belfast, than Nigel Farage.

The United Kingdom Government believe that we are better off, stronger and safer if we stay in the EU. Of course we do not want barriers to further trade. We recognise the importance of trade across the border to the Republic of Ireland. I can say that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are absolutely united in making sure that Northern Ireland business prospers and does the best it can, because this Government’s long-term economic plan will ensure that exports and domestic trade flourish.

Organised Crime

2. **Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to tackle organised crime in Northern Ireland. [903781]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The UK Government are supporting the fight against organised crime through the police funding delivered through the Northern Ireland block grant, the £25 million to tackle paramilitarism due to be provided under the fresh start agreement, and the work of bodies such as the National Crime Agency and Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs. The £160 million of additional security funding will support efforts on organised crime because of the involvement of terrorist groupings in that form of criminality.

Tom Tugendhat: In the fresh start agreement, the Executive committed to undertake a public awareness campaign to increase public understanding of the harm done to all communities by paramilitarism and organised crime. Given the impact that that has on businesses, will my right hon. Friend encourage the Executive to proceed quickly down that path?

Mrs Villiers: A theme that came out strongly from the fresh start talks was the need for a whole community approach to tackling the problems of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland in order not only to continue the excellent work of the police and their security partners, but to ensure that the public are well aware of the harm done by organised crime and are supported in their efforts to give the evidence necessary to bring individuals to justice and put them in prison, where they deserve to be.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): Since the National Crime Agency has, at long last, become operational in

Northern Ireland, what efforts have been made to seize the assets of those involved in organised crime and reinvest them in community projects in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Villiers: The NCA takes its duty to seize criminal assets very seriously. In that work, it will be assisted by the new joint agency taskforce on cross-jurisdictional crime, which will be established from April. It will consist not only of the NCA, Border Force, the immigration service and HMRC, but of the Irish Revenue Commissioners and the Criminal Assets Bureau. That will significantly enhance the excellent efforts already being made in Northern Ireland on these matters under the Organised Crime Task Force.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): Fuel laundering and smuggling is part of organised crime. What recent assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the fuel marker that has recently been introduced, and is she convinced that it will be effective enough?

Mrs Villiers: The fuel marker Accutrace was introduced in April 2015. A six-month report on its use was deposited in the Library of the House in November. The review suggests that the new marker is having a very positive effect. It is too early to say whether the reductions are sustained and to establish causality, but the results are positive so far.

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): With the number of police officers halving over the years, the number of groups involved in organised crime has more than doubled to 150, or possibly more. Does the Secretary of State see any significance in that?

Mrs Villiers: I would emphasise that Belfast, and Northern Ireland, is one of the safest places in the world. There is a significant problem with criminality related to paramilitarism and of course a lethal threat from terrorists, but the UK Government are absolutely determined to support the Police Service of Northern Ireland in the brilliant work it is doing. The PSNI is assisted by the very strong co-operation with An Garda Síochána in bringing to justice those who seek to exploit the border for criminal purposes.

Organised Crime

3. **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What discussions she has had with Ministers of the Irish Government on cross-border efforts to tackle organised crime. [903782]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): In December, I attended a trilateral cross-border ministerial meeting with the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government. We agreed new measures to enhance law enforcement co-operation. A joint agency task force to tackle cross-jurisdictional organised crime has been created in line with the fresh start agreement.

Sir David Amess: While accepting that there are political uncertainties in the south as a result of the elections, does my right hon. Friend agree that the north and south face similar difficulties in combating

crime, managing offenders and supporting victims, and that it is in everyone's best interests that the Administrations of the north and south work closely together?

Mrs Villiers: I agree entirely. Security co-operation between the UK and Ireland is better than it ever has been. I believe that it is saving lives every day in the fight against organised crime and terrorism.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): It is a stain on our efforts to frustrate cross-border crime that, after decades of fundraising for and running the Provisional IRA, it took the Irish Republic to secure an Al Capone-style conviction on Thomas "Slab" Murphy. Does that not highlight the fact that much more needs to be done to frustrate not only those who proliferate across the border, but those who support and fundraise for ongoing terror in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Villiers: The work that has been done by the Organised Crime Task Force and the PSNI over recent years in Northern Ireland is exceptional and very effective. I am convinced that the new strategy for paramilitaries in the fresh start agreement, in which the political parties went further than ever before in condemning paramilitary activity in the most forthright terms, and the cross-jurisdictional arrangements that were set up in the agreement will make Northern Ireland an even safer place than it is today.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that the introduction of plain packaging for tobacco products could lead to an increase in cross-border organised crime?

Mrs Villiers: It is hugely important that the police do all they can to tackle tobacco smuggling and I know that it is taken very seriously. It may be something that can be considered by the new joint agency task force on cross-border crime. It is a serious crime and those who buy illegal cigarettes are supporting and funding evil criminals who are involved in significant violence. It is not a victimless crime and I urge everyone to avoid purchasing such products.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): There was clearly a cross-border dimension to the horrific events of August 1998 in Omagh. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) and I, and I am sure the whole House, extend our profound sympathies to the friends and families of those who lost their lives on that terrible day. The Secretary of State has referred to cross-border co-operation and said that the relationship between An Garda Síochána and the PSNI is at an historic high. Will she commit, here and now, to bend every sinew to extend and solidify that relationship, because we must never, ever allow an intelligence breakdown to occur again?

Mrs Villiers: I can, of course, give the commitment that the UK Government and, I am sure, the Northern Ireland Executive will do everything in our power to enhance the co-operation between north and south, which is crucial. I associate myself with the comments of sympathy, support and condolence to the victims of one of the vilest atrocities that has ever taken place.

Economic Development

4. **Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive on economic development in Northern Ireland. [903783]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): I hold regular discussions with Executive and Government Ministers on a range of economic issues. Our long-term economic plan continues to deliver for Northern Ireland: the economy is growing, there are 46,000 more people in employment today than in 2010 and wages are up by more than 5% over the year.

Karl McCartney: I welcome the recent news that 10,300 fewer people in Northern Ireland were claiming jobseeker's allowance last month than in January 2015. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a clear indication that the economic pact is working?

Mrs Villiers: The economic pact that was signed between the Executive and the Government means that we are working more closely than ever before to rebalance the Northern Ireland economy and boost jobs. Unemployment is down by more than 40% from its peak in February 2013 and progress is being made towards implementing the devolution of corporation tax, which shows that working together between our two Administrations is effective in delivering for Northern Ireland.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I welcome the very good news on the economy in Northern Ireland, but in the light of the recent job losses in the manufacturing sector in Northern Ireland, with companies identifying high energy costs as one of the impediments to manufacturing growth, will the Secretary of State say what she is doing, along with the Executive, to tackle that issue?

Mrs Villiers: I have discussed that matter with the Executive and companies such as Michelin on many occasions, and I appreciate their concerns. It is also right to acknowledge the grave concern that people affected by redundancies at Bombardier will have. It is important to acknowledge that Bombardier is clear that that was part of a global restructuring, and that there was nothing that the Government or the Executive could have done to change its decision. However, it is also worth noting that manufacturing in Northern Ireland is strong and growing.

Mr Dodds: For our part, as leaders in the Northern Ireland Executive, we will continue to drive forward economic growth in conjunction with the Government here. Tourism is a major and important factor in driving that growth, and the Executive have invested heavily in, for example, Titanic Belfast and bringing major events to Northern Ireland. Will the Secretary of State help us by reducing VAT on tourism and air passenger duty? That would really drive forward our region economically.

Mrs Villiers: The right hon. Gentleman will, of course, know that EU law constrains us from reducing VAT on those matters. However, I am committed to doing all I can to bring more tourists to Northern Ireland, which is a fabulous place to visit. In particular, the Executive's investment in Titanic Belfast has been an outstanding success.

13. [903794] **Dr Alasdair McDonnell** (Belfast South) (SDLP): I thank the Secretary of State for her answers so far. However, although she can speak eloquently, and we are all very pleased about the economic development that has taken place, does she agree about the need to work more closely with Northern Ireland MPs and the Executive to establish a much more robust economic strategy to regenerate the economy and stimulate job creation, rather than a series of disconnected policies?

Mrs Villiers: Closer working between Ministers and MPs is always desirable. The economic pact gives us a strong platform for doing that. We have brought the economic pact implementation into line with the process for implementing the fresh start and Stormont House agreements, and that gives even more scope for working closely with the hon. Gentleman's party and others to ensure that the Northern Ireland economy thrives into the future.

Executive: Sustainable Finances

5. **Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): What steps she is taking to ensure that the Northern Ireland Executive's financial position is sustainable. [903784]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The Stormont House and fresh start agreements set out a number of measures to assist with the sustainability of the Executive's finances. These include packages of financial support of around £2.5 billion, implementation of welfare reform, and measures to improve the efficiency of the public sector.

Stephen Timms: Does the Secretary of State accept that there is a major threat to the sustainability of the Executive's finances if her view prevails and the UK leaves the European Union?

Mrs Villiers: My colleague the Minister has stated the Government's position on those matters. The Northern Ireland Executive's finances are on a more stable footing than they have been for many years. As a result of the fresh start talks, we have settled a budget crisis that was threatening to collapse the institutions. The Labour party should support us in maintaining that financial sustainability.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the impact on Northern Ireland's financial position of leaving the European Union? What assessment have her civil servants made of it, and is she allowed to see it?

Mrs Villiers: The Government are publishing several documents setting out their position on the European Union. As I have said, we should welcome the dedicated work of the UK Government and the Northern Ireland political parties to settle a budget crisis that was threatening to collapse the institutions and a return to direct rule, which would have been a major setback.

Mr Speaker: The question was supposed to be about the financial position of the Northern Ireland Executive. The hon. Gentleman is, as he knows, a very cheeky chappie.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Federation of Small Businesses indicates that some 32,000 jobs will be created by the corporation tax provisions, which the fresh start agreement secured. Sixty per cent. of those jobs in Northern Ireland are in the small and medium-sized business sector. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure that small and medium-sized businesses benefit from the corporation tax reduction?

Mrs Villiers: I have had many discussions over the years with the Executive and Invest NI on those matters. We believe that the devolution of corporation tax could have a hugely positive impact on the Northern Ireland economy, including for small businesses.

Mr Speaker: I call Roger Mullin.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I declare an interest as a former consultant to a range of educational initiatives across all communities—

Mr Speaker: You start with "Question No. 6", man.

Disadvantaged Children

6. **Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): What discussions she has had with Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive on programmes to support the most disadvantaged children in Northern Ireland. [R] [903785]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Ben Wallace): This Government are committed to improving the life chances of disadvantaged children by addressing worklessness and improving educational attainment. These are largely devolved issues in Northern Ireland, where the Executive have the powers to address child poverty in areas such as health, education, housing and childcare.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman does not need to declare his interest in the context of a question. In any case he has already done so, so he can bang on with his question.

Roger Mullin: Is the Minister aware of the Shankill children and young people's zone in Belfast, a programme embedded in the community that aims to address generational disadvantage in the area? Is the Minister willing to meet the zone organisers and share the lessons being learned more widely?

Mr Wallace: Yes, I am aware of that organisation. I was on the Shankill yesterday visiting two business parks, the Argyle business centre and Duncairn Gardens, in that very sensitive part of north Belfast. I would be delighted to meet them, and if the hon. Gentleman wants to come along too, he would be welcome.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Does the Minister accept that the changes to the welfare system will mean even more disadvantaged children in Northern Ireland?

Mr Wallace: No, I do not accept that. The changes to the welfare system have proved that what we should do is make work pay. It is having a positive effect, as we

see an increase in employment in Northern Ireland. More people and families are going out and securing a wage. That is the best way to lift people out of poverty.

Terrorism

7. **Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the security services in tackling terrorism in Northern Ireland. [903787]

10. **Michael Ellis** (Northampton North) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the security services in tackling terrorism in Northern Ireland. [903791]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): Keeping people safe from terrorism is one of the Government's highest priorities. The PSNI and its security partners have our fullest support. Funding for the intelligence services will increase significantly over the course of this spending review. The PSNI will also receive an additional £160 million to combat the security threat. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind the House we are discussing terrorism in Northern Ireland. These are extremely serious matters and I hope Dr Offord will be heard.

Dr Offord: I welcome the new commitment to a pledge of office, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the passive acceptance of values is not sufficient, and that there must be an active fulfilment of them?

Mrs Villiers: I agree that both the pledge of office and the fresh start agreement itself will be judged on implementation. Experience in Northern Ireland says that making a declaration or getting an agreement is only part of the journey. We are determined to see the fresh start agreement implemented in full. Implementation is going well, not least with the establishment of the panel to set out the strategy against paramilitarism.

Michael Ellis: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to recognise the tireless work of the PSNI and MI5, whose efforts continue to ensure that the vast majority of the people of the Province of Northern Ireland remain unaffected by dissident threats?

Mrs Villiers: I can certainly do that. They have our fullest support, as set out in the Conservative manifesto for Northern Ireland. Their courage and dedication is saving lives in Northern Ireland on a daily basis. They remain one of the main targets for attacks by dissident republican groupings, but they put their own safety on the line to defend the whole of the community.

12. [903793] **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): If, as the Secretary of State wants, we withdraw from the European Union, what assessment does she think the PSNI will make of the loss of the use of the European arrest warrant?

Mrs Villiers: The Government's position on these matters is clear and has been set out in a number of documents published in recent days. What we are all agreed on is the essential nature of the co-operation on

security matters between the UK and Ireland, and the crucial importance of that continuing, whatever the result of the referendum.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Will the Secretary of State do what she can to unite the community in support of the police against terror? Does she agree that that job would be made much easier if senior police officers, who this week took a decision to relocate memorials to murdered colleagues away from public-facing positions in police stations into back offices, reconsider that decision and relocate them, and ensure that the campaign against terror gets support right across the community?

Mrs Villiers: I will certainly reflect on the hon. Gentleman's point about the location of police memorials, but it is crucial to build support for the PSNI across the community. Support is at one of its highest ever levels and I welcome that fact.

Economy

8. **Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to strengthen the Northern Ireland economy. [903788]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Ben Wallace): The Government remain committed to working with the Executive and rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy. The Government's long-term economic plan is working and delivering for Northern Ireland: the economy is growing; there are 46,000 more people in employment than in 2010; and wages are up more than 5%.

Paula Sherriff: The Government recently set up an independent National Infrastructure Commission to ensure a long-term view on key infrastructure projects. What work is the Minister doing to ensure that the infrastructure commission is of benefit to the Northern Ireland economy, and can he name some specific infrastructure projects that it will undertake?

Mr Wallace: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has been in touch with Andrew Adonis to ensure that the commission is UK-wide. I am also delighted that, because of the efforts of the Government and the Northern Ireland parties through the fresh start agreement, the Northern Ireland Executive are well on their way to investing in new infrastructure for Northern Ireland, including hopefully work on the A5, the M2, and the A6 up to Derry, and Northern Ireland will get a 21st century road network that will improve economic development.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—
Engagements

Q1. [903840] **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 2 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others,

and in addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Patricia Gibson: Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to confirm that the UK Government intended to take £7 billion from Scotland over a decade through the fiscal framework? Will he take this opportunity today to explain why that was the case?

The Prime Minister: Only the SNP could try to maintain a grievance after a settlement has been put in place. We have built a powerhouse Parliament for Scotland that will have more powers, more ability to set tax rates, more ability to determine benefits for its citizens. Now it is time for the SNP to stop talking about grievances and get on with government.

Q2. [903841] **Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): The Csa Group in my constituency has recently taken on six new apprentices, and across South Ribble we have had more than 1,000 apprenticeship starts since 2014. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this suggests that the Government should stick with their plans so that even more companies have the opportunity to take on apprentices?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have this very stretching target for 3 million apprentices to be trained during this Parliament. We will do our bit by funding those programmes. We want business to do its part by contributing to the apprenticeship levy, but we need small businesses such as Csa in my hon. Friend's constituency and, indeed, the public sector to get fully involved in training apprentices to give young people the chance to earn and learn at the same time.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): It is three years since the Government announced a policy of tax-free childcare. Can the Prime Minister tell us what the hold-up is?

The Prime Minister: We are introducing the tax-free childcare, along with the 30 hours of childcare, for everyone with three and four-year-olds, with a £6 billion commitment. The start of the 30 hours will come in through a pilot scheme this year.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Treasury website describes it as a "long-term plan". Well, it is certainly that, because it was announced in 2013 and is apparently not going to be introduced until next year. Why is the Prime Minister's promise of 30 hours free childcare for three and four-year-olds not available for one in three working parents who want their children to be cared for in a pre-school?

The Prime Minister: First, on tax relief on childcare, we lost a court case against some of the existing providers, so there was a delay. The tax-free childcare will come in in 2017. As for the 30 hours, as I have said, there will be some pilot schemes this year and full implementation next year, which is in line with what we said in our manifesto. I am delighted that the right hon. Gentleman is helping me to promote Government policy. When I became Prime Minister, of course, I think we had only 10 hours of childcare; then it went up to 12, then 15 and now to 30. Those are the sort of things you can do if you have a strong economy with a sound plan. If you are getting your deficit down and your economy is

growing, you are able to do all those things. I am glad that we are able to talk about them.

Jeremy Corbyn: A National Audit Office report published today confirms that one third of the families who were promised 30 hours of free childcare will now not receive it. That is a broken promise. The report also warns that many childcare providers are not offering the new entitlement owing to insufficient funding. As a result, 41,000 three-year-olds are missing out on free early education. Will the Prime Minister intervene, and ensure that those children are given the start in life that they deserve?

The Prime Minister: We want all those children to have the start in life that they deserve. I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the National Audit Office report. Let me read to him some of the things that it says. For instance, it says:

"The Department has successfully implemented the entitlement to free childcare for 3- and 4-year-olds, with almost universal take-up of hours offered to parents."

I think that we should be congratulating the Secretary of State. It also says:

"The Department has made significant progress in providing free entitlement to early years childcare... parents and children are clearly benefiting from these entitlements... Stakeholders are... positive about increasing the entitlement to 30 hours"

We are able to do all those things because we have a strong and sound economy. What a contrast it would be if we listened to the right hon. Gentleman. Because I regularly subscribe to the *Islington Tribune*, I can announce to the House that his latest economic adviser is one Mr Yanis Varoufakis, the Greek Finance Minister who left his economy in ruins. That is Labour's policy in two words: Acropolis Now.

Jeremy Corbyn: That is not much help to the 41,000 children who are not benefiting from what they were promised by the Government.

Let us look further on in the educational life of children. According to the Government's own figures, half a million children in primary schools are in classes of more than 31, and 15,000 are in classes of more than 40. We are all aware of the importance of both pre-school and early-years education to giving all our children a decent start in life, yet half a million are living in poverty, and many are in oversized classes. Is it not time for a serious Government intervention to sort this problem out?

The Prime Minister: Let me bring the right hon. Gentleman up to date with the figures relating to all those areas.

Introducing the extra hours of childcare is obviously a huge operation for the childcare providers, but although the National Audit Office report said that only 58% of disadvantaged two-year-olds were accessing the free childcare offer, the latest information shows that over 70% are doing so.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the number of teachers, and overcrowded classes. There are 13,100 more teachers than there were in 2010, because we have invested in Teach First and in bursaries, and we have made sure that teaching is a worthwhile career. As for school places, I want to answer the right hon. Gentleman,

because there are actually 453 fewer schools that are full or over capacity than there were in 2010—so that is progress—and there are 36,500 fewer pupils in overcrowded schools.

Why have we been able to do that? We have protected education funding. We have protected the money that followed every pupil into a school. We introduced the pupil premium, and that was the first time that any Government had recognised the extra needs of children from the poorest backgrounds. We have done all that, so our school system is growing, there are more places, and there are fewer overcrowded schools—all because we have a strong economy and the right values in place.

Jeremy Corbyn: The problem is that class sizes are growing. The problem is that there is a crisis of teacher shortages as well. I have been talking to many teachers, as, I am sure, have the Prime Minister and others. I have a question from one, Tom, who says:

“I have been teaching for 10 years, and am currently head of D&T”

—design and technology—

“at a successful secondary school. With increasing numbers of teachers leaving the profession, will the government now accept that there is a crisis in recruitment and retention?”

Will the Government accept that there is that crisis in this crucial profession?

The Prime Minister: I have just given the right hon. Gentleman the figures. There are 13,000 more teachers in our schools than there were when I became Prime Minister. However, if he is worried about teacher recruitment, perhaps he can explain this. His party proposes to put up the basic rate of tax, starting in Scotland. How will that help? It means that classroom teachers, nursery teachers and secondary teachers will all pay more tax. What we are doing is helping teachers by saying, “You can earn £11,000 before you pay any income tax at all.” I do not think that recruiting teachers is simply about money—it is also about having a good school system, which we have in our country—but it certainly will not help if we listen to Labour and put up people’s taxes.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister seems to be in a bit of denial here. Ofsted and the National Audit Office have confirmed that there is a shortage and a crisis of teachers. Ensuring that there are enough excellent teachers in our schools is obviously fundamental to the life chances of children. When 70% of headteachers have warned that they are now having to use agency staff to staff their classrooms, is it not time that the Government intervened and looked at the real cost of this, which is the damage to children’s education and the £1.3 billion spent last year on agency teachers? We have this agency working situation in the national health service and also in education. Are we not moving into an era that we could term “agency Britain”?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has to look at the facts, rather than talking down the people who are working so hard to teach children in our schools. The facts are these: our teachers are better qualified than ever, with a record 96.6% of teachers in state-funded schools now having a degree or higher qualification. Those are the facts. On those going into

teaching, Teach First is the most popular destination for Oxbridge graduates—something that never happened under a Labour Government. If you want to encourage people to go into teaching, you have to know that you have a good school system with more academies, more free schools and higher qualifications, and make sure that we have rigour and discipline in our classrooms, all of which has improved. All of that is possible only if you have a strong and growing economy to fund the schools that our children need.

Q3. [903842] **David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): Fiddlers Ferry in my constituency is one of several UK power stations announcing closure this year. However, Germany and Holland, both of whose carbon emissions are higher than ours, are building brand new mega-coal power stations from which we will be importing coal. It is hard for me to explain the logic of this to my constituents. Could the Prime Minister review the pace of our closure programme, particularly in the context of next year’s energy crunch?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a very important question and he is right to say that there is big change in this industry. We want to see an increase in gas capacity and in renewables capacity, and of course the restarting of our nuclear programme, which I hope to be discussing with the French President this week. My hon. Friend is also right to say that security of supply must be our No. 1 priority, and that is why we have announced that we are going to bring forward the capacity market to provide an extra boost to existing stations, and this could indeed help Fiddlers Ferry itself. I would say to him and to everyone across the House that all these decisions we take about energy have consequences for people’s bills. He mentioned Germany, but German electricity prices are 40% higher than those of the UK; the level of subsidy makes up about 30% of German bills. Ours is less than half that level, and I think we have to think through these decisions and their consequences for energy consumers.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): We all have a right not to be discriminated against on the basis of age, gender, sex, sexual orientation, disability or ethnicity. Parents have rights to maternity and paternity leave entitlement. Workers have the right to paid holidays and the right to work for no more than 48 hours each week. All those rights are guaranteed through the European Union. Does the Prime Minister agree that there are huge social benefits from being members of the European Union?

The Prime Minister: The point I would make is that in recent years what we have done, including under this Government, is to add to the rights that people have, including maternity and paternity rights. The emphasis in Europe now needs to be on making sure that we expand our single market and make it more successful for our businesses, recognising that social benefits matter as well, but principally I believe that they are a matter for this House.

Angus Robertson: Millions of UK citizens live elsewhere in the European Union. European decisions have helped the environment by reducing sulphur dioxide emissions by nine tenths. Relations between the 28 EU member states are often imperfect but they are maintained through

dialogue and agreement, which surely is a huge improvement on the confrontations and wars of the past. Will the Prime Minister concentrate on the positive arguments for EU membership and reject the approach of “Project Fear”?

The Prime Minister: My arguments about being stronger in the reformed European Union, safer in the reformed European Union and better off in the reformed European Union are all positive arguments. I would add to that the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes, which is that things such as pollution cross borders and so it makes sense to work together. The fundamental point he makes is one worth thinking about. He and I are both post-war children, but we should never forget, when we sit around that table, that just 70 years ago these countries were murdering each other on the continent of Europe. For all the frustrations of this institution, and, believe me, there are many, we should never forget that fact—the fact that we talk, the fact that we work together and the fact that we resolve our disputes around that table.

Q7. [903846] **Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): Those who foster children deserve our full support. To mark fostering February, last Friday I visited Jay Fostering in my constituency, which since its establishment in 2003 has helped more than 1,250 children to find a loving and caring home. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the team at Jay Fostering, as well as the carers? Will he also agree to look into how the currently complex funding arrangements for over-18s could be considerably simplified to ease the transition of children into adulthood?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a very important point, which we started to address in the last Parliament because 18-year-olds were almost being automatically ejected from foster parent homes. We all know, as parents, that it is very important to give people the support they need. That is why we changed the law in the last Parliament so that local authorities are under a duty to support young people who choose to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18. We have put in place the “staying put” arrangement, we are providing £44 million over three years, and in the first year of its roll-out almost half those eligible to stay put have decided to do so. This is a real advance in our fostering arrangements.

Q4. [903843] **Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): As this is my first ever question to the Prime Minister, I do hope that my suit and tie match his mother’s high expectations.

In September last year, 16-year-old Mohammed Dura-Ray was stabbed to death in my constituency. His mother Mariama discovered last week that the Crown Prosecution Service will not be prosecuting the man arrested for his murder. Sadly, she joins the 84% of people in Southwark who experienced knife crime last year who have seen no one held to account. The Home Office blames local police for that low prosecution rate, and I resent the accusation that my local police are not up to the job. Will the Prime Minister commit to ensuring that my local police have the resources to investigate knife crime fully and bring more killers to justice?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman uses his first question to raise an incredibly important issue: knife crime in our country. The good news is that knife crime has come down by about 14% since 2010, but he makes an important point about the level of prosecutions. Last year there were some 11,000 prosecutions, and the rate of prosecution is similar to that for other areas, but clearly everything we can do to help the police and help the CPS to increase the rate of prosecution is wholly worth while. We need to give the police the resources they need—and we are, through the spending round; we need to educate young people on the dangers of knife crime, and we need to make sure that those who commit these crimes are properly punished.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Bernard Jenkin. [*Interruption.*] Where is the fellow? He is not here. We shall hear from someone who is here. I call Mr David Davis.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): For five or six years—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I know the House is in a state of some perturbation but we must hear from the right hon. Gentleman. When he has composed himself, we will hear from him.

Mr Davis: Thank you, Mr Speaker. For five or six years, the number of national insurance numbers issued to EU migrants has been hundreds of thousands higher than the official immigration figures. That implies that the official immigration figures may be a dramatic underestimate. We can know the truth of the matter only if Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs releases its data on active EU national insurance numbers, but HMRC has refused to do so. Will the Prime Minister instruct HMRC to release those statistics immediately so that we can understand the truth about European Union immigration?

The Prime Minister: I am glad that we have the single transferable question, if not the single transferable vote! It is very good to hear from my right hon. Friend. The reason why the numbers do not tally is that a person can get a national insurance number for a very short-term visit, and people who are already here but without a national insurance number can apply for one, so the numbers are quite complex. HMRC has given greater information, and I will ensure that that continues to be the case.

Q5. [903844] **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): The proposed changes to Sunday trading are causing great concern to many retailers, shop workers, their families, faith groups and all who want to keep Sunday special, yet before the election the Prime Minister said that he had no plans to change Sunday trading laws. When did he change his mind, or was it always his plan to scrap this great British compromise as soon as the election was safely out of the way?

The Prime Minister: I thought it was right to bring forward these proposals because they are genuinely new proposals—new in that we are devolving to local authorities the ability to make that decision. Secondly, and crucially—I am sure that Opposition Members will be interested in this—we will be introducing new protections not only

for new workers on Sundays, but for all workers on Sundays. The House should look carefully at this idea not least because our constituents are able to shop online all day, every day, including on Sunday. All the evidence shows that these proposals will be welcomed by customers and will create more jobs. We have nothing to be scared of in moving into this new arrangement.

Q9. [903848] **Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): At the weekend, I visited a young enterprise trade fair where teams from across local Staffordshire schools, including Rugeley sixth-form academy, were showcasing their entrepreneurial skills. Will my right hon. Friend join me in wishing good luck to all the teams, and does he agree that initiatives such as this are key to inspiring the next generation of entrepreneurs?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which is that for years not enough was done in our schools to encourage enterprise and entrepreneurship. When we know that so many of the jobs of the future will come from start-up businesses, small businesses and rapidly growing start-ups, it is absolutely right that we should be promoting enterprise in our schools, not only through teaching but through exercises and enabling young people to start businesses by giving them small grants.

Q6. [903845] **Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Yesterday, Five-Quarter Energy, a north-east small and medium-sized enterprise, ceased to trade. Its goal was the extraction of gas from coal deep under the North sea. The Government failed to provide a supporting statement to secure foreign direct investment owing to their inability to comprehend that underground coal gasification would not only secure our energy supply but provide feedstocks to grow our industries, and that all that would be totally decarbonised. Will the Prime Minister look into that appalling loss of opportunity and urgently change course and develop a meaningful industrial energy strategy that British industry, workers and the planet so badly need?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly look at the case the hon. Gentleman raises, because we back all energy projects that can create jobs and growth in our country, and we have a very active industrial strategy for that. I know that he is disappointed about our decision on carbon capture and storage, but I say to him that that is an extra £1 billion capital investment, and even after that there is no sign yet that carbon capture and storage can be even close to competitive with nuclear power or offshore wind. None the less, I will look carefully at the case that he mentions.

Q11. [903850] **Richard Benyon** (Newbury) (Con): A very large proportion of the fish caught by British vessels and landed in the UK are exported to Europe, mainly to EU countries, and, under reforms that were led by the British Government, a great many of our fishermen fish in the sovereign waters of other European Union countries. Does my right hon. Friend agree that our seas, those that exploit them, and the communities that they support are better off in a reformed European Union?

The Prime Minister: I do agree with my hon. Friend and I pay tribute to him for the huge amount of work he did to reform the common fisheries policy from what was a very poor policy to one that is now working much better for our fishermen. When it comes to fishing and farming, the key issue will be ensuring that Europe's markets remain open to the produce that we land and grow. That will be vital to the debate that we have in the months ahead.

Q10. [903849] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): When more than 1,600 families are on York's housing waiting list; when care workers are forced to leave the city owing to the cost of renting, thereby delaying hospital discharges; when young families are placed in a single room in homeless hostels; and when supported housing schemes will have to close because of benefit changes, can the Prime Minister specifically state why up to 2,500 predominantly high-value homes are being planned for development on public land in York central, without a single home being built for social rent?

The Prime Minister: The decisions made in York about planning are for York City Council and the local plan. One of the things that we did in the previous Parliament, which was specifically designed to help York, was to alter the change of use provisions so that empty offices could be used to build flats and houses for local people, which is happening in York and will help to make sure that that city continues to thrive.

Q12. [903851] **Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend agree to meet me and my constituent William Laurie, a brilliant young farmer whose business has been put at risk because the Rural Payments Agency has not paid his basic payment scheme money? Will my right hon. Friend also confirm that the figures that the RPA keeps putting out are fictional, or does he agree with his Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that it is the European Commission's fault for making the common agricultural policy so complicated?

The Prime Minister: The system is complicated, and we need to make sure that the Rural Payments Agency does the very best that it can. To date 70,000 farmers have received their 2015 payments, which is 81% of all claims paid, but there is always room for improvement. Indeed, we should look at all the devolved areas of the United Kingdom to see how they are coping with the problem, but more broadly it is very important that we maintain the access that our farmers have without tariff, without tax, without quota, to produce the cleanest and best food anywhere in the world and export it unhindered to 500 million people in the European single market.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Yesterday the chair of the board of the International Campaign for Tibet, Mr Richard Gere, came to the House of Commons to meet Members of Parliament as well as you, Mr Speaker. Will the Prime Minister follow the example set by the United States, Canada, Germany and Japan and write to the Chinese authorities to express his concerns about the oppressive counter-terrorism laws introduced in Tibet?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of the visit by Richard Gere. I will look closely at what he said and perhaps get back to the right hon. Lady about the issues he raises.

Q13. [903852] **Stuart Andrew** (Pudsey) (Con): In 2004 the 16-year-old son of my constituent Lorraine Fraser was murdered by a gang, and the conviction of four of them was secured through joint enterprise. The recent ruling in the Supreme Court has caused Lorraine and many other victims' families a great deal of anxiety. Will my right hon. Friend agree to facilitate a meeting to enable these families to discuss their concerns with Ministers and understand what the ruling might mean in cases such as theirs?

The Prime Minister: Through my hon. Friend, may I extend my sympathy to his constituents? He is right—we should begin by remembering the families of all those who have lost loved ones to dreadful crimes and who are worried about that judgment and what it might mean for them. I am very happy to facilitate a meeting between him and one of the Justice Ministers to discuss it. I think we should be clear that that judgment referred only to a narrow category of joint enterprise cases, and it would be wrong to suggest that everyone convicted under the wider law on joint enterprise will have grounds for appeal. It is very important that that message goes out, but I will fix the meeting that my hon. Friend calls for.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): People in the midlands are furious to learn that the Government have awarded a contract to make British medals to some French company. Imagine opening your Distinguished Service Order or your CBE to find “Fabriqué en France” on it. I have visited midlands medal manufacturers in Birmingham's jewellery quarter, and they are the best in the world. The Prime Minister should go back to Downing Street, call in the Cabinet Office Minister and get this scandal sorted out.

The Prime Minister: The only point I would make is that I am sure that all those in the Royal Mint in Wales would want to contest that claim and argue that they make the final medals in the United Kingdom. I am sure the competition between them and Birmingham is intense. I will certainly take away what the hon. Gentleman says. I was not aware of the issue, but where we can make something in Britain, we should make it in Britain.

Q14. [903853] **Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): A recent investigation by my local newspaper, the *Derby Telegraph*, uncovered reports of alleged experiments carried out on children by medics at a medical facility in Derbyshire during the '60s and '70s. Will the Prime Minister ensure that a thorough investigation is now undertaken?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance. She is absolutely right to raise this matter; they are very serious allegations and it is vital that the full facts are considered. My understanding is that the police, the local authority and the NHS are working together and that there is an inquiry process under the Derby Safeguarding Children Board, in line

with its procedures. I encourage anyone who knows anything about this to come forward and give their evidence to the board.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): The Syrian ceasefire is extremely fragile. There are reports that Russia is continuing to attack anti-Assad rebels, not Daesh, and that Islamic terrorists and weapons continue to pass into Syria across the Turkish border. What are the British Government doing to ensure that the ceasefire is properly monitored and, in particular, to reduce serious tensions between Russia and our NATO ally Turkey?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise this matter. The cessation of hostilities is an important step forward, imperfect though it is, and it does enable the possibility of political negotiations starting next week. She asked specifically what we are doing to try to ensure that it is properly enforced. We are working with the Americans and the Russians to make that happen—I have a European conference call with Vladimir Putin later this week to reinforce these points. Even though the ceasefire is imperfect, the fact that we have it is progress. Not every group is included in the ceasefire, but basically we are not seeing the attacks that were taking place on the moderate opposition, which is welcome. It has also enabled us, with others, to get aid to communities that desperately need it, including through air drops and convoys. I would not put too much optimism into the mix right now, but this is progress and we should work on it.

Q15. [903854] **Dr Phillip Lee** (Bracknell) (Con): Two weeks ago I visited the Zaatari refugee camp and the surrounding area on the Jordanian-Syrian border, primarily to assess healthcare services. I was struck by the remarkable generosity of the Jordanian people. However, the local system is under significant pressure. Will the Prime Minister meet me to discuss further what Britain can do to enhance healthcare services on the ground, both for the Syrian refugees and for the wider Jordanian community?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the situation. That refugee camp is an extraordinary sight, because of the scale of the endeavour under way. I think that Britain can be proud of what we have done, in terms of the direct aid that we have given and the London conference, which raised \$11 billion for the refugee camps. I know that he has a long-standing interest in what we can do to ensure that facilities are delivered quickly, including, on occasion, using military facilities, and I think that there might be opportunities for that. We also need to ensure that the emergency response from non-governmental organisations and the United Nations is as fast as it can be when such crises happen in future.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): As the Prime Minister struggles with certain elements in his party over Europe, does he ever think back to an inspirational and visionary Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, who faced similar difficulties but stood up to the rebels in his own party and secured a yes vote for staying in Europe? Will he join me in celebrating the centenary of Harold Wilson's birth next week? Across all parties we should celebrate that great, innovative Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: I do feel a natural sympathy for anyone who has had this job, irrespective of the side of the House they were on. I think that Harold Wilson did some very important things for our country. I know that the hon. Gentleman has a particular connection to him. I wish his family well on this important centenary. I am sure that we approach things in different ways, but one thing that we would have agreed on is that Britain's future is better off in a reformed European Union.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing our condolences to Neil and Jennifer Burdett, the parents of two-year-old Faye, who died on Valentine's day of meningitis B. Since Faye's death, 815,000 people have signed the petition calling on the Government to vaccinate more children against meningitis B. I am proud that the UK is the first country to have a vaccination programme for meningitis B, but could my right hon. Friend ensure

that the Government look at what more could be done to prevent more children like Faye dying from this horrid disease?

The Prime Minister: On behalf of the whole House, let me extend our sympathies and condolences to Faye's parents and to all those who have had children suffering from this terrible disease. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we were the first country in the world to have this vaccination programme. The programme was based on the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, who recommended targeting the vaccine to protect the infants at highest risk. The incidence of highest risk does occur in babies of five months, and of the 276 children contracting meningitis B last year, over 100 were under one year of age. But my hon. Friend makes important points. We need to look at all the evidence carefully, as do the expert bodies that advise us, recognising that Britain has already taken some very important steps forward by being the first country to vaccinate in this way.

State Pension Age

12.36 pm

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to make a statement on the Government's review of the state pension age.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): Yesterday we announced the appointment of John Cridland to lead an independent review of the state pension age. The review will make recommendations for the Government to consider, to ensure the future state pension age is fair and affordable in the long term.

The review will report by May 2017. I want to stress that the review is independently led and evidence led. Evidence will be put forward for Sir John to consider in his important considerations about the future of the state pension. The review will consider changes in life expectancy, as well as wider changes in society.

It is useful at this point to remind the House why this kind of review is necessary. In 1945, a man expecting to retire at 65 had a life expectancy of between 60 and 63. Men's life expectancy rose from 14.27 years in retirement after their pension age to 27 years under the present forecast and existing timescales. Women have gone from 18 years in retirement after their pensionable age to 29.5 years in retirement.

Future generations, therefore, would rightly expect that we reflect those changes in how we set the pension. They would not thank us—we very rarely hear anybody talk about future generations—if we did not take the right decisions at the right time and did not have the courage to ensure pensions are sustainable, to avoid people having to pick up an increasing bill, which would make their lives even more difficult.

I want to make clear what this review is not about. It does not cover the existing state pension age timetable—it picks up from April 2028. We have already provided legislation for this, and the review will not look to change the state pension age up to that point.

It is worth reminding the Opposition at this point that when the Labour Government were last in power, they first legislated for state pension age rises beyond 65, but without any commitment to a special independent review, which we have undertaken. When we brought forward the Pensions Bill in 2013, the then Opposition seemed to have had a change of heart, and they—quite legitimately and reasonably, I thought at the time—agreed with us on the need for a regular independent review of the state pension age. Let me quote what the then shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), said during the course of the Bill's passage:

“The Secretary of State and I have no difference of opinion on the need regularly to review the state pension age.”—[*Official Report*, 17 June 2013; Vol. 564, c. 661.]

It is worth reminding everybody that in that Bill was a statutory provision for a regular set of reviews of the pension age. Yesterday's announcement is simply in line with that statutory requirement. That is what we are now doing, and that is what the then shadow Secretary of State said in agreement. I also remind the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) that at the time Labour made no amendment to change the nature or scope of the review; nor, I recall, did it have anything in its manifesto to do with that.

Under the legislation, we are required to appoint an independent reviewer who will make recommendations on future state pension age requirements. We have appointed Sir John Cridland to lead this work. The legislation also requires us to report on this in 2017. I can assure the House that we will report back to the House in an oral statement and a written statement on whatever comes forward from that review.

This review is part of the Government's reforms to pensions to ensure that they are affordable for the long term. It is right that we recognise those who have reached their pension age and who have worked hard, done the right thing, and provided for their families. I believe that this Government are delivering for those very people. As a result of our triple lock, pensioners will receive a basic state pension over £1,000 a year higher than at the start of the previous Parliament and under the previous Government. We have provided greater security and more choice and dignity for people in retirement, while also ensuring that the system is sustainable for future generations.

Owen Smith: May I start by welcoming the Secretary of State back to the Dispatch Box? We have missed him in recent months and are grateful that he is gracing us with his rare presence today.

Despite the statement we have just heard, I think that people travelling to work this morning will have been shocked to learn that the Government are planning yet another review of the retirement age and, in the immediate future, of when they can claim their state pension, with a clear implication that, as was the case with the women's state pension, they intend to increase it further and faster than we, or the people of Britain, were expecting. People will also have been shocked to read this morning the Pensions Minister's statement in another place, in response to the news of this review, that under the Tories the state pension age should no longer be considered as “a retirement age”. In other words, people will be able to retire only if they are rich enough or have a fat private pension; otherwise they will have to keep working—working until they drop, as one pensions professor warns this morning.

So could the Secretary of State try to clarify exactly what his Government's long-term economic plan is for pensioners? Is it, as was the case with the botched reforms of women's pensions, and as was implied in the terms of reference for this review, that people can expect the Government to ratchet up the retirement age much faster than expected? Can he guarantee that even if this review is not considering the planned increase to 67 by 2028, his Government will not bring forward that change? If that promise is not ratted on, can he confirm that his Government are considering speeding up subsequent rises, with increases to 69 or 70 being considered for people currently in their mid-40s? Could he also confirm that this will be a double whammy for those pension savers, as under his reforms everyone aged under 43 will have a worse state pension? Does he agree with his pensions colleague in the Lords that in the light of his reforms, the state pension age should no longer be considered as the retirement age, and so in future only the wealthy will have the luxury of retiring, while the rest will just have to keep on working?

Finally, what does the Secretary of State think is the upper limit for the state pension age? Is it 75, 76 or 77—or is it 80, as his former Pensions Minister colleague

warned today? Is not the truth that the new pension promise is not the 75p that the Tories are always banging on about, but the 75 years that people will have to work and wait under this Tory Government before they get their state pension?

Mr Duncan Smith: Well, all I can assume from that rather pathetic response is that the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) did not think that his urgent question would be granted and that, after he heard that it had been granted, he scribbled away massively, because it was utter idiocy. I want to be kind to him, because he has made a career out of being Mr Angry at the drop of a hat. I remind him—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not want to hear this, but I am going to answer the hon. Gentleman's question. Let me remind him of exactly what his party was about before he took over as the Opposition spokesman. Let me—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the Secretary of State—*[Interruption.]* Order. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) ought to know better, because he is a statesman—or, at any rate, a statesman of sorts—and should not conduct himself in an unseemly manner. As for the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr Campbell), I have told him before to be careful: if you have that hot curry too often, it tends to have an effect upon your demeanour in the Chamber.

Mr Duncan Smith: I am also worried about the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr Campbell). He has been here a long time and I want him to have a very good retirement, but he needs to calm down or he will not make it at this rate.

I remind the Opposition that the questions that the hon. Member for Pontypridd asked were all answered by his party when it was in government. It was the Labour Government who raised the state pension age—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not like being reminded of that. They did not have an independent review before they did it. They did it arbitrarily and set a set of dates, but they did not ask an independent reviewer to look at them. We are doing that now. That is what we were asked to do, and I think we are being reasonable about it.

It is also worth reminding the hon. Gentleman of what the then shadow Pensions Minister, Gregg McClymont, said when this statutory review—it is, I repeat, statutory—was passed by the Pensions Act 2014. He said—

Mr Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) (Lab): You're doing it!

Mr Duncan Smith: Yes, I am doing it, but the hon. Gentleman's party agreed with it. He should calm down, or he will never make it to state pension age. Gregg McClymont, the then Opposition spokesman, said at the time,

“we do not oppose the Bill”.—*[Official Report, 29 October 2013; Vol. 569, c. 870.]*

That was Labour's position on the statutory requirement to review the state pension age. Baroness Sherlock said:

“It is vital that the way the state pension age is reviewed is...seen to be fair”.—*[Official Report, House of Lords, 3 December 2013; Vol. 750, c. 146.]*

That is exactly what we are doing.

It is Labour that instituted the rises in the state pension, raised women's state pension age and went for the equalisation of state pension age. In government, it started to do the responsible things, but in opposition it is utterly irresponsible and pointless.

I have one final comment to make to the hon. Member for Pontypridd. As I stood up, somebody said to me—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The shadow Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) are both rather cerebral academics. I cannot believe that they would conduct themselves in this manner in a university seminar. If they would not do so there, they should not misbehave here. Whatever they think of what the Secretary of State is saying, they must hear it.

Mr Duncan Smith: Exactly, Mr Speaker, thank you. I say to the hon. Member for Pontypridd that, as I stood up, somebody told me—rather unfairly, I thought at the time—that he is shallow. Sadly, I now think that he gives shallow people a bad name. His response was pathetic and the urgent question was asked by an Opposition who have no policy and who jump around opposing everything and racking up spending commitments. No wonder they haven't a hope in hell of being in government.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Every western democracy surely has a responsibility to review its state pension age on a regular basis and in a totally non-tribal, non-party political way so that its people know, a long time ahead, what changes will be made to the state pension age. If, in the past, we took too long to change the state pension age and then moved too quickly, surely now the cross-party consensus that was reached shows us that the right thing for the House to do is to set up the review, and that it should report back next year.

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend, who has spoken about the matter on a number of occasions, is right, and I thought that we had that consensus. We certainly had it during the last Parliament, because the Liberal Democrats in the coalition agreed with us. The hon. Member for Pontypridd has mentioned the former Pensions Minister, who was keen to get a state pension age review. The Pensions Commission has said that increases in the state pension age are essential and that an independent body should be established to review them. We are doing exactly that.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Life expectancy in Scotland still lags around two years behind that in the rest of the UK. That gap persists across all social demographics and costs the average Scottish pensioner around £10,000. However, I am just as concerned about healthy life expectancy, which determines the age at which people start to experience illness and disability that limit their capacity for work. Healthy life expectancy is not rising at the same speed as life expectancy; in fact, the gap between the two is widening. Given the Government's reductions in support for sick and disabled people of working age—we are due to discuss those changes later today—can we have any confidence that further increases in state pension age will not simply condemn thousands of older people with serious health conditions to an impoverished old age on state benefits prior to their official retirement?

Mr Duncan Smith: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her tone, and she has asked a legitimate question. The whole reason why we have instituted an independent review is so that people can raise such questions. I encourage her and her party to submit to the review and to Sir John Cridland their concerns about the different demographic issues in Scotland. They are well known, and it is quite legitimate for the hon. Lady to raise them with him. The point is that because Sir John is independent, he can look at the whole question—including aspects such as demographic changes or changes in the work that people do—and take a view about it. He may recommend that we make no changes, or he may come back to us with recommendations for change. I do not prejudge that, but I recommend that the hon. Lady make all those points to him.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): In 1995, when I was Chancellor, I was among those who recognised that the old system was unaffordable. We thought that we were being courageous in giving 20 years' notice of our intention to raise the retirement age. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in hindsight, we underestimated the remarkably welcome improvements in life expectancy and in the number of women who qualify for a full pension, and that we should have gone faster? Does he also agree that, inevitably, there will be loud complaints from those who are unlucky enough to be born at a time when they are just affected by the change, but that a Government have a duty to proceed in the interests of the country and in the interests of future generations of working taxpayers, who will not be able to afford to sustain our system unless we respond to reality?

Mr Duncan Smith: My right hon. and learned Friend is correct. I thought that the position of successive Governments was to take that as a non-party political point and agree on the need to make those changes, the pace of which should be decided independently. We have done that. It was brave of the Government of whom he was a part to start the process of change, but it was always going to be necessary to review the matter in line with demographics. Recent demographic shifts have been rapid, so we are carrying out such a review now. I regret the fact that the Opposition have chosen to play political games rather than supporting this necessary change.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State accept that millions of people, having seen what the Government did in respect of the equalisation of the state pension age for women born in the 1950s, will look at the proposal and be worried that they are about to repeat those mistakes? Will he set out what transitional arrangements he expects for the changes, and whether that opens up the opportunity to look again at the injustice that has been done to those represented by the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaign?

Mr Duncan Smith: It is a legitimate concern to ensure that we give people plenty of notice, and Sir John Cridland will be looking at that carefully. If the hon. Gentleman wants to make a submission to the review about transitional arrangements, it is absolutely possible for him to do so, and I encourage him to do just that. This Government did not introduce those changes, but

we introduced a transitional change for those who were affected to improve the lot of a large majority of those who would otherwise have been adversely affected.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): At the moment, there are three people paying national insurance for every person who receives a state pension; by 2040, if nothing changes, there will be only two people paying national insurance for every person who receives a state pension. There are more people in higher education than there have been in the past, and life expectancy has increased. Surely, in the long term, it is only common sense to match the retirement age to life expectancy in some way. We cannot enter the labour market later, leave it earlier, live longer and expect the state to pick up the bill.

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree with my right hon. Friend. It is worth putting that into the context of what we have already done to sustain and support pensioners in the longer term. First, we have introduced more saving through automatic enrolment. More than 6 million people are saving for a pension. Secondly, the introduction of the single tier puts pension payments above the means test, allowing people to save in the knowledge that they will always hold their savings. Thirdly, the state pension is more than £1,000 higher than it was when we came into office. That is why we need to get the demographic changes right. We are going to be fairer to pensioners and support them as other Governments have never done.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I am not going to get angry, but I gently point out to the Secretary of State that he is quite wrong to say that there is a consensus on the matter. Indeed, he has broken the consensus that he established with the excellent former Pensions Minister, Steve Webb. The agreement was that independent reviews would look every five years at life expectancy and fairness for those who were paying in, but the Secretary of State is introducing affordability, which was not part of the original proposal, as well as bringing the review forward. Will he acknowledge that that is a change from what he agreed with Steve Webb and what the coalition Government delivered?

Mr Duncan Smith: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman chooses to find a difference, because I do not think that there is one. No one has more respect for the former Pensions Minister than I do; he is a good personal friend and I thought he did a brilliant job as Pensions Minister. As coalition partners, we worked well together. He and I agreed to introduce the independent review in the Pensions Act 2014. Sir John is quite capable of looking at the matter in the round, as we have asked him to do, and making a decision on the basis of "robust, evidence-based analysis", as set out in the terms of reference. He may yet say, "I see no need to make any change," but I am prepared to back him on that.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Our population is growing year on year, principally through immigration, so it is right that we look to the future. Will the independent review look at two scenarios, in which Britain either can or cannot control its immigration, depending on whether we remain in Europe? Will my right hon. Friend be able to see any of the information that comes through on both those scenarios?

Mr Duncan Smith: Tempting though it is to involve the review in other areas, it is focused on the need to figure out whether, given the circumstances, demographics and affordability, the state pension age should rise and what it should be in years to come. I am happy for the review to be limited to that.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): There are 2.6 million women who feel that they have not been given enough notice of changes to their pensions. I implore the Secretary of State to be straight with young people today about the fact that those of them who are born in areas of low life expectancy will be dead before they receive a pension.

Mr Duncan Smith: I am not sure that the hon. Lady came into politics to decide that the future for people is so bleak that nothing can be done. Our role in this House is to make the changes necessary to improve people's life chances and lengthen their life expectancy, so that they may enjoy the fruits of that life expectancy, having worked hard and saved hard, in a decent time of retirement. I am an optimist about Britain; she is a pessimist about Britain.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government intend to review the pension age every five years and to give people the opportunity to know their retirement age with a long lead-in time, so that they can plan for a secure future for themselves and their families?

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Essentially, the commitment made in the 2014 Act was to have a review in every Parliament. That will allow every Parliament to make decisions, and I hope that any changes, by the time we make them, can be done on a non-party basis. That would be the way to do it, and that is what we are engaged in.

This review was always known about. For those who are suddenly complaining that they had not noticed it, today's written ministerial statement was down to be made yesterday. I do not recall their doing a single thing to bring it to anyone's attention until a couple of newspapers wrote articles, after which a request for an urgent question was suddenly sent in.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I think everyone recognises that we need to review pension arrangements, especially given the demographics in the United Kingdom, but all such reviews throw up difficult cases and anomalies, not least in relation to differences in life expectancy across the regions of the United Kingdom. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the review looks at such discrepancies, and that things are properly built in to make sure that information is given out when changes are made?

Mr Duncan Smith: Much as I said to the spokesman for the Scottish nationalists, I say to the hon. Gentleman that, yes, it is recognised that there are issues about such areas. The point is that it is within scope of the review for him or anyone in his party to raise such issues with Sir John Cridland, and it is certainly within its scope for him, or anybody else he wants, to give evidence to the review.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): My right hon. Friend has given some very cogent figures to the House, particularly the change in the number of years people can expect to spend in retirement from 14 to 27. Will he confirm that the independent review will be conducted in an impartial manner? Is not what we are hearing from Opposition Front Benchers and their friends in the SNP simply scaremongering?

Mr Duncan Smith: I will repeat the figures. They are backed by what our right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), the Chancellor in a previous Conservative Government, once said with great foresight. The fact is that life expectancy for a man who retired in 1945, when the pensionable age was 65, was between 60 and 63. With the same retirement age, the expected period in retirement has risen to about 27 years. We must take that into consideration. I want more people to be able to work longer, and it was me and the then Pensions Minister who raised the default retirement age to stop companies telling people that they could not work past 65. Such people can now carry on working. We have done a lot, and this review is all part of that process.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): The Secretary of State said that he wanted to reward those who work hard and do the right thing. He did not do that for women born in the 1950s, many of whom were given only three years' notice of the acceleration in their state pension age. Will he now give the House a commitment that he will not, as he did in the Pensions Act 2011, further accelerate the changes in the state pension age that are due to come in up to 2046?

Mr Duncan Smith: I accept that the hon. Lady raises a legitimate point but I wish that, in doing so, she would encompass the fact that she sat on the Labour Benches under a Government who raised the pensionable age and that accusations of "no notice" can very much be lodged at the door of the previous Labour Government. I simply say to her that, during the last Government, we made changes to improve the lot of many of those affected. As I have said, the independent review will look at all of that post-2028 and make recommendations about the best way forward. I hope that she will give evidence to the review if she has such concerns.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that countries around the globe are being forced to confront the impact of rapidly rising life expectancy levels, and it appears that only Opposition parties are in complete denial about the need for a sustainable state pension age?

Mr Duncan Smith: That is a fact. Many of our neighbours have already equalised pensionable ages and are accelerating the move to a later pensionable age ahead of us. Germany, Norway and various other countries around the world have done so, and it is only right that we should do so as well. Otherwise, we will place a burden on our children and our children's children, who will not thank us for not taking the brave decisions that are necessary.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am 33. Will the Secretary of State tell me and others in my age cohort the age at which we will be entitled to retire?

Mr Duncan Smith: I can tell the hon. Lady that it is very clear when she and those her age will retire. It is very clear that the independent review will make recommendations. If she wants to make her position clear and give her view, she should give evidence to the independent review. We will have a review in every Parliament. I do not understand why her party is against having a review. Surely we want an independent review so that it can be fair and balanced. I would have hoped that she welcomed that.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the advantage of an independent review in every Parliament is that we should be able to give greater visibility to when changes will happen? Will he commit to not having a change with less than 10 years' notice for those affected?

Mr Duncan Smith: That is exactly the flow of timings at the moment. Sir John Cridland has to consider that, and we want him to look at making sure that such a process happens. We want people to have plenty of notice, and I know recommendations have been made about that. As I said earlier, he will look at that under his terms of reference, as will the next review and so on. I would simply say to my hon. Friend that if he has an issue, he should put it to the review.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): The Secretary of State claims to be an optimist, but I see precious little to be optimistic about. We have had the stock Government response that, in raising any concerns, we are scaremongering. Does the Secretary of State agree that many of my constituents will, because of regional variations in life expectancy, die before they receive their state pension and have an absolute right to be scared?

Mr Duncan Smith: I am sorry that the hon. Lady takes that view. We have rising life expectancy. We have people earning more in jobs. We have more people in work. We have more people saving, and preparing for their retirement, than ever before. We have a pension coming in that means they will not get means-tested. I have to say that I am optimistic on those grounds. I do not, however, blame her for being pessimistic because if I was sitting on the Labour Benches today, I would be really pessimistic.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend reassure my constituents approaching retirement age that the headlines splashed across this morning's papers—in one case, saying that people will be required to work until they are 81—have no basis in fact whatever, given that this is just the start of the review and that no conclusions have been made, let alone agreed by the House?

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend. The reality is that this independent review will look at all of that. The papers have to make their own decisions—I will not be critical of them—but I would simply say that they cannot extrapolate from the announcement of a statutory independent review and say that it will somehow have certain implications for the retirement age going forward. All I would say is that it is necessary to get the balance right between people who are paying for those

who have retired and people who have retired and are saving. It is the job of the Government to get that right, and I hoped it would be approached more consensually across the Floor of the House.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I want to raise another anomaly with the Secretary of State. People who worked in Northern Ireland when they were 14 and 15 paid national insurance contributions between 1947 and 1957, but those contributions did not count towards their pension entitlement because the school leaving age in Britain was a little higher. Can that anomaly be raised with Sir John Cridland and addressed so that it can finally be rectified?

Mr Duncan Smith: As I understand it, that specific issue is not within the scope of the review, but I am certainly happy to talk to the hon. Lady about it. In general, the point about the review is that it is the first time—I would have hoped this would therefore be welcomed—that someone has asked an independent body to review such anomalies. I am very happy to speak to her if she wants to come and see me.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): This is a policy on which there should be consensus and cross-party support. The evidence is that we are living longer and healthier lives, and not just in Mid Dorset and North Poole, so there should be optimism across the country. Does the Secretary of State agree that the responsible thing to do is to have an independent review, follow the statutory regime and examine the evidence and all the options, rather than scaremongering and using phrases such as “working until they drop”?

Mr Duncan Smith: I must say that I was slightly surprised earlier today when I saw the Opposition spokesman tweeting the most inflammatory comments about people retiring. I can understand that those in opposition need to try to get attention, but to start worrying and scaring people without foundation or reality is nothing short of appalling. I wish the hon. Gentleman would get up and apologise for that.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): The review will consider variations in pension arrangements between “different groups”. Will the Secretary of State give more detail on whether “different groups” refers to occupations, such as shift workers or, to give an example from my constituency, bus drivers, who get chronic bladder conditions? The life expectancy and health of those groups deteriorates as a result of their occupation. Will those issues be raised in the review?

Mr Duncan Smith: It is certainly within scope for that matter to be raised with the reviewer. He and his team have the power to review it. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman raises that concern. It is up to the reviewer to what degree he looks at it.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Notwithstanding the antics of the Labour party, my right hon. Friend is absolutely right to underscore the national importance of this issue and I commend the approach that his Department has set out. Despite the depressing and dispiriting response from the Opposition parties, will he

undertake to continue to try to build a national consensus and a consensus across the House on this issue, as it affects all our constituents and should be above party politics?

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend. My door is always open and I am always ready to see somebody, even if they then change their mind. I have found the tweet that the shadow Secretary of State sent this morning—strangely, not after he had seen the statement, but only after he had seen the newspapers. It states:

“Pensions Minister scraps retirement for all but the rich and those lucky enough to have a good private pension!!!”

How ridiculous is that? This is the announcement of a statutory review that his party agreed with in 2014. He really needs to apologise.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): The Secretary of State and all of us here are fortunate to have satisfying, well-paid jobs, but many of our countrymen and women work just to survive. Will the review look at whether it should always be the presumption that living longer means working longer, or might we look at alternative ways of funding the basic state pension so that people are able to benefit and live fulfilled lives in retirement as a result of better healthcare and the fact that we are living longer?

Mr Duncan Smith: Again, that is a wholly legitimate question for the hon. Gentleman to raise. As I said to his party's spokesman, that matter is within scope for the reviewer, if he wishes to raise it. The reviewer and his team will have to decide how to get the balance right. It is certainly within scope for the hon. Gentleman and his party to ask the reviewer to look at that balance and to see whether some of the presumptions are necessary, and I urge him to do so.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): The Secretary of State has been a champion of pensioners with the triple lock, the single-tier pension and automatic enrolment, which is now benefiting more than 6 million people. Does he agree that, in the light of the cross-party support for an independent review in 2014, it is rank hypocrisy for Labour Front Benchers to try to make political capital out of it today?

Mr Duncan Smith: I genuinely regret that the consensus that was achieved for the 2014 legislation has been tossed aside in a matter of hours by the Opposition, apparently over breakfast this morning. *[Interruption.]* I urge them, instead of chuntering away on the Front Bench, to remember what their spokesman said in 2014. He said categorically:

“we do not oppose the Bill”.—*[Official Report, 29 October 2013; Vol. 569, c. 870.]*

They agreed with the regular review. I urge the Opposition to get back to the sensible position of wanting to co-operate over changes to the pension age.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): May I ask the Secretary of State about different occupations? Certain professions, such as those who serve in the armed services, the fire brigade and the police, require a lot of physical strength. We should even think about

surgeons, who will have to operate on people later on in life. Has Sir John Cridland been asked to look at those people's retirement ages?

Mr Duncan Smith: That is another legitimate question. It is within scope for the hon. Lady to raise it with John Cridland and I urge her to do so. A number of similar points have been made. Of course, he will have to make the final decision about the balance of his review within the terms of reference, but this matter is certainly within the terms of reference. I wish those on the Front Bench of the hon. Lady's party had taken such a positive view.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I have listened to this discussion for 45 minutes and, setting aside the bluster from some of the Opposition parties, the only point of divergence that I can see is on whether the Government have included a requirement for this five-yearly statutory inquiry to consider affordability. If that is the case, does my right hon. Friend agree that affordability should definitely be part of any inquiry into our pensions system?

Given that we have a national debt of £1.7 trillion or £24,000 for every man, woman and child in this country, it would be a crime for the Government not to consider whether our pension age is affordable. I hope that the other parties will reconsider, particularly Labour and the Lib Dems, given that this was the only point of difference that their spokesmen could raise.

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend. I thought that there was consensus on this matter, but it has apparently been torn up. I urge those on the Opposition Front Bench to change their minds and engage with the review. Of course affordability will be considered. I do not know of any Government that would genuinely say, “We will make some change and not think about whether it is affordable.” Hang on a second—the last Labour Government did that, actually. I am sad to hear that the Opposition are following their usual trend, which is to shout a lot and make commitments they could never possibly meet if they were in government.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State rule out the prospect of the retirement age being increased to 84 as a result of the review, as was predicted by the previous Pensions Minister, Steve Webb? Are the Government prepared to set any upper limit on the state retirement age?

Mr Duncan Smith: The hon. Lady should not grab on to and believe everything that is printed in the newspapers. They have their own legitimate reasons for publishing stuff. There is nothing in the review that talks about that. I have said categorically that John Cridland will review, within the terms of reference, where we should go with state pension ages and look at other aspects, such as affordability, within the context of what people have done and what their details are. If the hon. Lady has a particular issue she wants to raise, she should raise it with him.

What is untenable is that the hon. Lady's party opposes an independent and regular review of state pensions. Why would anybody do that? *[Interruption.]* I hear

[Mr Duncan Smith]

the shadow Secretary of State shouting, “Rigged.” The only thing that was rigged was the way that he got on to the Front Bench to be the Opposition spokesman.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): As someone who accepted the rise in his own pension age to 68 in 2007 on the basis of the evidence presented by the Labour party, it has been disappointing to hear the tenor of the Opposition’s comments today. Will the Secretary of State reassure me that the review will be independent and that it will take into account factors across the country, not just in London and the south-east, that affect life expectancy? Will he assure me that we will seek to have constructive engagement with the Opposition? If we cannot get it with the shadow Secretary of State, perhaps we should try to get it with the shadow Pensions Minister instead.

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The important thing is that there is an independent review and that we own up to the decisions that we have to take. I wish the Opposition would accept that they took decisions about the state pension age. They have collective amnesia about anything that happened not just pre-2010, but apparently pre-2015. I expect that they will shortly forget everything pre-2016 and that it will go on like that. They should wake up, smell the coffee and get on with being an Opposition in the hope of being in government, not perpetually in opposition.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is concerning and disappointing that further changes are being considered,

given that the Government have not even fixed the botched mess they made of the transition for women born in the 1950s. Several of those women have come to my constituency surgery and some of them face losses of up to £30,000 as a result of the unfair transition. I wonder how many of the WASPI women have gone to the Secretary of State’s surgeries or those of his Ministers and what message he has had for them.

Mr Duncan Smith: The terms of this urgent question and the review are to look beyond 2028. I accept that there are demographic issues in Scotland, such as a faster ageing population, that cause particular issues. I would therefore hope that the hon. Gentleman and his party welcomed an independent review by an independent individual that can look at any aspects and problems in Scotland that they wish to raise. I urge them to do that. I take it from the nodding of his head that he welcomes the independent review, unlike the Labour Front Benchers.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State ensure that the Cridland review moves the indicator from life expectancy to health—mental as well as physical health—particularly for post-menopausal women, and that people can have quality of life post-retirement, so that we can gain from that social capital and people can look forward to their retirement?

Mr Duncan Smith: The hon. Lady raises a wholly legitimate set of issues and concerns. We must consider how we deal with people who retire and their quality of life in retirement. I therefore agree with her, and urge her to talk to the review and ask that it finds some way to look at those issues, which we need to consider anyway.

Humanitarian Crisis: Greece

1.20 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Home Secretary if she will make a statement on the developing humanitarian crisis in Greece.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): I am delighted to be here to respond to the urgent question.

A situation of humanitarian concern is unfolding in Greece. There are reportedly approximately 10,000 people at the border between Greece and Macedonia. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports that around 24,000 people—maybe more—are stranded across Greece. Greek authorities have established two camps at the border with a projected total capacity of 12,500, but crowded conditions are putting pressure on delivering essential support to people.

The UK is already providing nearly £55 million to the Mediterranean migration crisis response. This includes essential supplies such as blankets, sleeping mats and tents, as well as support through non-governmental organisations and UN agencies. The UK has established a new refugee children fund for Europe, which will meet the specific need of unaccompanied and separated children.

We should of course remember that the vast majority of Syrians who have fled Syria are in countries neighbouring Syria. That is why the UK continues to be at the forefront of the response to the crisis in the region. The recent London conference on Syria raised more than \$11 billion with the Prime Minister announcing that the UK will more than double our total pledge to the Syria crisis from £1.12 billion to more than £2.3 billion. As part of this, we are working in partnership with host countries such as Jordan and Lebanon to help them expand job and education opportunities for refugees in a way that will enable them to better support themselves and give them hope for the future where they are.

The UK is working across the EU to ensure that a humanitarian crisis is averted and that the most vulnerable people are protected and provided with shelter. We are monitoring the situation closely. We stand ready to meet other priority needs and are sending a team to Greece to assess the situation.

Stuart C. McDonald: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for her answer. We all recognise the important role that the Department for International Development has played in responding to the humanitarian crisis. Sadly, I regret that the same cannot be said of the Home Office, hence my targeting the question at that Department.

Yesterday, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees warned that Europe faces an imminent humanitarian crisis, largely of its own making. As the Secretary of State reported, UNHCR described crowding and shortages of food, shelter, water and sanitation in Greece. I agree with her that, first, we need an emergency aid response, and the £55 million to which she referred is indeed welcome. However, secondly, we need an urgent strategic response from other European states to share responsibility for supporting Greece in processing and hosting arrivals. Does she agree that border closures, tear gas and rubber bullets do not amount to the required strategic response? Is it not obvious, as the UN has pointed out, that Greece cannot manage the situation alone?

Will the Secretary of State please now agree with the UN that it remains vital that the European agreements on relocation are prioritised and implemented? If not, who do the Government think should take on the responsibility? Is it the Government's position that Greece alone must shoulder it? If she agrees that the challenge of relocation should be shared, how can the UK Government defend not playing their part in that?

Will the Secretary of State also back UN calls for increased regular pathways for the admission of refugees from countries neighbouring Syria? In the light of the unfolding tragedy, will the Government look again at increased resettlement, expanded family reunification, private sponsorship and humanitarian and refugee student and work visas? Surely, in that way, we can reduce dangerous journeys, save lives and support Greece.

Justine Greening: I will start with the hon. Gentleman's final point. He is right that ensuring that refugees can get on with life, even though they cannot be at home, is incredibly important. That is why the London conference focused not just on jobs and work permits so that refugees can work in neighbouring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, but on ensuring that children are back in school, and looking ahead further than the next few years to their future. Those new, groundbreaking steps are important to understand how we can tackle more comprehensively the sort of crisis that is emanating from the conflict in Syria.

On the hon. Gentleman's other points, the UK has worked hand in hand with the UN. We hosted the London conference with the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, and I welcome the announcement that has just come from the EU about the step-up in support for refugees who arrive in Europe. I should say that the announcement has just been made, but our initial look at it—we need to examine it in greater detail—suggests that it proposes precisely the response that the UK has already put in place. It focuses on enabling NGOs that are already on the ground to do a better job, and UNHCR to do a stronger job, particularly in processing and registering refugees. Doubtless, as we get into the detail of the announcement, it will give us more of an indication of exactly what the plans are, but they certainly look like ones that we would welcome.

The hon. Gentleman asked about how Europe more broadly is responding to the crisis. Essentially, there are two different aspects alongside the pieces that I have just mentioned. One is sensible border control. The UK is not part of the Schengen area, for reasons that have become clear in recent months. However, it is important that countries such as Greece are helped to ensure that they can manage their borders more effectively. That is why the Home Office has worked with the Greek authorities. Of course, it is also important that, when refugees arrive in Europe, they make use of mechanisms such as the Dublin convention. We have a co-ordinated approach of dealing with refugees in Europe, but the challenge is that that has broken down in recent months. The UK has taken a clear position based on our proud history of accepting people who seek asylum and refugees, but of course the approach needs to be sensibly managed both for those who want to claim asylum and refugee status, and for the countries where people seek safety.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): I am very pleased to hear my right hon. Friend recognise that we are talking about refugees, not migrants, that the two are different, and that we are dealing with men, women and children who are fleeing war zones. This country has a proud and honourable tradition, which is being honoured now in our seeking to assist, but the European Union response has been chaotic. The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) is right: using rubber bullets and tear gas against children and women is not the answer. When will my right hon. Friend and her colleagues in our Cabinet seek to convene a European meeting to produce a proper and holistic response?

Justine Greening: For many months, we have pressed for the comprehensive approach that, as my hon. Friend says, is required. The crisis has not emerged just in the last few weeks. There is an EU-Turkey summit next week, which will give us a good chance to see a more structured response from the European Union. However, throughout the process, the UK approach has steadily emerged as the most sensible. First, it deals with root causes. It helps people where they are in the region, and considers some of the reasons for their loss of hope about staying there, such as lack of jobs and the inability to get their children back into school. Where people need to relocate, we are enabling them to do so safely and securely.

We are working with UNHCR and other agencies on the ground to identify the most vulnerable people affected by this crisis in the region, and we are relocating those who need relocation in a sensible, managed way. That is much better for those people because they do not have to put their lives in the hands of people smugglers, and it is significantly better for the countries that people go to, because it enables them—as in the UK—to work with local authorities and communities, and ensure that they are prepared to take in refugees who are being relocated, and that the right services and provisions are in place when they arrive.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Secretary of State has spoken again about what the Government are doing for refugees in the middle east, which is wholly commendable, but this urgent question is about the millions of refugees—including half a million Syrians—in Europe, and especially the plight of Greece. I was in Greece last month. The Greek people have been as hospitable as they can be, but their Prime Minister said this week that with the closure of the Macedonian border, and with tens of thousands of people backing up in Greece in the streets of Athens and on the islands, Greece runs the risk of becoming a permanent “warehouse of souls”.

What are the Government doing to get bilateral aid to the Greeks in this crisis, and to encourage Turkey to do something about the thousands of refugees who are being shipped from Turkey into Greece, with some coming increasingly from north Africa? What pressure are the Government bringing to bear on Turkey to put a stop to that and to make it easier for refugees in Turkey to work and get education for their children? Irrespective of the fact that we are not in Schengen, what are the Government doing to work with fellow members of the European family of nations to be more effective against people traffickers and provide safe routes for refugees?

Above all, how can we turn our back on the people of Greece, who risk being overwhelmed because of the absence of a strategic and humanitarian approach to this issue from all EU nations, including the UK?

Justine Greening: I strongly disagree with the hon. Lady's last statement, because the UK is the largest contributor to the humanitarian response, including in Europe, and we have provided nearly £55 million to the Mediterranean migration crisis. She will be aware of the work that we have done in the Mediterranean helping to save lives in recent months with our Royal Navy and Border Force cutters. We have provided Greece with around £19 million of support in total, much of that to help the UNHCR, some to help NGOs on the ground and amazing organisations such as the Red Cross, and some to help the International Organisation for Migration. We have also worked with Greece to help it manage its borders more effectively.

The work that Britain is doing is showing the way to other member states in Europe with a sensible, thoughtful approach to this crisis that can help us not only to deal with root causes, which is what we are doing in the region, but to show that we must all provide support to refugees who are arriving closer to home here in Europe. The UK is leading the way in that.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State and her ministerial team, who are doing an excellent job in difficult circumstances. The International Organisation for Migration suggests that 97,000 people have entered Greece in the past two months alone, which is eight times more than in the same period last year. Not all of them are Syrian refugees, although the majority are. What more can the Government do to work with the Governments of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Morocco, who make up the other 17%?

Justine Greening: Part of that is ensuring that we consider some of the root causes that make refugees undertake these journeys in the first place. My hon. Friend will be aware of much of the work that we are doing in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and also for people who are shifting from parts of Africa. Much of our aid programme is intrinsically focused on improving opportunities in the countries where those young people grow up. In the end, the only solution to these sorts of crises are peace, for those driven by conflicts such as that in Syria, and development, in the case of migration flows that are due to people feeling that they do not have opportunities on their doorstep, and that they want to find better opportunities elsewhere.

Turkey currently has 2 million Syrian refugees, and we should praise the generosity of Turkey and Turkish communities—many of which I have had a chance to meet over the past few years—for the hospitality that they have provided. We will not rise to the challenge of dealing with this crisis by pointing the finger at other countries, although I know it is tempting to do so. We would like other countries in Europe to contribute more, as the UK has done, but in the end we will rise to this challenge by working more collaboratively together in a thoughtful, evidence-based way that understands the drivers behind what is making people move, while not accepting criminality such as people smuggling.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), I recognise the role that DFID has already played, but can the Secretary of State confirm that her response today does not include any new announcements of funding or resource? Does that mean that this latest crisis was somehow foreseen in the needs analysis that the Government carried out before the funding announcements that they have already made? What general needs analysis was carried out before the Government decided to double their pledge at the Syria funding conference? The UK Government's response cannot simply be about funding; at some point we must take our fair share of refugees from Europe to the United Kingdom, and by anyone's calculation, 20,000 people over four years is not a fair share.

Justine Greening: First, our pledge to slightly more than double existing support to the crisis in Syria and the region affected by it was sensible and reflects the situation on the ground and what is needed. If we are to do the right thing, that means going beyond simply providing day-to-day life-saving supplies, because we must also get children back in school. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's characterisation of Britain as not having played its role in helping people more directly in the region to relocate. The Prime Minister has set out what I think is a sensible approach of taking 20,000 people over the course of this Parliament. Those will be the most vulnerable people who would otherwise have absolutely no prospect of getting out of that region. We are working directly with UN agencies and with local authorities around the country to help those people do just that. There will also be people in Scotland who provide a home to those people, and we must ensure that when we bring them to the UK, it is done in a sensible, measured and effective manner.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and the Minister for coming to the House—I know they care deeply about the plight of refugees, and I do not doubt for one minute that they are working exceptionally hard on this issue. However, given what I saw when I visited Lesbos a month ago, I am not surprised by the chaos that Greece is now in—you could see it coming. The Secretary of State kindly agreed to meet me to hear about what I had seen, and it is my fault that the meeting did not happen, for which I apologise.

I remain convinced that the UK has a greater leadership role to play to ensure that Greece is supported and not left to collapse and be abandoned by the rest of Europe, as is happening now. In the mix of this whole sorry mess, unaccompanied and orphaned—let us call them what they really are—children, are still there and need our care and hope, and I believe that the UK and other countries have a moral obligation to home them. I am being simplistic, but for me, blankets are not enough. Our leadership in the region and in Syria is exemplary and I will not hear a word said against it, but there are orphaned children in Europe now. Can we not take some?

Justine Greening: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. I am still very happy to meet her directly and I am sorry she was not able to make the meeting we had

planned. She is right to raise the issue of how children are affected by this crisis. It is why we have put education at the heart of our response.

On children who are arriving in Europe, my hon. Friend will be aware that we have announced a £10 million fund to ensure that we have a much better system of identifying children across Europe, working with UNHCR to make sure children are specifically protected and in safe spaces, and are able to get to where they are trying to get to in a way that does not put them at any more risk. A number of countries across the European Union can help to provide safety for children. That is what we want to happen—we want a more co-ordinated approach. My hon. Friend will be aware that we are extending our vulnerable persons scheme to include unaccompanied children. The one bit of good news in all of this is that, in part because of DFID's work in the Syria region, children arriving in countries such as Jordan and Lebanon are being reunited with their families.

I can absolutely reassure my hon. Friend that our desire is to make sure that children are taken care of. Implicit in her assumption is that many children want to come to the UK. Under the Dublin convention, if they are able to claim asylum and have links into the UK, we can consider their cases. This is one reason why it is so important to make sure that children are registered and inside the system. We are focusing on making sure that that happens. As she will know, it can be a very chaotic situation. Sometimes one of the biggest challenges we face is that children are very reluctant to come forward to the authorities. That is a problem we are trying to overcome.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The situation in Greece is becoming dangerous and could well implode as the crisis gets worse. I am sure the Secretary of State agrees that the humanitarian aid from Britain and the EU is not yet enough to help Greece to cope with the crisis. Will she agree to look at how many refugees arriving in Greece have family in Britain who could look after them? Will she get that assessment done? Will she consider whether the refugee resettlement programme could be extended not just to cope with young, unaccompanied refugees, as the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) said, but others with family in Britain who could look after them, so that Britain can do its bit in a fair way?

Justine Greening: Today's EU announcement is possibly one of the first big steps towards ensuring that the level of response in Europe is on the scale required. I agree with the right hon. Lady on that. Countries, including Britain, have stepped forward to do what they can. We work where we can with the Greek authorities, but more is required. It is good that the announcement appears to be scaling up against those needs.

On the right hon. Lady's second point, I reiterate that we have good and sound processes that sit behind our asylum and refugee system here in the UK—obviously, we are not part of the Schengen area. Those are perfectly sensible approaches to work through the issue of where refugees will finally end up. We will not be a part of a pan-EU relocation approach. We think that that simply plays into the hands of people smugglers, who are perhaps the only people who gain from the present situation. We prefer a much more sensible approach, which is taking people directly from the region.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): My right hon. Friend is right to focus on the humanitarian crisis in Greece, but does she agree that the wider region is important? For those who criticise the international aid budget, does she agree that not investing the 0.7% in countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, which have taken in millions of refugees, would mean a far bigger reduction in our growth prospects? This is not just morally the right thing to do, but is the sensible thing to do.

Justine Greening: I agree very strongly with my hon. Friend. By pursuing the UK aid strategy of doing the right thing by some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world, we also do the right thing by ourselves. Perhaps the worst long-term challenge of the many facing Syria is that many of its best and brightest are leaving the region. The more we can help people to stay close to home and close to their families, the more we prepare for Syria to have the people it needs to help it get back on its feet. As it stands that prospect seems a long way off, but that does not mean we should not try to do our best to achieve it.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) and I were told last Thursday by Europol that 90% of the migrants who enter the EU do so because they are supported by organised criminal gangs. When will we get a statement from Ministers to tell us that there is success against the organised criminal gangs that are doing so much damage to the people of Europe? When is Turkey going to get the €3 billion we promised it to help it to deal with this crisis?

Justine Greening: The right hon. Gentleman will see that on the Treasury Bench with me is the Minister for Immigration, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), who I am sure will respond to his point on progress in tackling organised criminal gangs. Our National Crime Agency works very closely with Europol. He will be aware that we also played our role in saving lives in the Mediterranean with Royal Navy and Border Force cutters. The €3 billion has now been agreed. In fact, we managed to agree it in time for the London conference, which again was a step forward. The key is making sure that it is delivered and that the strategy behind how it is invested is strong. That needs to involve not just the day-to-day support for refugees whom Turkey is very generously hosting—we should remember that Turkey has taken in 2 million refugees—but getting children back into school and progress on effective border control. The package now in place needs to be very carefully delivered not only by the EU, but by Turkey itself in terms of how it uses that investment.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the position she has taken in this crisis. I urge her to continue to put the emphasis on the refugee camps, which will have a big stabilisation effect in places such as Jordan. I wonder, given the expertise of her Department, whether she can say a little more about the technical assistance she is providing to Greece.

Justine Greening: It is in several different areas. Part of it is more Home Office-related assistance on border management, and part of it is humanitarian, working

through UNHCR and, latterly, assisting UNICEF on child protection. Although we often focus on the amounts of aid we are giving, the most effective aid is often technical assistance, which is very cost-effective and highly effective in terms of outcomes.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Secretary of State is absolutely right. Solving this crisis will require a co-ordinated approach across Europe. Surely, however, it is now apparent that to get that co-ordinated approach, we have to have some acts of political leadership? Last year, 90,000 unaccompanied children registered and applied for asylum in Europe. Does that not demonstrate the modesty of the call for this country to take 3,000? Surely this is a time when the Government should say yes to that very modest call for political leadership.

Justine Greening: We have shown political leadership, not just in terms of the scale and the shaping of the humanitarian response in the region but in how we have responded to it closer to home. As I have said, Britain has done more than any country to provide support to refugees more broadly. As I set out to my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen), we have done a huge amount of work to support unaccompanied children. Many Parliaments across Europe will be debating this issue, but few will be able to be as proud as the UK, given the work across government and the support being provided by so many British people to refugees in the region and to those arriving in Europe. I can reassure him, as I did my hon. Friend, that we are working very hard on the issue of unaccompanied children. We are absolutely playing our role.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I am really proud of the fact that this country is the biggest financial contributor in Europe to dealing with this crisis—a point that is too easily dismissed by Opposition parties. However, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact is far less sanguine about the contribution of the European Union. What can my right hon. Friend do to put pressure on her interlocutors to ensure that some of the money that the EU gives to loony projects is diverted to assist in this crisis within our own European borders?

Justine Greening: As my hon. Friend probably knows, I am what I would call an aid disciplinarian. That probably comes from my innate chartered accountant perspective, which means I always need to see effective projects that are well run and deliver value for money. That is absolutely what we have been pressing for and working with the European Union to do. Our push has essentially been to see the EU mirror the UK strategy on doing more effective work in the affected regions and see it step up to the plate on managing this crisis closer to home, which is what today's announcement seems to be about. It is good to see the EU starting to move in the right direction. Of course, we took further steps at the London conference a few weeks ago, which we also welcomed.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): It is hard to overstate the national and regional dangers from Greece becoming a giant refugee camp. That is all the more the case because the refugee crisis cannot be

disentangled from the crisis in the Greek economy and infrastructure. When I visited a refugee camp on one of the islands, I found that the island had already lost its healthcare service, as have so many other islands. In addition to the humanitarian assistance, which is very welcome, what discussions are the British Government having within the EU to discuss the state of the Greek economy, which is very heavily dependent on tourism? There is a risk that the Greek economy will implode under the pressure of a growing refugee crisis this year.

Justine Greening: At the ministerial meetings I attend as a Development Minister, we discuss the challenges that we face much closer to home. We should learn from what has happened in Jordan and Lebanon—that we should not expect countries to be able to cope on their own when they suddenly see huge numbers of people flowing in that they were not expecting. It is not simply a matter of financial pressures because pressures are placed on local communities. That is why the UK has done a lot and why I welcome the announcement that we think is coming from the EU today. This is the right thing to do for the refugees that are arriving. As has been said, it has taken some time for the penny to drop across Europe about what needs to be done closer to home, but I am proud of the work that the UK has done in trying to make sure that the levels of support that people need are now being put in place.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the British public want to help and welcome it being provided for genuine refugees, particularly the women and children from minority groups? However, many are concerned at the arrival of large numbers of fit and able young men who have left their families behind, often claiming to be younger than they are, often having cultural attitudes towards women and gays that are unacceptable in Europe and often coming here for economic reasons. Do we not also need to send out a message that those people should not be able to come here in large numbers?

Justine Greening: I think there are two elements here. One part is responding to the humanitarian crisis itself. As my hon. Friend says, a number of genuine refugees caught up in the Syrian crisis are coming over, but there is also the crisis in Iraq, particularly with the impact of Daesh in northern Iraq, which has also led to refugees coming over. As he points out, another part of the problem is economic migrants. That is why it is so important to have strong processes in place to deal with refugees and asylum cases, but also with migration. As a London MP, I often deal with immigration casework, so I am perhaps as familiar with it as any other MP in this Parliament. Having strong processes in place to work through those different cases is vital. That is why, despite the emotional pressures, we are right to stick to that plan and stick to our strategy—that Britain should have the ability to set its own rules on migration, which is why we are not in the Schengen area.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): Apart perhaps from a couple of contributions from Tory Members, the Secretary of State will have heard a cross-party consensus today that we are dealing with a humanitarian and a refugee crisis. There is a great deal of cross-party support for a friendly reception for the efforts made in region by the Government. Will the right hon. Lady therefore

respond by accepting that the scale of the issue we now face requires a re-examination of the scale of the bilateral support to Greece? Secondly, without a meaningful contribution to the resettlement—and I mean a meaningful contribution—will it not be more difficult to get the solidarity across Europe that will be required to deal with this issue properly?

Justine Greening: As ever, we will continue to make sure that the support we give to all the countries affected by the crisis is at a level that we think is sensible. As I have set out, Britain has, frankly, done as much as any in helping refugees who are arriving in Europe. That is why a significant proportion of what we provide has been given to countries such as Greece where the refugees have arrived. I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman's second point about our approach to relocation. I think our approach is the sensible approach, one that is increasingly recognised across Europe as sensible and pragmatic.

My final point to the right hon. Gentleman is that the people we are able to relocate are the most vulnerable people from the region, those identified by agencies like the UNHCR as needing to be removed from the region in order to get back on with their lives and receive the support they need to do so. I think we are right to focus on the most vulnerable people affected by this crisis; that will continue to be our approach.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and the Government for the leadership they have shown in making us the biggest donor of humanitarian support in region, after the United States. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the refugees from the middle east are the victims of terrorists and traffickers, so taking into the United Kingdom the refugees who have already reached the safety of Europe is simply playing into the hands of those evil traffickers who are exploiting people so appallingly?

Justine Greening: I think my hon. Friend is right. In the end, there is no getting away from the fact that overwhelmingly people want to stay in the region where they had their home and grew up—the area with which they are most familiar and where their closest family is likely to be based. I think the failure of the international community to do enough is what has led to the sorts of flows that we are now seeing. That is why the London conference a month ago was so important. It is also why we need to see more countries doing more in the region. We should not lose sight of the need for more international leadership, matching that of Britain, in the region so that refugees can be supported in countries such as Jordan and Lebanon. They have been generous, but they are saying that this is an extremely difficult situation for them to cope with. Let us not lose sight of that.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): Greece is, of course, a great country and an important and long-standing ally of ours. The people of Greece, however, are still suffering badly from the financial crisis, and the refugee and humanitarian crisis is pushing them to the brink. Help from the EU has so far been slow and inadequate. Despite what has been said today, does the Secretary of State truly believe that the EU strategy to give Greece the proper help that is needed is in place? Does she not agree that a lot more needs to be done?

Justine Greening: As ever, it is all about today's announcement, which we understand to be about €700 million for the next three years, and about making sure that that money is invested sensibly. It is important that Greece itself is willing and able to work with NGOs on the ground and with the UNHCR so that the best work can be done. One of the biggest changes affecting Jordan and Lebanon that has enabled us to help to create more jobs was the important decision of those countries to allow refugees to have work permits. That enabled us to do more to help them get the jobs so that they were able to support themselves. It is important that we are able to work effectively with the Greek authorities to make the most of the additional resourcing and investment so that we can help people as much as we possibly can.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): I fear that Members on both sides of the House are failing to acknowledge two pertinent facts. Not only has the European Union visited penury and misery on the people of Greece because of its cruel monetary policy, but that has been compounded by the fact that its largest member has completely disregarded, in a high-handed and arrogant way, the Dublin protocols that my right hon. Friend mentioned earlier.

May I ask what efforts the Government are making to distinguish between economic migrants and refugees, and—returning to an undertaking that the Prime Minister gave me before Christmas—what special efforts are being made to target our resources at the persecuted minorities in the middle east, particularly Christians?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend has, in fact, raised three issues. First, we are working with the International Organisation for Migration to secure better data and evidence relating to the flows of migrants and refugees. Secondly, we are not in the Schengen area, which means that we can more readily make decisions on how to deal with the various people who seek to come to Britain, depending on whether they are claiming asylum, seeking refugee status or, indeed, just wanting to come here to work as migrants.

Thirdly, my hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the issue of certain minorities. I had a chance to go to Irbil, where I met, among others, Christian minorities who had been persecuted and caught up in the Iraqi crisis and the territorial gains that Daesh was making in Iraq at the time. I can reassure my hon. Friend that we are very conscious of the need not to lose sight of the groups who have been most affected by the crisis. We often talk of its impact on children, but, as he rightly points out, whole communities have been targeted in some areas.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): There should be concern about the impact on Greece's social structure of the double blow that it has experienced: first the effect of membership of the euro on its economy, and now the chaotic immigration policy that is being pursued by the EU.

Many Syrian leaders who are looking to the future are saying that people should be kept as close to Syria as possible, in well-organised camps, and not thrown into the hands of the traffickers who wish to smuggle them into Europe. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Governments of Jordan, Lebanon

and Turkey about the resources that they need in order to sustain that number of people in their own countries, and what hope has she of persuading her EU partners to join the United Kingdom in stumping up some money to support those efforts?

Justine Greening: We have had many discussions with the countries that have experienced the biggest flows of refugees over recent years, particularly the ones that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned.

I think the London conference on Syria was especially important when it came to persuading other countries to step up to the plate alongside Britain, and to do more to help provide the resources that are needed by countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. As the hon. Gentleman will know, at the end of last year the United Nations appeal was just over 50% funded, but following the London conference, only five weeks into this year, some 70% to 80% of this year's needs have already been resourced. Nevertheless, we still need other countries to do more. The crisis will be ongoing for some time, and unfortunately, while I was delighted by the success of the Syria conference—the largest ever amount was pledged in a single day—it should be seen as the beginning, not the end, of the international community's better response.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Riot police, tear gas and rubber bullets are increasing the risks to lone children, and, sadly, also increasing their price tag for trafficking purposes. I saw that for myself in Calais on Monday, and the situation is the same in Greece. There is no effective identification and processing of lone children, especially those with connections to the United Kingdom. Can the Secretary of State assure me that the welcome 28 January commitment to increase the safety of lone children in Europe, as well as in conflict zones, will help the desperately vulnerable children who have no hope of access to the safe legal routes to which she has referred, and prevent them from getting into the hands of traffickers?

Justine Greening: I hope I can provide that reassurance, which is, in a sense, twofold. First, it is about enabling vulnerable children in the region to be relocated when that is necessary, working with UN agencies. Secondly, it is about the £10 million fund that we established to make better and stronger identification possible so that we can get children into the system. We are providing funds to ensure that children receive the kind of specialist protection that they need, can be helped to understand how to deal with the situation in which they have found themselves, and can be given trauma counselling. Even when we have reached an "end point" in our work to help unaccompanied children, they will often need further support in order to be able to get on with their lives effectively because of the experiences that they have been through, and the United Kingdom is ensuring that, whenever possible, we can provide that as well.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): The people traffickers are benefiting from a clear Russian policy: to weaken resolve in Syria, to create a crisis in Europe and weaken our humanitarian values, and to weaken neighbouring states such as Jordan, Lebanon, Greece and Turkey. Last week, Saudi Arabia told the Defence Committee that it had offered visas to Syrian families, allowing them to move in with their own family members.

It has offered them work permits, and opportunities for education, employment and healthcare. Why can we not do the same for Syrian refugees who have clear links with the United Kingdom?

Justine Greening: We have a relocation scheme, and the Dublin convention provides routes enabling people with clear links to the UK to come here. Ultimately, however, we need a co-ordinated and managed approach to migration. We are not in the Schengen area—for all the right reasons, as we can see—and it is right for Britain to have the controls and rules that enable us to manage the flows of people coming into the UK.

The hon. Lady mentioned people smugglers and the impact of bombing. Although we obviously hope that the ceasefire holds, it is important for us not to take steps that would simply play into the hands of the criminals who are gaining from the crisis, and that is why we have taken the approach that we have.

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): I, too, am proud of the leading role in the provision of aid for refugees that the United Kingdom has played, not just over the last few months but for many years. What requests has Greece made directly to the UK for help? I know that the UK has been seeking a comprehensive EU response for months, but what more can we do to put pressure on the rest of the EU to help with the daily basic needs of the refugees in Greece, and at least try to alleviate some of the burden?

Justine Greening: We have humanitarian advisers in Greece who have been helping to ensure that the Greek strategy, including the way in which camps are being set up, is as effective as possible. We have also worked with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. More recently, we have helped to provide child protection officers. The situation on the ground is complex, but I think we should recognise that the UK has helped to provide not only life-saving and core humanitarian support, but the technical assistance that can help the Greek authorities to do a more effective job themselves. I agree that it is welcome that the European Union is now responding with additional resources to mirror the kind of work that the UK has been doing, because that support has been badly needed.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State agree that the very last thing that families fleeing beheadings, bombs and barbarism need is to face barbed wire, tear gas and rubber bullets on their arrival in the EU? Will she please, as a matter of urgency, urge her Government to take a much more constructive role within Europe and to help to implement the EU action plan on migration?

Justine Greening: We are taking a constructive, proactive approach within the European Union. We are not part

of the Schengen area, but that does not prevent us from clearly setting out our views on a more effective way of dealing with this crisis. Speaking in my capacity as Secretary of State for International Development, I think that one of the most important elements to that response has been to tackle the root cause of what is making people feel that they have no alternative to putting their lives in the hands of the people smugglers. That involves doing a better job of supporting those people in the region, closer to home and closer to their families.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): We certainly welcome the financial commitments that the UK Government have announced and are already providing. I echo the calls for the rest of the international community to match those commitments, but the fact is that no amount of money will ever provide enough schools, hospitals and homes to enable the 4 million-plus refugees to settle permanently in the small number of countries that the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) mentioned earlier, given that those countries are already looking after millions of refugees.

Information from Eurostat shows that, relative to the population of each country, Greece receives twice as many asylum applications as the United Kingdom, while Italy receives two and half times the number and the EU as a whole receives five times the number. Some countries, such as Hungary and Sweden, received 30 times as many asylum applications as the United Kingdom does. Does the Secretary of State agree that those figures destroy once and for all the myth that the refugee camps are full of people whose chosen destination is the United Kingdom?

Justine Greening: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, we have an ambition to get every Syrian child who is missing school because of this crisis back into school by the end of the forthcoming academic year. One of the key outcomes of the London conference on Syria was to get the funding for those plans. We know that we can achieve this because we have already helped half the children to get back into school. We now need to finish the job. More broadly, he talked about the intentions of refugees arriving in the EU. The reality is that there are large Syrian diasporas in Germany and Sweden, and many of the people arriving on the shores of Greece might want to join their families in those countries. In the end, however, we need a more co-ordinated approach that recognises that countries such as the UK are not in the Schengen area and that we want to take our own decisions. There is no getting away from the fact that as a last resort people are putting themselves in the hands of people smugglers, but their first choice is almost always to stay in the region. Following the Syria conference in London, we need more action taken internationally to deliver on that.

Points of Order

2.12 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will recall that on 2 December last year, the Prime Minister came to the House and sought permission to extend into Syria the RAF airstrikes that were taking place in Iraq. In the motion, he undertook to provide quarterly progress reports to set out the impact of the strikes on Daesh's finances, its fighters and its weapons. The basis on which the support of the House was given was that we would receive those regular updates, which would also tell us whether there had been any UK involvement in civilian casualties. A quarter has now elapsed since 2 December, and I seek your guidance as to whether the Prime Minister has sought to provide such a progress report to the House and, if not, what action I could take to ensure that he does.

Mr Speaker: A very brief, and I hope accurate, mental calculation suggests to me that there have been 101 days since the date to which the right hon. Gentleman refers. It is perfectly possible that the Government are contemplating such a statement, and if they are not doing so, it is possible that they might do so as soon as the news of his point of order wings its way towards the relevant departmental Minister, or even to the Prime Minister himself. If that transpires not to be the case, the right hon. Gentleman is a very experienced Member and a former Deputy Leader of the House and he will be well aware that he could pursue the matter at business questions, for example, or through the use, on other days beyond today, of the device that can help to secure a ministerial presence. Knowing him as I do, I know that he will utilise all the weapons at his disposal.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The day would not be complete without hearing a point of order from the hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke).

Alec Shelbrooke: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your support and advice. You will know that last week we had an important urgent question about mental health, and you will recall that when I asked a question on that occasion, I commented on the fact that the writers of "Coronation Street" had done a great service to those with mental health issues by addressing the stigma and other relevant issues. It will not have escaped your notice that the creator and original writer of "Coronation Street", Mr Tony Warren, has sadly passed away at the age of 79. Is there any way in which it could be noted, through you in the Chair, that the contribution to society as well as to entertainment of great pioneers such as Tony Warren has led to a great improvement in British culture and a greater understanding of our country?

Mr Speaker: My feeling is that the hon. Gentleman has found his own salvation. He has achieved his mission. Moreover, he knows that he has done so. No real contribution from me is required, other than to acknowledge that he has paid fulsome and gracious tribute to someone who proved to be a change-maker. I am sorry to learn of that gentleman's passing, but he has been honoured by the hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell today.

Employment Status (Review)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

2.16 pm

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the establishment by the Secretary of State of an independent review of the operation of the Employment Rights Act 1996 in relation to the determination of employment status and dispute resolution mechanisms for employers and employees relating thereto; and for connected purposes.

My Bill calls for something that is long overdue: a full, independent review into the law surrounding self-employed workers and their rights. The need for this was demonstrated by the collapse of City Link in my constituency and those of other Members. The delivery firm went into administration just over a year ago, with employees being informed on Christmas day 2014. Roughly 2,700 people, along with 1,000 contractors, lost their jobs. Those contractors, and the situation that was forced upon them, form the inspiration for this Bill.

A number of concerns were expressed about City Link's collapse and about how it might have been handled better. It provoked a joint report from the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee and the Scottish Affairs Committee—a report on the impact on employment of the closure of City Link was published in March 2015. City Link viewed its drivers as self-employed. The drivers provided their own vans, but were required to wear the company's livery and were not permitted to work for anyone else. Those drivers were employees in all but name.

The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee stated:

"Contractors and sub-contractors providing drivers for City Link have been hit particularly hard by its closure."

That is because they were unsecured creditors and were unlikely to receive the vast majority of the wages they were owed. The administrators' statement of proposals found that they could expect to receive less than 2p in the pound. The Select Committee further noted that the financial difficulties of the contractors were worsened by the fact that they had been encouraged to take on additional staff and vehicles and to work longer hours in the lead-up to Christmas, despite the doubts over the company's future. Gordon Martin, of the RMT, told the Committee that, due to assurances from City Link:

"People, through the business, went out and bought additional vans to put on the road. This is a human tragedy across the piece. People are thousands of pounds in debt. Who knows how they are going to pay?"

That context is important in outlining the vulnerable position subcontractors can be in when a company goes into administration. The underlying issue here that I wish to raise is bogus "self-employment". The RMT told the Committee that the self-employed drivers were "tied to the company; they have to wear the uniform and they have to use the company livery on the vehicles...That is the way the market is, unfortunately, but they are employees by any definition, other than the fact that they have an arrangement in place where they seem to be divorced from the company but are employed by it."

Crucially, the Select Committee accepted the RMT's analysis that this was direct employment in everything but name.

Why does this matter? All rights under employment law are contingent on employment status, be it as an employee, worker or someone self-employed. The self-employed have few rights. They are not entitled to receive sick pay, holiday pay or the national minimum wage, and are responsible for their own taxation. Workers have a number of basic rights, including the right to the minimum wage and annual leave. Employees have the same rights as workers, plus additional rights, including the right not to be unfairly dismissed and the right to redundancy pay. An employee is an individual who works under a contract of employment, which means that employment rights turn on whether or not the contract under which a person works is a contract of employment.

Self-employed persons are instead regarded in law as providing a service for a customer or client. The distinction is often described as the difference between a "contract of service" and a "contract for services". The question that needs addressing is how to make sure that people are on the type of contract that accurately reflects their work. I am not in any way opposed to people being self-employed—I am sure that in many situations it is extremely useful. What I object to is people being denied the right type of contract for their work and therefore not getting the employment rights to which they should be entitled. The difficulty is: how does someone know whether they are on the right type of contract? The Select Committee found that these drivers were employees in all but name, but that is no consolation to those affected. It should not be so difficult to determine whether a contract is an employment contract or not, or for someone to find out whether they are on the appropriate contract for their work.

Bogus self-employment is when an individual is treated by a company as being self-employed but their relationship with the company exhibits the features of an employment relationship. If the company says the individual is self-employed and the individual says he is actually an employee, there is only one way to settle the issue and that is by going to court. A contractor who wishes to challenge their employment status has to go to court, which is both arduous and expensive. Furthermore, the question of employment status is one of the issues most widely litigated on in employment law.

The House of Commons Library has kindly supported me in understanding the legal tests developed by courts and tribunals. Substantial criteria are involved, each of which is subject to volumes of case law, and this level of complexity in the law worsens the problem. An individual might suspect that he is an employee but would be unlikely to know whether or not he is, because the law is

so complex. That means that some companies may be wrongly categorising employees as self-employed persons, depriving them of employment rights.

At the time of the City Link collapse I met the then Business Secretary, who, to his credit, was aware of this difficulty. Let me quote at length what he told the Select Committee:

"Before the City Link issue came up, I had initiated a thorough investigation of employment status, which we are now undertaking...there is what appears to be a growing number of people who are not genuinely self-employed but have, in some sense, fallen through the cracks. We are trying at the moment to get a handle on...how, at least through legislation, we might address that problem. We certainly acknowledge that it exists. It is a part of this wider debate...I would hope my successor, whoever it is, takes this seriously, because there is a gap."

He then announced the review in October 2014. It appears that this review is internal, and we still do not know the outcome. In March 2015, in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna), the then Minister responded by saying that

"a number of teams from across the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills have been feeding into the employment status review."

Yet, in answer to a parliamentary question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) only this month, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury said that

"officials from HM Treasury, HM Revenue and Customs, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will form a Cross Government Working Group for Employment Status early this year."

I can only ask this: what have they been doing for the past year?

It is time for a proper review, led by experts in employment law, and I suggest that a leading employment lawyer is appointed to chair the review. We need greater clarity as to the criteria for "self-employment". We need a forum where individuals can query or challenge their employment status without having to go to court, and I suggest that an ombudsman or a Government agency might be appropriate. We need penalties for companies that intentionally use bogus self-employment contracts, and we need to give full consideration to whether the rights and support we provide to the self-employed are adequate in today's world.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mr Jim Cunningham, Chris Stephens, Colleen Fletcher, Mr Geoffrey Robinson, Mr Dennis Skinner and Steve McCabe present the Bill.

Mr Jim Cunningham accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 March, and to be printed (Bill 146).

Estimates Day

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

ESTIMATES 2015-16

DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

The Science Budget

[*Relevant Documents: First Report from the Science and Technology Committee, The science budget, HC 340, and the Government response, HC 729.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2016, for expenditure by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills:

(1) the resources authorised for use for current purposes be reduced by £7,152,214,000 as set out in HC 747,

(2) further resources, not exceeding £195,006,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a further sum, not exceeding £72,412,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—(*Margot James.*)

2.28 pm

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): We hold a position of great responsibility in the global scientific community; as a science powerhouse, not only do we set the bar for the quality of research, but we have a duty to take care that our spending and structural decisions do more than merely maintain the status quo. As we face down a century that is filled with infinitely complex societal challenges—ageing, chronic and complex illnesses and climate change—we have to acknowledge that we are in the hot seat. Our scientists and innovators in academia and industry will be at the forefront of the discoveries that will not only underpin the productivity of our economy, but ensure the sustainability of our way of life.

If we get our spending priorities, regulatory frameworks and immigration policy wrong, we will be on the wrong side of history. For that reason, the Science and Technology Committee chose spending on science and innovation as our first inquiry and ensured that we reported in time to make recommendations ahead of the spending review. It is also why we asked for this debate today, ahead of the Budget, to press on recommendations that have not yet been taken up, although we are grateful for the Government's response.

Our findings received widespread support. *The Times* and the *Financial Times* published editorials endorsing our call to increase R and D investment. Sir Paul Nurse, president of the Royal Society, joined scientists up and down the country when he said that our report “hits the nail squarely on the head.”

The evidence that we received was clear:

“We punch well above our weight”

in science and innovation.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): As my hon. Friend knows, my constituency houses one of the centres for fusion technology. In the context of her remarks, I wonder what she has recommended in relation to taking that forward and helping to develop it.

Nicola Blackwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to be proud of the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy. I have visited it on more than one occasion. One of the fundamental proposals that we have made is to increase R and D investment in the UK. If he will listen a little further, he will hear exactly what we have proposed to ensure that the UK remains a world leader in that particular area of research.

With just 0.9% of the world's population and 3.2% of the world's R and D spending, we produce 16% of the world's most cited papers and hold more than 10% of the world's patents. We have produced 80 Nobel laureates. We have four of the world's top six universities—I will, if I may, boast that one of them is in my constituency—and we attract more inward investment for research than any other part of Europe. However, it is not enough to be proud of the exceptional impact of our research base; we must also be mindful of the pivotal role that it plays in the goals that we have set ourselves as a nation.

As a Committee, we welcomed the Chancellor's statement protecting the science budget in real terms, increasing the annual capital budget to £1.1 billion and maintaining the innovation budget at flat cash—albeit with £165 million becoming loans. We are also grateful to the Business Secretary, who gave evidence to the Committee in January, for reassuring us that not only would the ring fence for the science budget remain, but no additional organisations, programmes or spending lines could be added to that budget.

Although we welcomed that assurance, we would like to see those allocations for ourselves. The Business Secretary assured us that those allocations would be finalised in mid-February; it is now March and I am told that the negotiations are still ongoing. Will the Minister please tell the House what the hold-up is, and exactly when those allocations will be made public? We are concerned that as excellent as our research base is, commercialisation, though improving, remains sub-optimal. Crucially, despite the recent spending settlement, UK investment in R and D is internationally low at a time when our competitors are increasing R and D investment.

At 1.7% of GDP, the UK remains 12th among 28 member states for R and D investment; in 2013, Germany invested about 3%, China about 2%, and Israel and Korea about 4.2%. There is a reason why all our competitors are increasing their R and D while we lag behind. It is that R and D investment is proven to increase productivity and innovation growth. Science and innovation spending is not a subsidy, but a strategic investment that creates jobs, increases productivity and attracts inward investment.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that research, pure research and discovering inventions often lead to some of the greatest creations? There were decades between the discovery of the electron and when we were able to use it, but it now runs every part of our lives today.

Nicola Blackwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I often like to quote Lord Porter, who says that there are only two kinds of research: that which has been exploited and that which has yet to be exploited. That is why we must ensure that the entire pipeline from fundamental research all the way through to commercialisation is working at peak capacity.

We must be mindful of the fact that, between 2000 and 2008, 51% of productivity growth came from innovation. We know that Government investment in research crowds in private sector investment, because the latest BIS analysis tells us so. It shows that £1 of public investment will increase private funding by between £1.13 and £1.60. It shows that firms that persistently invest in R and D have 13% higher productivity than those that do not. It shows that every £1 of public investment in R and D raises private sector R and D productivity by 20p each year in perpetuity.

Our top recommendation to Government was to produce a long-term road map to increase public and private R and D investment up to the 3% EU target. That would sit well alongside the national innovation plan, which I understand the Business Secretary is proposing. We are not alone in calling for that increase; other Select Committees and institutions have done so before us. In fact, it was BIS's own analysis in 2014 that called for the UK to increase R and D investment up to 2.9%, which is the average of our competitors, commenting that those competitors do not appear to get poor returns on their investments.

If the evidence is so compelling, what would such a road map look like? Based on international analysis, if the UK were to invest 3% of GDP in R and D, we would expect a third of that to come from public spending. Policies and the road map would need to be a combination of increasing Government R and D and stimulating private sector investment beyond the life of this Parliament. Although protecting the science budget proper and the ring fence in this Parliament is a good start, we also believe that the policies need to protect the departmental R and D and to make it more transparent and necessary. Departmental R and D has plummeted in some Departments in the past decades; reversing that trend can only lead to better government and will also create all the virtuous effects that we saw in the previous Parliament.

We also need to target private sector investments to scale-ups. The UK has become a country with lots of start-ups, but not enough companies make it through the so-called "mid-cap gap" to become £1 billion valuation quoted companies. Incentives for early-stage investors to build and stay in companies are needed. Options might include increasing the enterprise investment scheme threshold to cover £100 million companies.

There could also be incentives for investors to hold on to eligible research-intensive companies for longer and not to sell them. Those incentives could include reintroducing the capital gains tax taper relief to reward 10 to 15-year exits from investments in such companies. There could also be incentives for pension and institutional fund investors to invest in research-intensive companies, as they tend to have a longer term outlook. A programme such as a capital gains tax break on the dividend returns for funds in proportion to the percentage of the fund that is invested in a research-intensive company might be an option.

We could also look to our immigration policy for possible opportunities. Tier 1 investor visas require individuals to invest £2 million in the UK for the duration of their stay. The Migration Advisory Committee has recommended that those sums should be invested in the public good, such as in hospitals and schools. There is an opportunity here to assemble a portfolio of investment

for research to meet that criterion so that our science, technology, engineering and maths ecosystem could benefit from that investment.

The immigration skills charge is a final option that we could propose. We urge the Minister to consider an exemption for the STEM PhD-level certificate of sponsorship from the immigration skills charge. That would boost the STEM PhD employers. Furthermore, PhD-level exemptions already exist in the visa system in recognition of the need to recruit for these posts from the best in the world.

Those ideas are just a starting point, but our message is clear: we believe that increasing UK R and D investment to a competitive level needs to be a matter of national priority, and a long-term road map is the right mechanism to achieve it. Getting the science spending right is about not just how much we spend, but how we spend it.

We also received worrying evidence that not all of our capital projects were operating at full capacity due to inadequate resource allocations. The ISIS neutron source worth £400 million at Harwell is operating for only about 128 days instead of an optimal 180 days due to insufficient operational costs. Similar problems were reported elsewhere, including in the Catapult network. Although we welcome the Government's commitment to the Catapult network, which is working well, we urge them to consolidate and fully fund the existing network before expanding it. It is simply wasteful not to ensure that we are putting enough resource into the system so that we can realise the full value from all capital investments. That is why we called for a review of all capital and resource allocations to ensure that all future capital investments are allocated the resource necessary fully "to sweat our assets".

The Business Secretary accepted that problem when he appeared before us, and he assured us that a review was under way to ensure that the situation did not happen again. He committed to send the Committee the results of that review, but we have not received them, so I hope that the Minister can update us on progress today.

The Business Secretary identified France and Finland as the inspiration for the introduction of innovation loans. The Committee would be interested to hear what metrics the Government used to conclude that loans were effective for stimulating innovation. We understand that the Government intend to pilot this scheme. As a Committee, we can only commend a scientific approach to measuring the impacts of different types of instruments before settling on a specific grants/loan mix, if that is the intention, but it would be helpful to hear from the Minister at the outset what hard evidence there already is on which financial instruments work best and what his plans are to build on that evidence before introducing such loans.

Finally, we were crystal clear that on no account must the Government's proposals for reorganisation of the research councils and higher education undermine the dual funding system or the Haldane principle. In his evidence to the Committee, the Secretary of State said that there would be one response from Government covering Dowling, Nurse and the higher education Green Paper. He could not give us a timeline for that response, however. Given the far-reaching impact of these proposals and the current uncertainty surrounding the Government's intentions, I hope the Minister can be a little more

[Nicola Blackwood]

definitive today. Will he please not only say when the Government will publish their response, but clarify a number of points?

First, do the Government plan to adopt Nurse's proposal for a ministerial committee and, if so, what form will it take? Will it be a single Minister meeting Research Councils UK, or will it involve Ministers from across key Departments? This will clearly have an important impact in terms of the politicisation of funding decisions. Secondly, can the Minister give us at least some sense of the major concerns raised in the Green Paper consultation process—in particular regarding merging the Higher Education Funding Council for England's science budget allocation role with Research Councils UK? What specific measures are being proposed to ensure that the dual support system will be safeguarded if these changes go ahead? Finally, what additional costs does he anticipate the implementation of Dowling, Nurse and the Green Paper will incur and will those have to be found from within the existing science budget settlement?

Our goal in this Budget and Parliament should be to unleash the full potential of every local economy in Britain. In an increasingly knowledge-based economy, the pursuit of excellence in research and innovation is at the very heart of effective strategies for sustainable growth, increasing productivity and creating high value jobs. It is not enough just to aim for stability—for maintaining the status quo—especially if policies and spending decisions are based more closely on templates of the past than on analysis of future challenges.

Globalisation means that a single disruptive technology can create a worldwide market shift in what seems like an instant, and our STEM ecosystem needs to be the most agile and responsive in the world if we are to compete. However, we will achieve that agility only if we recognise that we are operating in a global market at home as well as abroad. Some 25% of university research income comes from overseas, largely the EU. Some 50% of business R and D in the UK is from firms headquartered overseas, and R and D from abroad has grown by 59% in recent years. A quarter of top researchers operating in the UK are not British nationals.

Investors and talent need to see the Government instil confidence in the research base, but with the Green Paper, the Nurse review and the upcoming pilots of innovation loan systems, we are sending signals of turbulence and uncertainty. It is time for the Government to step up and make it crystal clear that the UK's science and innovation is built on a rock-solid foundation. It is time for the Government to end uncertainty over Nurse, Dowling and Green Paper reforms and set out their direction, and it is time for them to demonstrate commitment to creating stability and certainty for science, with a long-term road map for increasing public and private R and D to competitive levels. In that way, we would supercharge the proven, stabilising effects of the ring fence and capital commitment, capture large-scale inward investment and secure our status as a bona fide science superpower.

2.43 pm

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is a genuine pleasure to follow the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee. The manner in which she is steering that

Committee towards practical added-value recommendations is exemplary and superb, and the manner in which she steered the House through her recommendations this afternoon was astonishingly good, too. I am in the weird position of agreeing with every word she said, so I will not take too much of the House's time.

The hon. Lady was particularly strong, if I may say so, when she spoke about what a pivotal role science plays in future economic and productivity growth, and given my Select Committee's priorities, I was particularly interested in her point about start-ups. It is relatively easy to start a business in this country, but scaling that up so that we have very large, innovative and successful firms employing a large number of people is a major challenge for this Parliament. I hope that our two Select Committees can work together closely to provide the join-up that is needed.

The hon. Lady mentioned that science has never been more crucial to our status as a modern economic nation. I agree. We need innovative and successful firms creating wealth and employment on the back of science and research and development. We are here now, in the 21st century, on the cusp of the fourth industrial revolution: the first, in the 18th century, used water and steam power to mechanise production; the second, in the early 20th century, used electric power to create mass production; the third, in the late 20th century, used electronics and information technology to automate production, unleash digital and revolutionise the means of communication.

This fourth industrial revolution, moving at an exponential pace, is astonishing. The technologies that this revolution is unleashing, such as the internet of things, autonomous vehicles, materials science, nanotechnology, biotechnology, energy storage, artificial intelligence and quantum computing, will disrupt almost every industry in almost every country, and will disrupt society as a whole. Science and technology are the foundations of this revolution, and the choice in the future will be stark. Countries that embrace and invest in science will be the winning nations of the future; those that do not will fall behind in economic growth and living standards.

This is why, as the hon. Lady pointed out, it is a matter of concern that we have lagged behind spend by our competitors on science and research and development for much of the past 30 years. As she said, what we do spend, we seem to spend very efficiently and effectively. We punch well above our weight, but we need to think about the volume of that value, as well as what we are doing with it. We have spent just over 2% of GDP on R and D just once in the past 30 years. That was in 1986, and we have never again reached that level. Spend has declined steadily over that period to reach a long-term average of about 1.6% or 1.7% of our GDP. We are below the EU average for R and D spend as a proportion of our economy.

The Russell Group has pointed out that in terms of the level of R and D intensity of the top 22 countries listed by the OECD, the UK has the lowest level of investment. Our investment has declined, while our competitors such as Korea, Germany, the US and even Japan have increased the share of their economy spent on research and development. As is mentioned in the hon. Lady's report, Imperial College London has said that our investment as a proportion of GDP is about 1.72%, but China increased its share of R and D investment from 1.3% in 2005 to 1.98%; France increased

its share from 2.11% in 2005 to 2.26% in 2012; and Germany increased its share from 2.51% in 2005 to 2.92% in 2012. The US also increased its investment in the same period from 2.51% of GDP to 2.79%. Imperial College, giving evidence to the hon. Lady's Select Committee, said that the choice was stark:

"Without increased investment in R&D, therefore, the UK risks losing its position at the forefront of research globally, particularly given the rapid rate of advance in scientific research and the intense levels of international competition."

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend concerned that where the Government attempt to support innovation and R and D, the resources are very unevenly distributed? For example, from the Catapult programme, 9% of resources have gone to the midlands region, but 46% have gone to London and 22% to the south-east. Surely that is not the way to get the best out of the country.

Mr Wright: My hon. Friend makes an important point. If we are spending a pound of public money, what do we want to get out of that and where do we get most bang for our buck? If the Government are serious about rebalancing the economy and making sure that prosperity is not just in London and the south-east but spread across the country, projects such as the midlands engine and the northern powerhouse need to have that scientific base in order to boost investment, research and development, and ultimately wealth creation as well.

The Russell Group has stated:

"The UK punches above its weight when it comes to excellence in research and higher education but this situation is unsustainable in the long-run without continued investment...The UK lags behind its main competitors in its level of investment in R&D and cannot continue to sustain its position as a world-leader without sufficient support."

The EU has stated that to maintain future competitiveness in the face of unprecedented global competition, member states should be working towards spending 3% of GDP on research and development by 2020. As the hon. Lady said, the UK is a long way from that target. Only Finland, Sweden and Denmark already exceed that 3% target, yet it is vital for future productivity gains.

The hon. Lady and her Committee thought that the science issue was so important that it should be the focus of their first inquiry. We in the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee thought that the Government's productivity plan, published in July 2015, was so important—indeed, the productivity gap is the major economic challenge of this Parliament—that we made it the focus of our first inquiry. We looked at spending on research and development and found that publicly funded R and D creates a strong "multiplier effect" and "crowds-in" private sector, charitable and inward investment, stimulating around 30% more self-investment from industry. Throughout our inquiry we heard strong evidence about just how much the public spending on R and D can draw in that private spend, as opposed to crowding it out. That model is operated by our major competitors around the world. Our report stated:

"We fully agree with the Science and Technology Committee's recommendations on maintaining good R&D investment in the UK and echo that, if the Government is serious about productivity and competitiveness, it needs to commit to a total level of public and private R&D investment in the United Kingdom of three per cent of Gross Domestic Product. We therefore recommend that

the Government produces a 'roadmap' for increasing the total level of public and private R&D investment in the United Kingdom to three per cent of Gross Domestic Product."

The hon. Lady also mentioned the move from grants to loans. I worry about that, because it is a major concern. Decisions on capital investment are global, often decided by people around boardroom tables that are not in the UK, and it can be transferred anywhere. Those multinational corporations will be looking at a different dashboard of metrics when deciding where to put their latest investment. They will be looking at the flexibility of the labour market, tax rates and the ease of doing business. They will also be looking at the collaboration and partnerships between public and private, particularly in terms of R and D.

Other countries provide help and support to land that investment, and for the past 15 years we have had a major strength in that. The level of foreign direct investment into the United Kingdom has been excellent, but I think that we will put that at risk by moving from grants to loans. For example, why would Rolls-Royce invest in a factory here when Singapore, where the company already has a presence, could be offering a whole lot more? It is a case of making sure that we do not compromise our true strengths when it comes to grants and loans. Therefore, echoing what the hon. Lady said, what is the rationale for that? Is the Minister not aware that there is a huge risk in moving from grants to loans? What metrics will he use to advance this? Can we pilot it before it is rolled out across the economy?

The second risk that I would like to talk about is the proposal to merge Innovate UK and Research UK. The Catapult centres are working well, but they are relatively new organisations and they need a period of stability and certainty to become embedded in the ecosystem of science research and innovation. The merger will cause disruption and uncertainty and it will affect our science base. Will the Minister therefore outline for the House what the roadmap is to ensure that Innovate UK and Research UK can come together in a safe way?

The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee fully agrees with the Government on the need to improve productivity; we want to focus on that throughout our inquiries in this Parliament. Part of that is being able to spend for the long term and prioritising capital spend. Under the coalition Government, BIS's capital departmental expenditure limits rose by about 84%, but under the spending review announced by the Chancellor two or three months ago it will fall by about 60%. The spending review stated quite explicitly:

"The government has chosen to prioritise its day to day spending on national security and key public services while investing more for the long term in capital infrastructure."

The Government's capital investment over the lifetime of this Parliament actually increases by about £12 billion, but BIS's capital spend is being cut by 60%. The Ministry of Defence's capital spend will increase, as will the capital spend of the Department for Communities and Local Government—a comparably sized Department—because of housing. The Department for Transport's capital spend will double to £12 billion.

In contrast, the science budget will bob around throughout this Parliament at about £1.1 billion a year. I do not see that as a huge success. Actually, I see it as a failure in negotiations by BIS during the spending review, especially given that, as the Chancellor has said, science is a major priority for this Government. Since 2010 we

[Mr Iain Wright]

have lost around £330 million in capital spend on science. It will take an awful lot of investment and prioritising to catch up, given that our competitors are moving ever further away. Therefore, does the Minister think that that was a disappointing negotiation? Given the priority and the pivotal role that science plays, does he think that we should be spending more on science in order to boost that long-term value for the economy?

Given the central importance of science as perhaps the principal driver of future economic growth, increased competitiveness and improved living standards, the relative decline in our science spend, regardless of whether we spend it wisely, should be a cause of enormous concern, and there should be a determination at a national level to reverse it. That is why I am really pleased that the hon. Lady has brought forward this debate. I hope that the Minister will respond positively to ensure that science is at the heart of our economic revival, now and in the future.

2.57 pm

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): This is a vital debate because it is about the future direction of our nation, and whether we will truly commit to the high-value, high-skills economy and invest in the areas that underpin that aspiration, such as core scientific research, or whether we will pay lip service to that aim while actually spending most of our energies maintaining the status quo. I suppose the reality will be a bit of both, but on this occasion I am pleased that the Government's actions appear to be working towards backing up the aspiration. That is why I want to place on the record my thanks to the Chancellor and to the Minister for the announcement in the recent spending review of a real-terms increase in spending on science.

I was fortunate enough to be a member of the Science and Technology Committee in the previous Parliament. Indeed, I wanted to chair the Committee in this Parliament, but unfortunately that was not to be; my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood) was successful, and I wish her and the Committee well in the coming years. Back in 2010 the Committee was very pleased that there was a flat cash settlement and a ring fence for the science budget. At the time, that seemed an excellent outcome, compared with the cuts being experienced by other Departments. Of course, the inflationary effect of that flat cash settlement was that by 2015 it had effectively dropped by 15%.

Therefore, the announcement of a real-terms, year-on-year increase in this Parliament was particularly welcome. As the Minister will recall stating:

"We are protecting science resource funding in real terms, at its current level £4.7 billion for the rest of the Parliament."

That, along with the £6.9 billion science capital commitment, means a total investment of over £30 billion in science by 2020. That has to be welcomed by all. I believe that it sends a clear signal that science and innovation are at the heart of the Government's long-term economic plans.

We know that Britain is a great place to do science. As we have heard from my hon. Friend, for every pound invested, we publish more papers and receive more citations than any other developed nation. We perform

well above the average, producing 16% of top-quality published research findings, with just 3.2% of the world's R and D expenditure.

How has that come to be the case, and how do we maintain it? There are a number of things that we have done in the past and that we are doing now. As a nation, we have a long and illustrious history of scientific endeavour, and we have made numerous significant scientific breakthroughs, as we heard from the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee. We have created a scientific landscape that fosters creativity and an ability to think the unconventional and then go out and explore it. While money is important, therefore, this is not all about the cash; it is more about how it is used and how we direct—or do not direct—the way in which it is spent.

This Government and previous Governments have built on the achievements of the past for the benefit of our collective future. In the recent Russell Group report "Engines of growth", a sample of 240 projects from the group's universities delivered at least £21 billion of economic benefit—a hundredfold return on investment. That proves that public investment in R and D supports economic growth. However, that investment must be free from political interference, as enshrined in the Haldane principle—the idea that decisions about what to spend research funds on should be made by researchers, rather than politicians. That must continue.

It is right for the Government to support science, but they must not become too prescriptive or they will kill the very creativity that allows us to punch well above our weight. At present, the Government are getting it about right. Investing in Catapult centres is an excellent example of how the Government can give researchers a steer, without direct interference, and I hope that that will continue. It is right that we put up the money, but it is also right that it is the scientists who decide how it is spent.

We have an excellent record of investment in science in this country, but I want to highlight one or two things. The relationship between Parliament and the science community is as good as it has ever been. Yesterday we saw an excellent event—Voice of the Future—at which the Minister spoke. As part of that collaboration between the Royal Society of Biology and the Science and Technology Committee, young and early-career scientists were invited into Parliament to quiz those responsible for directing how Parliament and science interact. Another example of that relationship will come next week, when I host SET for BRITAIN—the science, engineering and technology for Britain competition—where young and early-career scientists will have an opportunity to highlight their work at a poster competition, with the potential to receive significant recognition and prizes.

As I said, the landscape for science looks good in the UK, and the Government are showing genuine support, but I cannot let this opportunity pass without highlighting one or two areas that still need addressing. As was highlighted in both previous contributions, the amount we spend on science in the UK is well below what our international partners spend. We are the fifth largest economy in the world, but all the other major economies are spending considerably more than us. We can take a simple step towards rectifying that by aiming to spend 0.7% of our GDP on R and D by 2020, rather spending 0.5%. That is a figure we have committed to spend in

other areas, and we could certainly commit to spend it on science. We know that that makes sense, and we have seen how we get a return on that investment. I would like the Government and the Minister to take that thought away.

My final point is about how we inspire the next generation of scientists. In a recent report, the Royal Society identified a skills gap, noting that we will need 1 million new engineers, scientists and tech professionals by 2020. The Government are doing something through their apprenticeship programme to help fill that gap, but we need to do more to inspire young people to see science as a career for them. One way we could do that is by getting the Government to facilitate greater working between schools, the learned societies, the professional bodies and STEM businesses, so that we can take real-life examples of how science works in society into our educational establishments and inspire young people about science at an earlier age.

The settlement goes a long way towards ensuring that we continue to be an economic and scientific powerhouse, and I commend the Government for their actions.

3.5 pm

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): We meet for this debate at an auspicious moment. According to this morning's *Financial Times*,

"Grey hairs, monobrows and poorly judged comb-overs could be consigned to history after research led by British scientists revealed how our genes affect hair growth on the human head and face."

That, if evidence were needed, is a sign of the continuing health of British science. However, it takes funding for British basic science to produce publications that can, in time, lead to the wealth-creating, job-generating businesses of the future. I am, therefore, broadly supportive of the Government's continuing commitment to the science budget, but there is much more we can do when it comes to Government support for science, for knowledge transfer and for greater private sector involvement in R and D.

First, however, let me set out some history. When the last Labour Government came to power in 1997—happy days—we found, as we always do, that the Conservative party had decimated the British science base. Laboratories were falling apart, basic funding was slashed, support for R and D was pathetic, and the space programme was in chaos—the usual. Over 13 years, primarily under the leadership of Science Minister Lord Sainsbury, and with the support of Chancellor Gordon Brown and investment from the Wellcome Trust, the Labour party rebuilt Britain's science base.

The UK innovation investment fund was created to back technology entrepreneurs, the science research investment fund was created to tackle the backlog of under-investment in facilities, and the higher education innovation fund was created to incentivise universities to transfer their knowledge into industry. The result has been a golden age for British science, with great discoveries such as the Higgs boson; the Rosetta mission; an end to the brain drain; and world-class, well-resourced universities carrying out cutting-edge work.

Mr Iain Wright: My hon. Friend makes a really important point, and the work Lord Drayson did was absolutely instrumental in those achievements. Does my hon. Friend agree that that 10-year science plan gave

all institutions and companies the time they needed to invest with certainty and confidence, because the ecosystem was steady for the entire decade?

Tristram Hunt: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. The Science and Technology Committee report makes a point about the innovation lag, and the investment my hon. Friend talks about yielded extraordinary results afterwards. So successful was the Labour party's science policy that the pressure group Save British Science had to go into liquidation—its work was done.

When the coalition Government came to power, they ring-fenced a flat-cash science budget. They cut the capital budget by 40% and then reversed the cut. Those were not the long-term, sustainable decisions our science base needs. Today we have heard that the capital part of the science budget stands at £1.1 billion a year, and that will be protected in real terms until 2021. However, I share the Science and Technology Committee's concern about the UK falling behind our competitors in R and D investment. I agree with the Committee's plans for a road map to take us towards R and D investment of 3% of GDP and up to the Euro norm. I agree very much with the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood) that spending on science is not a subsidy but an investment.

This limited debate offers us a broader opportunity to think about the role of the state in creating the wealth of tomorrow. A decent science policy should set out how a supportive, collaborative and inventive state can generate not only the basic science, but the knowledge transfer and institutions for innovation that are fundamental to a high-wage, high-skill economy. Wages for jobs in the knowledge economy are higher—in 2013, they were in fact 40% higher. If the knowledge economy made up one third of jobs in Britain, we would create an extra 2.4 million better-paid jobs.

While the Business Secretary is a market fundamentalist and a minimalist-state zealot—my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) spelled out brilliantly the failure of his negotiation strategies—and the Chancellor is eyeing up further spending cuts, I am very glad that the Science Minister has outed himself as a supporter of Mariana Mazzacato's work on an entrepreneurial activist state. Publicly funded research and development has a strong multiplier effect in that it crowds in private sector, charitable and inward investment. We all know the stories of Stanford University and Xerox, and the National Science Foundation and Google. From hi-tech to bio-tech to nanotech to green-tech, we will succeed in these sectors only with a state committed to driving innovation, research and knowledge transfer.

Let me briefly lay out a few areas of concern. The first is how other Government Departments use their science budgets, where we have seen a real cut in terms of science expenditure. This money is not ring-fenced and there is very little strategic approach to how it is utilised. In the United States, departments use their money effectively for areas of strategic direction. We need a lot more of that across the UK Government.

Secondly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) spelled out, the Government's regional approach to science spending is a mess. I applaud the Chancellor's investment in Manchester—a city that likes to think it was the birthplace of the industrial revolution, when we all know that

[Tristram Hunt]

Josiah Wedgwood pioneered that in Stoke-on-Trent, at Etruria. But beyond the Irwell, the level of investment in regional universities and laboratories, and indeed in the Catapult centres, is pathetic. In 2013, 52% of total UK R and D expenditure was in the south-east. The Government are pump-priming the silicon tech, silicon roundabout in Old Street, and the Olympic park in the east end, but it would do much more if it supported organisations such as the Lucideon research facility on ceramics in my constituency.

Thirdly, as the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe) suggested, we need to work much harder on getting young people into science and technology subjects. I wish the Government would stop pretending that careers advice does not matter and get a grip on that area. We face a crisis in getting high-quality maths teachers into high-poverty areas in order to allow young people to pursue a career in science. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool suggested, we must also do something about supporting the growth and development of technicians.

Finally, while I do not wish to intrude on internal family disputes, it is clear that our place in Europe is absolutely fundamental for the continuing support of our science base. Only this week, 50 biotech and pharmaceutical chief executives reminded us of the importance of remaining inside the European Union if our life sciences sector is to continue to grow, saying:

“Not only would an exit from the EU negatively impact on the life sciences sector, but changing the current arrangement would lead to disruption, expense, and significant regulatory burdens.”

We have to make sure that we remain in a reformed European Union, but if we want to get more out of our investment into UK science, we also need much more concerted belief in, and support for, a truly entrepreneurial state.

3.13 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, following the Committee's report on the science budget.

Members will be aware that there has always been strong evidence for the link between spending on research and development and the productivity of our economy. The UK's economic growth depends on its ability to innovate, and investing in innovation is essential in order to strengthen the UK's competitive advantage and maintain and grow the UK's share of the global market.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood) said, investment in science is also an effective way to invest public money to drive economic growth. Every £1 spent by the Government on R and D increases private sector productivity by 20p per year in perpetuity. As the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills highlights in its own report, Government R and D investment leverages in for that £1 investment an average £1.36 in private investment. Government investment also provides a productive environment for research generally. For example, although Cancer Research UK does not receive any Government funding for research, it depends on Government's investment in UK science to create a supportive environment for that research. For these reasons and many others, we

on the Committee recommended that the Government produce a long-term road map for increasing public and private R and D in the UK to 3% of GDP. Businesses need as much certainty as possible when making substantial commitments to long-term investment, and a robust road map will help to deliver that.

The spending review showed that the Government have listened to concerns from the science community, with the protection of science resource funding in real terms at its current level, to increase in line with inflation for the rest of this Parliament. Members will know that this is a better deal than the flat cash settlement in 2010, which, owing to inflation, caused the real value to fall. While inflation is very low—in fact, nearly zero—it may not seem as though this is a terribly dramatic commitment, but, again, it provides economic certainty. China is going through a period of economic turmoil and the European Union is still in the doldrums, so the Government are showing that the UK is a great place to invest.

However, despite moves to deliver on the £6.9 billion commitment in the Conservative manifesto, and the stability and confidence created by the new ring-fence, investment in the science base is still low compared with that in other leading scientific nations. Fortunately, the UK science industry is rightly recognised for the superb quality of its research. While representing only 0.9% of the world population, it produces 15.9% of the top-quality research findings. A productive research environment must have Government investment in science capital and resource. However, the work is far from over. We need to do more to reap the benefits of our research in order to convert the research findings into the commercial, both for products and services. This is not an easy task to accomplish. It requires more than a protection of budgets, as was highlighted in the Dowling report. We must reduce the complexity of support systems to provide clear advice on funding, as the Government recognised and supported in their response to the Committee.

Like many, I was pleased that following the spending review, the Government will take forward the recommendations of the Nurse review of research councils, which, subject to legislation, will introduce a new body—Research UK—that will work above and across the seven existing research councils. While welcoming the Nurse review, we need to be mindful that the Dowling report highlighted how complex a system can become and the need for simplification, or “hiding the wiring”. The integration of Innovate UK and the proposed Research UK has the potential to strengthen collaboration between the research and commercial sectors but, as with everything, there must be clarification of what decisions will be made at the research council level and what decisions are to be made by the new overarching body. Long-term and stable Government investment will help to foster partnerships between industry, research organisations, charities and international partners. These relationships need the confidence that this Government are bringing by delivering economic recovery and the good deal in the science budget.

Beyond the science budget, several Government Departments finance research and development with an un-ring-fenced budget. This highlights the importance of having a chief scientific adviser for every Government Department, or at least access to one. With devolution, we ought to take the opportunity to look at other models such as that in Germany to see whether its Government structure, though different from ours, offers

any guidance. In Germany, individual states have scientific advisers. I look forward to seeing how devolution enables city regions such as Greater Manchester to take the best scientific advice and focus on supporting our fantastic universities, institutes and industries, perhaps with each city region having its own dedicated scientific adviser. There is increasing specialisation in the UK whereby every business and organisation focuses on what it does well. For example, as the UK pharmaceutical industry concentrates itself in the triangle linking Oxford, Cambridge and London, we need to recognise the importance of gaining critical mass for particular industries in other areas of the UK.

The Greater Manchester area has a fantastic history as a global player in the mass spectrometry industry, inspired by John Dalton's work in Manchester on atomic theory in the late 18th and early 19th century. Coincidentally, that is also the industry to which I belonged before coming to this place. We are rightly proud that, in addition to our many other industries and organisations, the National Graphene Institute will make Manchester a leading centre of graphene research and commercialisation, and secure jobs for the future.

As our economy continues to strengthen, we need to ensure that our science base keeps pace with it. I am pleased that the spending review has been well received by UK scientists, but, without increased investment in R and D, the UK risks losing its position at the forefront of global research, particularly given the intense international competition. That is why I urge the Government to create a science road map that stretches beyond the electoral cycle. A commitment to that road map would give much valued certainty about investment, which it sometimes takes decades to deliver, and act as a mechanism for the whole R and D community to challenge political parties to commit to it in their manifestos.

3.21 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): At the outset, I congratulate the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee on her determination to publish its report on the science budget before the comprehensive spending review. That no doubt contributed to the Chancellor's announcement that the science budget would be maintained for the duration of this Parliament.

Although the settlement was greeted with relief by many in the scientific community, that was only because they had feared much worse. Government investment in science is pitifully poor. Since 2010, the science budget has been frozen in cash terms, leading to a real-terms drop of 10% over the last Parliament. By 2012, UK Government investment in science had fallen to an embarrassing 0.44% of GDP—less than any G8 country has invested in R and D in the past 20 years.

Despite that fact, the UK remains one of the best places in the world to do science, but how can that position be maintained when countries such as Japan and South Korea are pumping money into their research establishments? They have created an environment that allows science to flourish, and it is no surprise that their economies are also booming. If we are not careful, we risk losing the lead in cutting-edge science. When the Universities UK spokesperson, Dr Dandridge, addressed the Science and Technology Committee, she said that long-term under-investment of publicly funded research in the UK is leading to an erosion of capacity.

The Scottish Government have already recognised that erosion and have sought to mitigate the impact—subject to the reserved nature of Research Councils UK and Government research and development spend—by increasing their expenditure on research and knowledge exchange by 11% in the year 2013-14, yielding a rise of 38% since 2007. I ask the UK Government to do likewise.

As a physicist, it was a pleasure to visit CERN with the Committee last week. It is a wonderful example of international collaboration. Many may wonder about the wider impact of the facility, which is known for its work on particle collisions, but, in order to promote and carry out such high-level experiments, technology has been developed and innovation has flourished. The facility gave birth to the world wide web. Particle acceleration and focusing technology have led to medical developments such as proton beam therapy for cancer. For me, however, one of the most exciting projects at CERN is the development of high-temperature superconducting materials, which will allow current to flow with zero resistance, and have major implications for global energy supply.

There are many physicists, engineers and technicians from the UK working at CERN, including Aidan Robson from the University of Glasgow, who was a member of the team that discovered the Higgs boson. However, when we were shown the total number of personnel, it was rather disappointing to see that there were only 900 from the UK, compared with 1,500 from Italy and 1,300 from Germany. When I asked why that was, I was told that Italy is more serious about science. A new type of particle accelerator is currently being developed at CERN, but it might be built in Japan because the Japanese Government are willing to contribute 50% of the costs. That is how a Government demonstrate that they are serious about science.

Recent work, most notably by Professor Stephen Watson at Glasgow University, has pointed to the significance of the infrastructure spend component of UK Government investment, but there is a huge mismatch between the spend for the so-called golden triangle and that for elsewhere in the UK. Infrastructure investment is known to play a key role in driving scientific discovery and, crucially, in attracting business investment. No one would deny the impressive nature of buildings such as the Crick Institute in London, and I look forward to seeing it up and running. However, such a facility means that private investment will flow into a narrow geographical area. The Government must, therefore, map out investment, both thematically and geographically—that has never been done before—to ensure that pockets of excellence are allowed to grow throughout these isles.

Chris Green: I appreciate the hon. Lady's point about where we invest in, encourage and support science, but often the money and resources follow the expertise, so if there are great centres in a particular location, business and Government will, naturally, invest in them. The reason the Italians have a particular interest in CERN is that they have a great speciality in particle physics, which our country does not emphasise so much. We look at different areas.

Carol Monaghan: There is no reason why the UK should not be a world leader in particle physics as well. Our infrastructure and environment must allow those skills and talents to be developed.

[Carol Monaghan]

My final point relates to the proposal to give loans rather than grants to industry-based research, which has sent a chill through research-intensive industries such as the pharmaceutical sector. The UK is in a global competition to attract industries to carry out R and D here. The proposals could put the UK at a serious competitive disadvantage, and we run the very real risk that companies will move their R and D abroad.

In conclusion, I have several questions to pose to the Minister. First, does he agree that more, not less, investment in blue-sky scientific research is needed? Will the Government commit to increasing science spending to 3% of GDP, which is the EU target, as recommended in the Select Committee report? Secondly, will the Government commit to reviewing infrastructure spend on science to ensure that the talents of the scientific community in all parts of the United Kingdom are properly supported? Finally, will the Government abandon their hare-brained plan to replace research grants with loans?

3.29 pm

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): I congratulate all members of the Science and Technology Committee on their excellent report. I especially congratulate the Chair of the Committee, the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), who has led us through it so eloquently. The report has hit the nail on the head. As the Chair of the Committee has said, science is vital to securing Britain's future prosperity, research and development. It not only underpins our economic position, but helps to secure our wellbeing and health, by contributing to potential medical breakthroughs in the treatment of cancer and heart disease and even in the eradication of grey hair, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) has mentioned. I was reminded of that at the event I attended yesterday, "Voice of the Future 2016", which the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe) has mentioned. That event was an opportunity for young scientists and engineers to questions parliamentarians, and the Minister knows all about it because we were both there for the question and answer sessions towards the end of the day. It was gratifying and inspiring to hear that there is such support for science among our young people.

If only the Government were equally supportive. Unfortunately for us all, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, where the levers of growth in the Government are found, suffered a further 17% cut in the November spending review. Much was made of the protection of the £4.7 billion science budget until the end of the Parliament in 2020, and Ministers seemed to be especially proud of protecting the science capital budget of £1.1 billion until 2021. I was pleased to be reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) that some other Departments did better. For example, the Ministry of Defence, the Department for Transport and the Department for Communities and Local Government—as far as housing was concerned—secured a more favourable capital spend. However, I would be the first to concede that many in science and industry breathed a sigh of relief at that settlement; after all, I think they were expecting much worse.

The situation could have been so much better. As we have just been reminded by the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), flat cash settlements eroded the ring-fenced, non-capital science budget by £1 billion in real terms in the previous Parliament. If we discount the introduction of the global challenges fund, which is geared to overseas development and has many strings attached, we are dealing with another flat cash settlement that will create a serious real-terms decline in funding.

The fact remains that £4.7 billion is only 0.49% of GDP, which pales in comparison with our competitor nations. The UK Government's spending on R and D is the lowest among the G8 countries. As the Minister knows, the Royal Society has called for investment in R and D to be increased to 0.67% of GDP, to match the OECD average. The CBI has called for it to be doubled to around 1% of GDP. That is because, as the former director general of the CBI remarked last year, we are falling ever further behind our international competitors, and we must take action to ensure that we lead from the front.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I am a member of the Science and Technology Committee. Does the hon. Lady acknowledge that although those numbers, as she presents them, may not sound good, the output that we get for that funding is better than ever?

Yvonne Fovargue: I agree that the output is good, but surely that makes the case for more investment in the science budget, not less.

As the Select Committee pointed out, the UK has fallen behind its competitors in total R and D investment. If that trend is not reversed, it will put UK competitiveness, productivity and high-value jobs at risk. The Committee recommended increasing public and private R and D investment to 3% of GDP. The current position is about 1.6% of GDP. We have heard about how much less we spend than our competitor nations, and we have a serious problem of underfunding.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool and the hon. Members for Oxford West and Abingdon and for Bolton West (Chris Green) have all cited compelling figures. As they have mentioned, there is much value in using public funding to leverage private money and increase productivity, so why not commit to more funding and lever more from private industry? We are not seeing the level of industry funding for R and D that we need. I welcome the comments by the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon and my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool on scaling up investment, not just start-up investment.

In their response to the Committee's report, the Government mention Innovate UK and the Catapult network, which aims to strengthen R and D capacity and encourage innovation. I commend them for that development. As we have heard, however, £165 million of UK grants to Innovate UK for turning scientific research into commercial applications have been axed and replaced by loans. That creates additional risks for researchers and is liable to damage innovation. Both the CBI and the Federation of Small Businesses have raised concerns. I repeat the call that has been made: on what evidence has this decision been based? Do the Government believe that turning grants into loans will benefit innovation and encourage companies to invest?

On the subject of the Catapult network, why does the north of England do so badly when it comes to Innovate UK funding? The north-west did not have a single Catapult project until late last year, while Yorkshire and the Humber gets about 5% of total funding. How can that be right when the south-east gets 52% of it? As several hon. Members have said, what we need from the Government is a proper road map to outline where we are going with research and development. Let me add that any road needs to go to the north, not just stop at the M25. It is unclear what the Government are trying to achieve in the long run. What is their plan? Can they see the wisdom of increasing R and D funding as a proportion of GDP to something approaching that of our competitors? Nowhere in their response to the Committee's report is that made clear.

As hon. Members have said, we have a lot to be proud of in this country. The UK is very good at research—we have heard many of the figures—and we in fact gain hugely in that regard from our membership of the EU, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central said so eloquently. Scientific development and innovation are critically dependent on collaborative ideas and contributions. The EU helps universities to pursue cutting-edge research. It also makes working across borders easier for UK and European researchers pooling their knowledge, infrastructure, data and resources. In fact, the UK does disproportionately well in securing EU funding. During the last period, we received €8.8 billion in direct EU funding.

We also need to ensure that the UK Government are fully behind the science research project. Flat cash settlements for R and D do not help; nor do Cabinet Office missives suggesting that scientists in receipt of Government grants should not try to influence policy. Whatever happened to the idea of evidence-based policy making? The muzzling of some of our finest minds will not help. Above all, we need a Government who have a sense of the future potential of science funding. That is why everyone has talked about the need for a road map, which is the most important missing element. Unless we have a sense of where we are going, we will fall further and further behind our competitors, instead of reaching for the stars like Major Tim Peake.

3.37 pm

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood) for her Select Committee's important work. I will use the time available to address some of the concerns of the Science and Technology Committee and to respond to some of the points made by hon. Members.

First, it is right to remind ourselves of and to celebrate the landscape in which the Government's plan for science and research lies. As hon. Members have mentioned, the UK's global scientific impact far exceeds our size as a nation. With just 3.2% of the world's R and D spend, the UK accounts for 16% of the most highly cited research articles—we have overtaken the US to rank first among comparable research nations for our field-weighted citations impact—of which we should all be extremely proud.

That is why science and research very much sit at the very heart of this Government's economic plan. Last July, our productivity plan clearly set out how we will

tackle the UK's long-term productivity problem, with science and research being central to our proposed solutions. This autumn's spending review settlement was an emphatic confirmation of that commitment: an extension of the ring fence around science and innovation until 2020 means a total investment of £30.4 billion during this Parliament.

The ring fence has been a powerful indication of the Government's commitment to science, and we will continue to protect science resource funding in real terms for the rest of the Parliament. We are building on the safeguards put in place for the science budget in the last Parliament. That will mean a decade of protection and of sustained investment by the Government. All that of course comes in the context of significant savings in other areas of Government expenditure, which is a clear sign of the important place of science in our decision making.

The Science and Technology Committee has called for a road map towards a 3% R and D spend. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon knows, decisions on increases in the science spend are taken in spending reviews, when it is weighed up against the other priorities for the nation. My hon. Friend the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee also asked about allocations. We have discussed indicative allocations with our partner organisations. They are very much aware of their likely settlements, and I assure her that we will publish the allocations imminently.

My hon. Friend asked about the next steps in the implementation of the Nurse review and our thinking about the proposals we outlined in the Green Paper. As I am sure she will have appreciated, we consulted very carefully on how best to proceed, with a proper 10-week consultation. Although I understand her impatience to know how we will take all the proposals forward, it is important that we do so in a deliberative fashion and get these important decisions absolutely right. The consultation period ended only on 15 January and we will come forward with our full response in the spring.

In the meantime, I hope that I can give my hon. Friend the assurance she seeks from the Government by saying that we will maintain the spirit of the dual support system, which is so important to our research sector, alongside the continuation of the important Haldane principle, which ensures that decisions about which research to fund are taken by scientists through competitive peer review processes. To deal with her concerns about the operation of the dual support system in a bit more detail, it is possible to ring-fence or hypothecate separate funding streams, even when they are delivered through a single body. That is a model that the Government can and do use effectively, and that could ensure the continuation of the dual support system in a reshaped landscape.

The Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) raised concerns about the move from grants to loans which were echoed by the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) and by the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan). We will market-test the proposed new financial products in the spring. We want to broaden the types of financial support that are available for innovation in this country. BIS and Innovate UK are studying the financial models that are operated by our international counterparts in respect of innovation. It is clear from

[Joseph Johnson]

our analysis of what is going on around the world that the most successful models are increasingly emphasising other financial products in their policy mix as a supplement to their grant funding, which will always have a place.

We want to ensure that the overall funding through Innovate UK evolves and that the spectrum of products diversifies to reflect the different needs of different companies at different stages in their lifecycle. Overall funding will increase from £311 million in 2009-10 to £471 million by 2019-20. That figure includes the new finance products.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) rightly echoed the Dowling report's recommendation that we seek greater simplification of the innovation landscape and support system. We will certainly take that core recommendation into account as we develop the thinking on our national innovation plan.

I want to emphasise three commitments in the spending review and ensure that the House understands their importance. The first is our commitment to protect science resource funding at £4.7 billion. This is the lifeblood that powers our world-leading science and research base. It funds vital blue-skies research, fuels the Bunsen burners and afterburners, and funds labs up and down the country, the research councils and the national academies, thereby making sure that Britain stays at the leading edge of global science.

At the same time, we are delivering on our manifesto commitment and investing in new commitments on a record scale, with £6.9 billion for capital expenditure. That means new research institutes and laboratories across the UK. It has been one of the greatest privileges as Science Minister to break ground on new institutions such as the imaging centre of excellence at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital in Glasgow. To answer the hon. Member for Glasgow North West, I hope that that demonstrates the Government's commitment to ensuring that we fund excellent science wherever it is found in the United Kingdom.

Through our science and innovation audit, we want to encourage areas that have not received much science funding relative to other areas to come forward with proposals that we can support when we feel that they have the potential to be excellent and to do great science. We want more such proposals.

The third matter that I want to consider is the global challenges research fund. We have committed an additional £1.5 billion to the fund by 2021. It will keep the UK at the forefront of global research, leading the way on major global challenges, such as Ebola, in which we have always played a significant role. The value of the GCRF is not just what the UK can do alone. We have some of the world's most talented scientists, most prestigious universities and most advanced laboratories, but the most significant breakthroughs in science and research are bigger than just one country.

That brings me to the points that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) made. I am glad to have his general support for all the spending review commitments that I have briefly summarised. They will give the science community the certainty that it needs for the years ahead. Like the hon. Gentleman, I recognise the important role that public sector investment

in science plays in stimulating private sector investment. Other Members have already cited the crowding-in effect, which we estimate at about £1.36 for every £1 of public investment.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central is also clearly right about Europe. Science today is increasingly cross-border and collaborative. I have made my position clear, as have the Government: UK universities and our superb science base are key to our future as a knowledge economy, and we and they will be much stronger inside the EU. That is best for our research. Almost half of all UK research publications involve collaborations with other countries. Papers involving international collaboration have almost twice the citation impact of those produced by a single UK author, and EU countries are among our most crucial partners, representing nearly 50% of all our overseas collaborators.

Staying in the EU is best for our students. Our links with Europe are deep and long standing. Free movement of people makes it easier for our universities to attract the best talent, and for British students to spread their wings across the continent. Lastly, it is best for our funding. The excellence of our research base means that it is no surprise that the UK is one of the most successful players in EU research programmes.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Is not it the case that we collaborate a great deal with the United States of America, which is not a member of the European Union? Would not any British Government want freedom of movement of expert people to our universities, whether we were in or out of the EU?

Joseph Johnson: My right hon. Friend is right—the partnerships are not exclusive, but why turn our back on great collaborations that benefit our science base tremendously?

The UK received €7 billion under the last framework programme, which ran from 2007 to 2013. That made us one of the largest beneficiaries of EU research funding. In this funding round, Horizon 2020, we have secured 15.4% of funds, behind only Germany on 16.5%, and with the second largest number of project participations.

As science becomes more international, we should nurture partnerships, not reject them. In the end, the British people will decide whether we are safer, stronger and better off as part of the EU, but, to thrive in a knowledge economy, there is no doubt that we need to build academic partnerships, not turn our backs on them.

3.48 pm

Nicola Blackwood: The debate has been not only consensual but of high quality. The Chair of the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills is right to say that we are in the middle of a fourth industrial revolution founded on science and technology and that the only sensible approach is to increase R and D investment. My hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe), who has been such an outstanding champion for science in this place, is also right to say that, as a nation, we have a long and illustrious history of scientific endeavour and we would be foolish to take any steps that undermined the proven Haldane principle on which it is built.

Relief will have swept through the corridors of both Houses at the groundbreaking news brought to us by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) that the days of the comb-over and the unbrow are numbered. My Committee colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) was right to highlight Dowling's recommendations—they have yet to be responded to by the Government—on simplifying the achingly complex science and innovation support system. The hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) joined other Committee members when she said that we need a more strategic approach to geographic allocation of capital investment, and I thank the Minister and the shadow Minister for their responses.

On the necessary deliberation and response to the Green Paper, and the fact that the consultation period only ended in January, I gently remind the Minister that the Government have chosen to respond to Dowling, the Nurse review and the Green Paper as one. Those reports came through before Christmas, and there has been quite a long delay for the scientific community in waiting for them.

As the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central so eloquently said, we are in a golden age of British science. That is in no small part due to the championing of science by the Chancellor and successive Science Ministers, but there is no room for complacency. We must be mindful of the investment time lag, and acutely conscious that science and innovation will lie at the heart of our success as a nation. That is why I will simply restate that it is time for a step change in our investment in R and D. I call on the Government to ensure that our strategic capital investments are fully resourced so that we can sweat our assets, and I restate our key recommendation, which is the publication of a long-term road map to increase public and private R and D up to 3% of GDP. That strategic investment will create jobs, increase productivity, attract inward investment, and fund the groundbreaking discovery that is necessary to fund the great global challenges of our time.

Question deferred (Standing Order No. 54).

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

End of Life Care

[Relevant Documents: Fifth Report from the Health Committee, Session 2014-15, End of Life Care, HC 805, and the Government response, Cm 9143; First Report from the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, follow-up to the PHSO report: Dying without dignity, HC 432, and the Government response, HC 770; Sixth Report from the Public Administration Committee, Session 2014-15, Investigating clinical incidents in the NHS, HC 886, and the Government response, Cm 9113.]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2016, for expenditure by the Department of Health:

(1) further resources, not exceeding £25,869,317,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 747,

(2) the resources authorised for use for capital purposes be reduced by £945,313,000 as so set out, and

(3) a further sum, not exceeding £252,304,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—*(Julian Smith.)*

3.52 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): The care that people receive at the end of their lives has a profound impact, not only on them but on their families and carers. All Members of the House want people to be able to access the highest quality care, irrespective of their age, diagnosis, where they live or the setting in which they are treated. We know how to deliver world-class care—indeed, we know how to deliver globally inspiring care. To start on a positive note, I should say that *The Economist* ranks Britain as the best in the world, from among 80 nations, for delivering end-of-life care, and we should be proud of that. The disadvantage is that that care is not available everywhere to everyone, and that is the challenge we face today.

In the 2015 report “Dying without dignity”, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman set out some starkly worrying cases of poor care that highlighted a theme, and she was clear that it is a recurring and consistent theme in her casework. For that reason, the Minister must look carefully at the themes in that report, and also at other reports that have been produced.

At the end of the previous Parliament, the Health Committee produced a report on end-of-life care, and I thank all members of that Committee, the Committee staff and our Committee specialist advisors for their valuable input, as well as the very many people and organisations from around the country who contributed.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree that we must also consider the families of those children who unfortunately have very short lives? We need support for them as well, and it should be available across the country.

Dr Wollaston: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that this care should apply irrespective of someone's age or the setting in which they are treated. Social care will be integral to that, and I will expand further on that issue later on.

[Dr Wollaston]

Another report the Minister will be aware of—it was commissioned by the previous Government from the Choice in End of Life Care Programme board—is “What’s Important to Me. A Review of Choice in End of Life Care”. It is now exactly a year since that report was launched. When can we see a timetable and a response to that long-awaited report?

I know other Members want to speak, so I will just touch on four key themes today: variation, communication, choice and control, and funding—including funding for social care. On variation, dying does not make equals of us. People with cancer are currently accessing about 75% of specialist palliative care. We are making great progress in that regard, but we need to make such palliative care available to people with other diagnoses. Our report touched on poor access for elderly people, particularly those with a diagnosis of dementia. The Minister will be aware of the “National Care of the Dying Audit for Hospitals,” which showed that 21% of hospital trusts are meeting National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance for providing seven-day-a-week, face-to-face specialist palliative care between the hours of nine and five. In fact, only 2% of trusts are making that care available around the clock, seven days a week. We have a long way to go.

Tackling variation means understanding where the gaps exist. The VOICES survey, which collects the views of informal carers and evaluates the services available to them, has been invaluable in setting out the issues important to those who have been bereaved and the experience of their loved ones after a bereavement. A point that has been made to me very forcefully is that we could do so much better in addressing the gaps in provision if the VOICES survey was expanded. Currently, it does not have enough power to be able to identify where there is variation around the country. Will the Minister address that point when he sums up?

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I wonder whether my hon. Friend could give me some guidance. Ideally, when should end-of-life care begin? What sort of time period are we talking about and how much uncertainty is there over the diagnosis? There are all sorts of complications: we cannot be sure whether someone is terminally ill and is going to die within a limited number of days.

Dr Wollaston: My right hon. Friend raises a very important point. It should start as soon as possible—as soon as someone receives a life-limiting diagnosis. We need to start those conversations much earlier on. We need to get better at identifying, towards the very end of life, when people are in the final stages of an illness. I will touch on that point in greater depth in a minute.

We should recognise some successes and welcome the changes made by the Care Quality Commission, in one of its thematic reviews, to prioritise end-of-life care. Does the Minister have any plans to roll out that rather successful approach in prioritising end-of-life care to out-of-hospital settings? The CQC has highlighted successfully the critical importance of leadership in improving end-of-life care, examining how having a named individual—not as a tick in a box—translates into their leading change within the hospital and identifying

other individuals there who can improve the quality of care at the end of life. Recognising it as a thematic review would be very helpful in other fields.

The critical importance of training has been raised by all those who have commented. We need to provide adequate training for medical, nursing and caring staff across the board. Has the Minister had any conversations with Health Education England about what progress can be made in rolling out further training?

On communication, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) touched on, early identification will be crucial to rolling out end-of-life care to other groups beyond the traditional groups who access specialist end-of-life care. That means health professionals having the confidence and training to raise these issues at a much earlier stage and to start those difficult conversations that are too often put off.

We know that having an end-of-life care plan enables people to exercise much greater choice and control. We could go further in looking at explaining to people the differences between, for example, advance statements of wishes and advance decisions to refuse treatment. We could help people to put in place lasting powers of attorney, and nowhere is that more important than when people have been diagnosed with dementia. These conversations need, critically, to start at a much earlier point.

The sharing of communication between professionals is another issue. I know that the Minister has taken an interest in electronic care planning. When people have a life-limiting diagnosis, how can we ensure that at whatever point in the system they access care, they will not have to keep repeating their story? People’s wishes need to be understood at the earliest possible stage. We know that electronic care planning can help to reduce unnecessary hospital admissions. It is crucial for ambulance staff, for example, to have access to people’s records—with the patients’ consent, of course—so that they can be shared widely. Will the Minister update us in his summing up on what progress he has made with respect to electronic care planning and recording people’s wishes?

We can also improve communication by putting in place care co-ordinators. This point has been made to me repeatedly by people who are suffering from life-limiting illnesses. The system can sometimes appear to be terribly confusing, so allowing families to have a single point of contact to advocate on their behalf at a time when they are in distress can make a huge difference, as can having a named clinician who is taking overall responsibility for the care.

On care for people at the very end of life, the Minister will know that over the years we have much debated the Liverpool care pathway and its success. Other Members may wish to talk in greater detail about that, but emergency care treatment plans are important so that people can clearly document their wishes well in advance—not as a tick-box exercise, but as a considered exercise of having discussions with individuals and their loved ones about what their wishes are and then ensuring that they are respected. Will the Minister tell us where we are now with emergency care treatment planning?

At a time when people so often feel that they are losing control towards the end of their lives, it is vital to give people more choice and more control. That was the key theme of the so-called “Choice” review, on which I

hope the Minister will update us. Where are we now with all who need it having a “national choice offer”, as it was termed? We know that about a half of the 470,000 people who died in 2014 died in hospital, yet we know from the VOICES survey that of those who expressed a preference, only 3% wanted to be in hospital. We are a long way from allowing people the kind of choice and control they want about where to be at the end of their lives. Most people would prefer to be at home, surrounded by their loved ones. We can do far better.

Many practical issues need to be addressed. One that I have seen first hand in my clinical experience is where families are exhausted and overwhelmed by caring responsibilities. Sometimes the individual at the heart of this will opt to go into hospital because they feel bad about the burden they feel, often wrongly, they are placing on their families. One key theme of our Health Committee report was that nobody should have to end their life in hospital for want of a social care package. That will mean being much more generous about providing free social care at the end of life, or much more rapid access to the assessments needed to allow people to continue in care, as they are sometimes very delayed. I hope the Minister will update us on that, too.

The Minister will be familiar with the work of the Nuffield Trust. Its report on the use of Marie Curie nurses, for example, pointed out that the service could save total care costs of £500 per patient and also allow many more people to be where they wanted to be at the end of their lives. Not only is the service good value for the overall health and care system, but it provides the choice and control that people desperately need and deserve at the end of their lives.

Funding lies at the heart of this issue, and it is not just a question of social care packages. I know the whole House agrees that we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the hospice movement. Hospices play a pivotal role in outreach, providing specialist support not just for hospitals but, critically, throughout the community. Rowcroft hospice, in my constituency, is hugely valued in the community. It provides extraordinary levels of care and supplies many specialist services to the NHS to deal with—cases of lymphoedema, for instance. This week, however, it informed me that it faces a funding shortfall of £1 million next year. While about a third of its funding comes from the NHS, about 60% comes from charitable giving.

Hospices do not want to lose their link with the voluntary sector, because it is deeply embedded in the way in which they work in communities. However, it makes them rather vulnerable, because the level of charitable giving and legacies can vary greatly. What they need is a higher percentage of stable core funding to allow them to expand the important work that they do. The Minister will probably want to comment on the so-called currencies that are being developed to replace funding for palliative care. The feedback that I am receiving suggests that there is a risk that that will become a rather bureaucratic process, and there is also a worry that its implementation by clinical commissioning groups will not be compulsory. An update from the Minister would be helpful.

Will the Minister also assure us that, if the Government intend to implement all the recommendations of the “Choice” review—which I hope they do—he is satisfied

that, across NHS England, the business plans that have been established will allow sufficient funding for a full implementation?

I know that other Members wish to speak. There are many other issues that I could raise, including bereavement support and research, but let me end by asking the Minister to be truly ambitious. I think that we can achieve seven-day, 24-hour access to specialist palliative care in all settings, and that we can address variation and give people choice and control at the end of their lives. It would be an extraordinary achievement for the Government to go further. We should not rest on our laurels because we are leading the world; we should say that we lead the world not just for some people, but for everyone.

4.8 pm

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about such an important issue. Let me begin where the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) left off. I have been very impressed by what I have read. When end-of-life and palliative care in this country is at its very best, it is indeed the best in the world, which makes me proud to be British. However, it saddens me that that is not the case more widely. All the recent reports have demonstrated that access to the very best care varies tremendously, and is very patchy. It is for that reason that end-of-life care has been the subject of recent studies and reports, not least those of the Health Committee.

I understand that a very thorough piece of work was done before I became a member of the Committee last year, and that concerns were raised about this very issue. The “Choice” review body looked into it as well, and came up with various recommendations. I want to focus on one of those recommendations in particular. The review recommended that 24/7 care should be made available for people in a community setting. The point has already been made that it is hard to define the end of life and the timescale involved. Indeed, the British Medical Association makes the point that more funds are needed to train staff to a level at which they can better identify these things. The end of life can be a lengthy process, and people need support at this most important time of their life.

Most people who responded to questionnaires on this subject have said that they would prefer to die in the comfort of their own home, surrounded by their family. In order for that to happen with the maximum dignity and the highest standards, investment is needed in social care above all else. The recent cuts in social care budgets have been a matter of concern for most of us. Lancashire County Council is further reducing its spending on social care, and the elderly and disabled in my constituency and their families are already worried about the impact that this could have on them. However, we still aspire to have the highest possible standards for end of life care, and the two concepts simply do not add up.

I wonder why the Government are delaying their response to the “Choice” review. We desperately need to hear what their plans are, to determine whether they are really listening. The “Choice” review also recommended additional funding of £130 million, because the £8 billion that was allocated for spending in the NHS has already been well and truly spent many times over. County councils’ adult social care budgets are feeling the pinch.

[Julie Cooper]

Last year, in the run-up to the introduction of the private Member's Bill tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris)—the Assisted Dying (No. 2) Bill—people in my constituency told me of their concerns about dignity at the end of life. Many of them asked me to vote to support the Bill because they were worried that a level of care that afforded them the dignity they wanted would not be available. They were worried about whether they might suffer and what the experience would be like for their families.

This issue is rightly at the top of the agenda, because this is the very least that we can do for the elderly and the sick. We do not like to talk about it, but everyone's life is going to end and we need to think about this. The fact that we cannot do this better in 21st-century Britain makes me ashamed. We know that we could do it better, so I urge the Minister to read the recommendations put forward last year by the Health Committee and by the "Choice" review. In fact, I am sure that he has already done so. Almost 12 months have gone by, and this is a matter of urgency. It is quite shocking that we have not dealt with it before. I urge the Minister to look at the recommendations and to ensure that those who choose to die in their own homes in the community get the excellent care and support that they rightly deserve.

4.13 pm

Mr Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): This is a timely debate. We do not discuss this matter regularly, and I pay tribute to the Health Committee for producing its report. Having looked at the *Official Report*, I understand that the last debate on the subject took place in 2011. That debate concentrated on Great Yarmouth and Waveney. The subject deserves a lot more discussion because it affects many of our constituents and their families. If things go wrong at the end of life, it can leave the surviving partner and the family with a great sense of guilt. All of us have had people come into our surgeries who cannot get over the way in which a relative has been treated in these circumstances. It is absolutely vital for the wellbeing of the families that the Government get this policy right, so that they can move on and recover from the experience. Over the years, I have observed fantastic fundraisers for hospices in the community, and this is one area where the charity sector comes into its own, with rugby matches, cricket matches and jamborees. These things do get public support but it is sometimes a hard ask to keep raising the sort of money that they do. I therefore welcome the fact that the Government have increased the funding, although I think it is right and proper that they do not overdo it, because sometimes Government money can drive out money raised by the private sector.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful contribution. Will he reflect on the importance of not only the care of the patient, but the care of the patient's family at this most difficult time? The new state-of-the-art Marie Curie hospice in Solihull provides not only very good patient care, but a real home from home for relatives and patients at this most acute time.

Mr Syms: My hon. Friend makes a good point. What I have also noticed about the hospice movement is that many people go in for one or two days a week when they start to become ill. That not only makes them familiar with the hospice, but gives respite to the rest of the family, allowing the carer to do all the jobs they would otherwise have done if they were not caring for their relative. It means that they get more used to the environment, so when the final days come things are much easier for the family. Dealing with this situation and how the families feel is important. My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) mentioned the Liverpool pathway. All of us have constituents who have been worried about how their relatives were being treated at the end of their life, so I am glad that we have decided to phase that pathway out.

My principal point is to pay tribute to the wonderful fundraisers, the wonderful nurses and the charity organisations that do so much in our constituencies to make families feel at ease at this difficult time. I welcome the "Choice" review, which the Government have set up. It has come up with some sensible recommendations and I hope the Government respond to them soon, so that people can spend their final days with dignity, respect and a degree of privacy.

Over the years, I have been impressed by how people deal with the difficulties at the end of life. It is up to us, as politicians, to give people the maximum possible choice, so that they have the maximum possible control over those final few days and can discuss with their family what is going to happen. My hon. Friend made a good point about putting legal provision in place where people have dementia or Alzheimer's—provision to do with wills and businesses—and all these things are important. Of course most people want to stay at home, and I perfectly understand that, but people often end up in hospital because the ambulance service picks them up in the last few days of their life.

A relatively small number of people die in hospices. As I say, the main benefit of the hospice movement is the day care and outreach it provides to the community, and the reassurance, support and experience it gives to the NHS. The charity sector and this sector are perfect examples of where private and charity bodies can work with the NHS, and may well sometimes be a model for other areas. This is Britain at its best. Tremendous people in all our constituencies are doing terribly well. However, I leave the Minister with the point that we have to respect individuals and families at this difficult time, and if we pick up some of the suggestions of the "Choice" review, we will be taking a real step forward on how people face a challenging occasion.

4.18 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to speak in this debate, during the second day of our consideration of the 2015-16 estimates. This is the fourth of our estimates debates and it is on end-of-life care. Supporting an individual at the end of their life is a difficult experience for all involved, be they family members, friends or healthcare workers. Health and social care services play a vital role in making palliative care as dignified as possible, and in ensuring that the patient's wishes and needs are taken into account.

The Liaison Committee has recommended that this important subject be debated today as part of the estimates process.

The Scottish Parliament is partly funded by a block grant. The change in this block grant is determined every year by the Barnett formula. In simple terms, the Barnett formula looks at the change in each Department's funding in England for that year, and applies either an increase or a decrease in the level of funding that Scotland receives. The calculation takes into account the level of devolution of each Department, and allocates Scotland a population share on that basis.

The Department of Health, as it relates to end-of-life care, has a 100% comparability percentage when it comes to the calculation of Barnett consequentials, which means that any change in the departmental expenditure limit will have a full population share effect on the block grant for this area. Naturally, I was looking forward—indeed, I was on the edge of my seat—to scrutinising the changes that the Government were making to the budgets for end-of-life care. I picked up HC 747, “Central Government Supply Estimates 2015-16”, and flicked speedily to the Department of Health section on pages 97 to 112. Members can imagine my shock and disappointment when I found that the words “end-of-life care” were not mentioned anywhere in the booklet. It is a bit surprising considering that it is 736 pages long—one would have thought that end-of-life care would have appeared somewhere.

Then the Order Paper came out. Hurrah, thought I, this is my opportunity, because it mentioned a number of documents associated with end-of-life care. I thought that I could look at the budget in relation to end-of-life care and see what the knock-on effect would be for Scotland. I picked up all the various documents, but found that none of them lays out the budgetary spend, or the saving, associated with the changes. The documents do tackle major issues of great importance in relation to end-of-life care in NHS England. They highlight both the strengths and the weaknesses in current end-of-life care provision and lay out the UK Government's plans to make changes, but they do not lay out the budgetary spend or saving associated with any of those changes.

End-of-life care is important to those many families and individuals who are struggling to come to terms with bad news, navigate the health and social care systems, ensure appropriate support is in place for themselves and their loved ones, and make plans and take decisions that they never dreamed they would have to make. It is important that Parliament ensures that end-of-life care is funded appropriately. I know that many Members want to talk about the issues that have to be faced and the ways to solve them—or at least how to alleviate the suffering a little for these families and individuals—but it is nigh on impossible for Parliament to provide appropriate scrutiny of the funding when we are not provided with the budgetary costs associated with the plans.

I want an increased spend in the Department of Health budget as it relates to end of life care, but I am struggling with these documents, as I cannot discover how much is currently being spent on it. Also, I am not allowed to table an amendment that proposes to increase Government spend in this area. If I desired to amend the total net budget of the Department of Health, which is £25,869,317,000, my only option would be to

amend the budget downwards by £1,000. There are no other amendments that I can table in relation to this, so I cannot, during the estimates process, move an amendment to increase the Department of Health budget in relation to end-of-life care or to anything else and, consequentially, the Scottish block grant.

I am very pleased that we are discussing this vital and difficult issue, but I am distressed that we are not able to discuss in any detail the funding of this area, which is becoming increasingly important as our population ages.

4.23 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to participate in this debate today. A number of common themes run through the debate, the first of which is the fact that most people want to die in their own beds. Before coming to this debate, I tried to find some statistics on the subject. I trawled through a whole lot of figures on the internet, and what I came up with was the fact that 70% of us want to die in our own beds, yet 60% of people die in hospital.

Why is there such a discrepancy in the figures? Is it a ridiculous aspiration for 70% of us to want to die in our beds, or do we need to be better at organising end-of-life care services? The evidence from the Netherlands suggests the latter. In particular, there needs to be more emphasis on the social care aspect, the reorganisation of that and its delivery.

What does that come down to in practice? The issue came to the fore in my constituency with the re-provision of a hospital in Henley, the Townlands hospital. The hospital will be re-provided with a greater range of services for people to access and a limited number of beds at the side of the hospital in a care home. The gap is being taken up by a system that has come to be called ambulatory care, involving greater use of social care packages. This follows a change in practice, where the aim is to reduce the number of beds and keep people out of hospital for as long as possible.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): My own father died at home. The Government's response to the report states that a priority is to ensure that families are kept in the loop in the final days, but in our case, we did not know it was my father's final days. A nurse turned up on the last day with an end-of-life care kit. In front of my father she said, “Here's the end-of-life care kit,” and he died a few hours later. Does my hon. Friend agree that better communication is needed with those who want to die at home?

John Howell: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. As many hon. Members know, I recently lost my mother. Contrary to what I said earlier, she died in hospital, but I have to say that the services provided were exemplary. We were taken into the thinking of the clinicians as her illness progressed, we were told exactly what would happen, and this led to a greater feeling of comfort with the whole process when she eventually died. I am reconciled with the idea that it was what she wanted. That fits in with the idea of personal choice, where that is possible. In my mother's case it was not possible because of the illness, but I do not know the circumstances of my hon. Friend's case. It is something that needs to be borne in mind.

[John Howell]

There are still those locally who cannot see that the best interests are served by reducing unnecessary admissions to hospital and moving people out of hospital as soon as possible. I have listened to the clinical advice and the clinical evidence that this is the best way to go. Hospitals, contrary to what they may seem, are not necessarily healthy institutions. Even a short stay reduces the ability of muscles to function and affects quality of life. I spoke to the Alzheimer's Society about this. The evidence was clear: although admission to hospital or, better still, to care homes will inevitably be required, the best advice was to keep people out of hospital for as long as possible. That was true even in the case of people suffering from Alzheimer's.

This approach is not just about providing services to those who need periodic treatment, especially end-of-life care. It demands a revolution in the way social care is provided. I am a great advocate of integrated social care and healthcare, and I have heard from doctors about the way in which they decide on the services to be provided. When somebody presents to them with an illness, whatever it might be, the choices are a medical solution—they can be shipped off to hospital or given a prescription—or a social care solution. The feedback I have received from doctors is that they do not have control over the social care aspect, they cannot provide the services and it is very difficult for individuals to access those services, particularly at weekends.

We need this revolution for better control of social care by clinical commissioning groups. We need this revolution for the better use of providing medicine in the home, for example by using internet services, as has been mentioned, which I think is a magnificent way to go. We need this revolution for the timeliness of the provision of services. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr Syms) that we need to work across organisations to get this right, including those in the charity sector. If we do that, we can get a really integrated approach.

4.30 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell). When the House debated assisted dying last year, the point was made very strongly that good quality palliative care should be available to all; that at the end of life people deserve a good death, with access to palliative care and support; and that, rather than being subject to a postcode lottery, consistent, high quality end-of-life care should be available to all. Yet the quality of care and support that people and their families experience still varies significantly depending on where they live. Sadly, many people who would benefit from palliative care do not receive any at all. It is estimated that over 100,000 people a year in the UK—almost one in five of all deaths—would benefit from palliative care but do not receive it.

I want to talk about hospice care, as many Members have done. Hospice care forms a vital part of palliative care, supporting people through illness, the end of life, bereavement and into remembrance. It provides for the medical, emotional, social, practical, psychological and spiritual needs of individuals, as well as the needs of

their family and carers. Although many might think of hospice care as in-patient care, in fact 90% of it is provided through day care and at-home services, enabling patients to stay in their own homes—many Members have mentioned how important that is—and giving much-needed respite for carers.

Hospice care relies heavily on the support of local communities; it is estimated that 125,000 volunteers donate their time and expertise to UK hospices. On average, Government funding covers only a third of the expenditure of hospices. My constituency is served by an excellent local hospice, Springhill, which works closely with the community and is well known and well respected. The cost of running the hospice exceeds £3 million a year, and 70% of the running costs comes from fundraising in the local community. Year on year, Springhill hospice has to attract 70% of its income through fundraising events, charity shops, lottery, legacies and donations. Like many local people, I am doing my bit to help this year by running the Manchester 10k in aid of the hospice.

Springhill, like most hospices, provides a wide range of services in addition to in-patient and out-patient services, all of which improve the end-of-life experience for both patients and their carers and families. As part of its education programme, the hospice has developed a palliative care education passport for staff in care and nursing homes, and it has just celebrated the first group of 34 staff who have completed the passport. To complete the passport, health and care staff must demonstrate kindness, as well as the skills, confidence and the application of knowledge in the care of those with palliative care needs; transferable skills that, once part of everyday practice, will enhance the care of all service users. That is just one example of a hospice working in partnership with other healthcare providers to deliver better care to more people and to help reduce pressure on the NHS. Such partnerships are vital to deliver the improved end-of-life care we all want to see.

Although we would all agree that our hospices are doing great work, I would like to take this opportunity to talk about statutory funding and commissioning arrangements for our local hospices. NHS and local authority funding for hospice care varies considerably between localities, and a variety of commissioning and contracting practices exists. More than two thirds of hospices had their funding from local CCGs frozen or cut in 2014-15, and more than eight in 10 hospices do not think they are funded fairly and sustainably by the NHS and local authorities. If the Government invested more in hospice care, they could reduce the number of people in hospital at the end of their life who had no clinical need, and no wish, to be there. That would help to relieve the pressure on the NHS and the strain on A&E and acute wards, and it would improve the end-of-life experience for the patient and their family.

I cannot talk about end-of-life care without paying tribute to the work of Marie Curie and Macmillan nurses, without whom patients are more likely to use A&E services and to spend longer in hospital. Although a small number of people would prefer to die in hospital, that is the least preferred option for the majority. As the Chair of the Select Committee mentioned, the Nuffield Trust has shown that using the Marie Curie nursing service results in a £500 reduction in total care costs per person. That cost saving can be replicated by other

palliative care providers, meaning that investing in community-based palliative care can save the NHS money and reduce pressure on hospitals.

Changing demographics mean that the situation around end of life care will get worse. By 2040, an extra 100,000 people will die each year. The number of people with long-term conditions will have grown from 1.9 million in 2008 to 2.9 million in 2018. Unless the Government take action now to improve access to palliative care, the situation can only get worse, not better.

4.37 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I welcome this debate, not least because end-of-life care, or death, is something we as a society tend to avoid talking about, and there are parallels with mental health. Another parallel is that, like mental health, this issue is too often overlooked in our healthcare system. Talking about it here is therefore a step in the right direction.

It is of course good to see that the UK ranks No. 1 in international studies, as other hon. Members have said, but we know that we as a society do not do end-of-life care well enough—in fact, too often we do it badly. One reason that many constituents wrote to me before the assisted dying debate to support assisted dying was that they lacked confidence in the system's provision of end-of-life care and were not confident that they would have the chance of a good death. As many of us know, it is possible to have a good death, and that is what is experienced in many hospices, which do excellent work, as well as, sometimes, in hospitals and care homes.

Too few people die where they want to, quite apart from the quality of the experience they have. For example, only 6% of over-75s in Kent want to die in hospital, yet 40% actually die there. Some 86% want to die at home or in a hospice, but only 29% die in either of those places.

Every year about 500,000 people die in the UK. As the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) said, about one in five of them do not even receive palliative care. Those 500,000 people have family and friends who are affected by their death, so quality of death, on the basis of scale alone, should be a priority. In their final weeks and months, most people are highly dependent on the NHS, and there are frequent emergency hospital admissions for people towards the end of their life. Those hospital admissions account for 70% of health costs in their last three months of life. Unnecessary admissions to hospital are not only a bad experience for many individuals towards the end of their life, but expensive, and the NHS has scarce resources. That is another reason why it should be a priority to prevent people from dying in hospital when they do not want or need to. The question is whether it is yet a priority. The Public Administration Committee heard evidence that end-of-life care was still consistently overlooked across the NHS.

For the situation to improve, four things need to happen. There needs to be a focus on it from the very top of the NHS—from the leadership and from Government. There needs to be investment in capabilities to give people a better quality of death—not only capabilities of staff in terms of their skills, but in the technology that is needed. There needs to be better learning from what works; many places around the country, and internationally, do this well. There needs

to be much greater transparency and measurement of where it is going well and where it is being done badly, and accountability on quality.

On the technology point, many people lack a plan for how they want to die, yet that that can make a real difference. In the absence of a plan, there is often a default response when something happens to somebody who is frail and possibly close to death: an ambulance is called, they are taken to A and E, and they end up in the acute ward of a hospital and may never leave. Only last week, I spoke to a local GP who was very frustrated about this happening to his patients. He has often discussed with them what they would like to happen if their end of life is approaching, and sometimes even written it down. However, too often, in the moment of crisis, what he has written down makes no difference at all, because the people on the scene at the time—for instance, if an ambulance is called out of hours—do not have access to the plan that he has discussed with the patient.

That said, the GP was optimistic that this could change, because his CCG, NHS West Kent, is implementing an electronic care broadcasting system whereby other doctors, A and E and the ambulance staff would be able to access what the patient had said they wanted to happen in that situation. There is strong evidence of the benefits of such systems, which means that far more people are able to die in their preferred place. In some cases, this has resulted in the number of people getting to die in their preferred place of death rising to about 80%, and brought hospital deaths down from the average of about 53% across the country to below 40%, or even as low as 4%. Implementing such systems should therefore be a priority, as should learning from where they are going well.

Transparency and monitoring are a crucial part of improving end-of-life care. We need more transparency. We need to know about the variability that has been mentioned. As MPs, we need to know how good the end-of-life care is for our constituents. I welcome the CQC's increased attention to end-of-life care, but there are yawning gaps in reporting on quality. There is great inconsistency between what is reported in different areas and different institutions, and between CCGs, and relatively little is reported consistently at a national level. There needs to be a much greater focus on reporting. That was one of the recommendations in the Select Committee's report, and NHS IQ—Improving Quality—looked at it before being transferred into NHS England. I would be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister updated us on what is going on with regard to transparency on quality of end-of-life care, as I know that this Government do understand the importance of transparency.

All of us here today know that end-of-life care must improve; that this affects hundreds of thousands of people every year; that improving it will require continued and greater leadership and focus from the very top of the NHS and from Government; that investment will be required in capabilities and in technology, and should also lead to some cost savings; that there should be greater transparency, monitoring and accountability in respect of quality; and that there should be more, and more effective, sharing of the success stories and evidence of what works. Those things would mean that end-of-life care really was a priority for the health and care system, and that it should improve.

4.44 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this important debate, although I will not speak for too long. I have long been concerned about the long-term care of the elderly and have tabled many early-day motions in the past, including following the royal commission report in the late 1990s. The then Government went to great lengths to ensure that the report was not agreed unanimously, because they did not want to accept its recommendation for free long-term care for everyone, whether they be in residential care, at home or elsewhere. My early-day motion following that Government decision was supported and signed by more than 100 hon. Members, so my concern was shared across the House.

The Health Committee's report "Dying without dignity" is admirable, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) and her Committee on producing it. It recommends free social care, which I am very pleased about. The reports by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, of which I have the honour to be a member, are also relevant to long-term care. The Chair of the Committee is going to speak later, so I will not talk about them too much. "Investigating clinical incidents in the NHS" focuses on the appalling number of deaths and refers to the Mid Staffs hospital disaster, which was shameful.

Subsequent to the Government's refusal to pay for long-term care, there have been a series of forced privatisations of local authority care homes, which I opposed. In my own constituency, three first-class local authority care homes, where people would spend the last days of their lives, were forced to close and the residents were handed over to the private sector, which is driven by profit rather than concern for care alone. Some of the private homes are very good, but some are not. There have been some serious, well-publicised lapses of care, and there has been an ongoing crisis in the care homes world. I am concerned about that.

We congratulate ourselves on how we care for our elderly, particularly in the last days of their lives, but the situation is not all good. Some hon. Members have referred to the problems, including people not getting the palliative care they deserve and need. That is deeply worrying. We are all going to die one day and some of us are closer to that time than others, and we want to make sure that we and our families are cared for properly in those last difficult days. The subject needs more debate, more Government action and more support.

The reports are concerned about compassion. Undoubtedly, medical and care staff are overwhelmingly compassionate people, but it is not good that they are being put under pressure and made to work long hours; that they have too many residents to care for in the homes; and that they are being rushed because of concerns about costs and the desire to maximise profits. That means that people suffer. We have all had cases—I certainly have—where people have not been treated well in their homes or have not had the right care in a hospital or a care home simply because the staff are under pressure. People's compassion starts to be diminished when they feel they are being pressured and not being treated with respect. Pay is one thing, but compassion is damaged when a staff member is looking after too many patients or residents, or rushing around too many

homes with elderly single people who are in their last days. We have to make sure that compassion is to the fore in all these matters.

I have also said on many occasions that we do not spend enough on health and social care in general. We are rightly proud of the national health service and the principles on which it is based, but it is underfunded. We spend at least 2% less of our GDP—about £35 billion a year less—on health than France or Germany. With an injection of £35 billion a year, some of the stresses that cause the problems in hospitals in particular would go away. I also think, and said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) before the last election, that long-term care of all kinds ought to be provided on precisely the same basis as the national health service, completely free at the point of need. I believe that it should be provided by public servants rather than by the private sector. Only when we accept that we have to pay properly for the health and care service and resource it appropriately—that we have to pay people properly and make sure that we have enough staff—will we ensure that elderly people are cared for when they are alive, and that they die a dignified, pain-free and suffering-free death.

I will leave it there, although I would like to say a lot more. I hope that other Members will support some of the things that I have said.

4.50 pm

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): It is a great pleasure to make a modest contribution to the debate. When I speak on matters to do with the NHS, the emphasis always seems to be on more resources, greater transparency, greater accountability and greater universal provision of reliable quality. Everything is important in the NHS—everything is a priority—but the resources are not infinite.

End-of-life care is a painful and emotive subject that is difficult to get right. As has been mentioned, about half a million—I think the actual figure was 470,000—people died in this country in 2014. They died in different circumstances, with wide variations in their experiences of what the NHS was able to offer. In my constituency, I acknowledge not only an excellent hospital and a number of GPs, but a high level of respect in our community for Salisbury hospice. One of the challenges is to arrive at a settlement that makes clear where the boundaries of responsibility lie between funding from the NHS and the charity element. Clearly, there is a massive amount of good will, but that must not be abused.

The national director at Hospice UK has said:

"The things that make a better death are so simple. It's basic knowledge about good pain control and conversations with people about the things that matter".

That goes to the heart of what is required. It will be about resources, to some extent. It will be about transparency, and greater reliability and sufficiency of provision. But it will also be about us, as leaders in our communities, being able to speak about our constituents' experience of dying. Just as we put great emphasis on the provision of wills to ensure that people's estates are in good shape, we need to ask people what choices they want to make about the way in which they are looked after and cared for in their last days. We need to ensure that people have greater awareness and make more

informed choices so that we can make a better estimate of how to allocate resources and better integrate the different elements in our society.

One challenge that has frustrated me concerns free social care at the end of life. The Select Committee recommends in its excellent report that

“the Government clarify the eligibility criteria for the NHS Continuing Healthcare Fast Track Pathway”.

Some of my constituents have waited far too long to have such matters resolved; for example, I raised the situation of the Vaughans last week in business questions. Ambiguity and long delays in sorting things out cause enormous distress to families who are trying to make sensible provision.

I recognise the great emphasis that is placed on dying at home, and the tragedy that almost half—47%—of the 470,000 people who died in 2014 died in hospital, although the latest survey shows that only 3% of people who stated a preference wanted to die in hospital. By any measure, that is a failure of society, Governments and us all in not delivering what people want. That is not efficient for public services—it is more expensive—but it is also really unpleasant for the families involved when they cannot deliver what their loved ones want.

I hope that the Government will be able to give real and costed responses to the report and to all the various groups that have commented on the need for greater clarity about the Government’s intentions. Our constituents need that, and we need to do more to ensure that this does not become a taboo subject, but one on which there is greater engagement, so that we can secure better outcomes for those who are dying and for their families.

4.55 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the chance to speak on this issue. According to the End of Life Care Coalition, in the 12 months since the “Choice” review was published, almost 50,000 people experienced poor care during the last three months of their lives.

Some right hon. and hon. Members have clearly said that they are speaking from a family point of view, and I heard some of their speeches in the Chamber. Twelve months ago today my father passed away. My dad always wanted to die at home, but that was not possible. He had fallen out of bed and broken his femur. It was quite impossible for my mum to give him the care that he had to have, so he passed away in hospital. I have some experience of end-of-life care in hospitals, and I must say that I commend those involved: first, my mother, who was very loyally and religiously attentive to him, but also the nurses, who particularly helped and were very attentive and caring.

The 2015 report from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, “Dying without dignity”, demonstrated the consequences of people dying without access to high-quality care and support. It highlighted cases where people had died in distressing circumstances, which had a lasting impact on their friends and families. That is what we are focusing on today. Unfortunately, research by the London School of Economics suggests that such situations are not as rare as they should be. The people who tend to miss out on palliative care are those with conditions other than cancer, those over the

age of 85, single people and people from black and minority ethnic communities. Quite clearly, those are issues.

Research conducted by Ipsos MORI and Marie Curie—many of us met those from Marie Curie in Parliament yesterday—have found that seven out of 10 carers thought that people with a terminal illness were not getting all the care and support that they need. I commend the Marie Curie nurses for the hard and very attentive work that they do. Again, I have experienced that personally because a good friend of mine, Irene Brown, passed away just last week. Marie Curie helped her and her family greatly near the end of her life.

We have had ongoing worries and troubles about care homes in my constituency, with the threat of closures compounding the misery for people who need help the most and who already have to deal with an over-pressed and strained health service. I have to say, with respect, that the fact that such issues are not at the top of the priority list only serves to strengthen the disillusionment with the Government.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern, which was highlighted by some of the Marie Curie nurses I met, that while they very much want to do an excellent job in looking after the people they serve, they cannot do so all week but only on a couple of days, with less experienced staff coming in to fill in the gaps?

Jim Shannon: I obviously agree with the hon. Lady. I understand exactly what she says, as I think does everyone in the House. The Marie Curie nurses are special nurses and they do a grand job.

The issue of state-assisted suicide has been mentioned. We have had a debate in the House and a clear decision has been made, by an outstanding majority, that there is no need for it, and we will keep that going. We do not need to discuss the matter, because it has already been decided.

I want to refer quickly to the significant improvements to end-of-life care in Northern Ireland with the ambitious “Transforming your care” plan. Although there is still a long way to go, I ask the Minister sitting on the Front Bench, who is always very responsive, to look at what all the devolved regions have been doing, not least Northern Ireland, to ensure that the best strategy known and available nationwide is being implemented so that the figures I led with are reduced as much as possible and as fast as possible. We all know people or have known people going through this period of their life and, young or old, it is a reality that all of us will face some day. The UK Government and the devolved Governments need to do better on this issue to give ordinary, everyday, hard-working people the treatment they deserve at such a distressing time.

I will conclude on this point because I am conscious that other Members wish to speak. If the Government have been taking action on this issue, they need to make that clear and publicise it, despite the obvious delay. In other words, are the Government giving end-of-life care the focus and money it needs, and are they working with charities and hospices to ensure that it is delivered? It is true that there should be no timescale for coming up with the best solution, but it is equally true that there has been insufficient explanation as to why the timescale

[Jim Shannon]

has been delayed. I know that the Minister will respond to that. That delay is compounding the misery for people who are affected by this issue and their families. When it comes to end-of-life care, let us ensure that we deliver for our constituents.

5 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I will draw on conversations that I have had with people around the country who have experienced a relative dying fairly recently, as well as on my own observations. I will not mention a particular case, because if I did have a difficult case, I would take it up privately in the usual way.

The first conclusion that I have formed, which I think the Secretary of State has wisely come to, is that a patient undergoing the last stages of their life and their family need a named doctor who is in charge. The family and the patient, when the patient has capacity, need to have access at reasonable times to that doctor to find out where they have got to and what the next stage is likely to be.

I believe that Ministers have put in place a requirement for there to be a named general practitioner for every patient when they are at home or in a care home. That is very welcome and let us hope that it works, so that there is someone people can turn to, whom they trust and know. However, when, as so often happens, people enter hospital and may not come out again, because of the way in which rosters and rotas work, it means that every day or every other day there is a different group of doctors and nurses in charge of them.

That can mean one of two things. Sometimes, the family and/or the patient are constantly retold very bad news because the new team feels that they have a duty to tell them. It may not be helpful for people to keep getting the same bad news. Alternatively, the family or the patient with capacity may want information at a particular time, but no one is up to speed because they have only recently taken over and have not had time to read the notes. Indeed, reading the notes is not necessarily as good as being continuously in charge of the patient and talking to them over the days or weeks in which the treatment is undertaken or as their last days draw near. I therefore urge Ministers to get behind the idea that it is best if there is a named senior doctor—perhaps a consultant or registrar.

Often, people in their last few weeks or months of life have complex and multiple medical conditions, so a series of different consultants are involved, but no one consultant feels as if they are ultimately in charge. I am told that in some hospitals patients are moved from ward to ward at very short notice, with different specialties in mind. The family then turn up and do not even know where the patient is, because they think that they will be where they last saw them. That can be very disruptive for the family. More care and attention is needed in some cases to deal with that issue.

The second issue, which has been mentioned by other colleagues, is the interface between social care and hospitals. All of us who visit hospitals as Members of Parliament and sometimes as family members will have observed that a very large number of patients in a lot of our wards are extremely elderly and very frail, with lots

of complex medical conditions. Some of them may not be easy to treat. Others might be better off in a care home or at home, but there has been a failure to put together the set of services that they need.

I do not really believe that that is a money issue, because in many cases one could buy an awful lot of social care for the cost of the hospital bed that the person is occupying. Social care might even be cheaper. I am not recommending that we take people out of hospital because somewhere else is cheaper, but if they would be better off somewhere else, if they want to be somewhere else and if there are no longer any medical interventions that the hospital can make, it is sensible to take advantage of social care if it is also cheaper.

Kelvin Hopkins: I hear what the right hon. Gentleman says, but when local authorities know that they have to pay for care when somebody comes out of hospital, they will try to persuade them to stay in hospital for as long as possible. Different budgets put different pressures on different institutions.

John Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is right. Throughout the time he and I have been in the House, under Governments of different persuasions, we have all known about the problem, we have all said that we need to solve it and still we have not managed to do that. I hope that our current talented Ministers can do something that no previous groups of Ministers have been able to achieve. There is an experiment because, with the devolution models that Ministers are considering, if the health and social care budgets are put together under the same authority, the excuse that there is a budget row goes. One would hope that the best interests of the patient were dominant and that authorities would realise that, in some cases, the best interests of the patient also enabled them to save money through switching from an expensive hospital bed to a decent care package. That could be helpful, and I hope that Ministers will do that.

For the families of those who die, the need for care does not end at the moment of death. That is generally understood by the public sector, but there are serious problems with delivering the support and administrative back-up that families need when a loved one dies. Several people who have been through this recently told me that the first thing that happens is a delay in getting a death certificate. Without a death certificate, nothing can be done to settle things. People cannot even hold a funeral because they cannot instruct a funeral director until they have a death certificate.

Not only is there a delay in getting the death certificate from the medical staff at the hospital, but people cannot register the death because of the insistence on a face-to-face meeting with the registrar, which can mean a further delay of many days before a slot becomes available. Quite a lot of families therefore end up with one, two, three and four weeks of delay before they get the death certificate, which is necessary to trigger the funeral and any financial changes consequent on a person's death.

The Government have introduced a sensible "Tell Us Once" system so that when a person dies, the family can fill in quite a complicated electronic form, which is meant to tell all Departments with which the dead person may have been involved what the Government need to know. There are two problems with that. First, families often do not have all the knowledge that they

need. Unless they have that knowledge, the Government seem unable to cross-refer and discover that, for example, the person had a benefit as well as a pension. It would be helpful if Government computers talked to each other more adequately so that the Government could do more of the work and families just had to notify them of the death and did not have to know every detail of the dead person's financial affairs.

Secondly, because the delays with the death certificate and registrar appointments often mean that registration of the death is delayed, the Government make payments to the deceased person, and the families, having used "Tell Us Once", get a set of not terribly friendly letters—I appreciate that they have been dressed up a bit—saying, "Your dead relative owes us this much money". The families cannot necessarily get their hands on that money, but they are none the less obliged to pay the Government back, at an unsettling time when they are mourning and grieving and were not expecting a tax or benefit bill.

In the interests of handling the families better, the Government should speed up their side of the administration so that the death can be registered promptly, the Government do not make wrong payments and the families are not faced with letters demanding money back when they have other things on their mind and are trying to deal with the hurt. It does not make it better when the Government say, "We're very sorry you've had a loss" if they go on to say, "but you owe us this much money. The usual rules apply. See you in prison if you don't pay".

We need to improve greatly on dealing with the first few weeks for the poor grieving families, who do not necessarily know the process, are very lost because they have lost their loved one, and are not helped by delays and sometimes the incompetence of the regulatory authorities.

5.9 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) for her excellent work in leading the Health Committee. I will not repeat points that a number of Members have raised, but there is a consensus that the issue of end-of-life care is growing in prominence and importance. The debate on assisted dying last September drove that discussion, and since then a number of Adjournment debates have focused on why end-of-life care is so important.

We know that 480,000 deaths a year occur in England and according to Macmillan Cancer Support, only 53% of people die in a place of their choice. We know that there are gaps in provision—not just in access and quality, but also according to disease type. As a cancer nurse, I was fortunate to have access to excellent palliative care, not just locally but for patients nationally. However, for those suffering from many other diseases, such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's or Alzheimer's, there is little or no access to good end-of-life care. As a result, there have been a number of reviews. We heard about the "Choice" review, which identified gaps and gave some solutions for meeting them, and last year the Health Committee delivered its report on how end-of-life care could be improved. The report by the Parliamentary Health Service Ombudsman, "Dying without dignity", identified the same gaps. We know what the problems are, and now we need to deliver the solutions.

As this is an estimates debate, I will flag up the figures in those reports. We must invest £400 million annually in NHS community services to move end-of-life care out of hospitals—where most people do not want to die—and into the community, and we need roughly £100 million each year for local social services to provide the social care to back that up. That would deliver a saving of £370 million for the NHS and the acute services that are now picking those people up, but from my experience I think the savings will actually be much higher.

In the short time I have been an MP, many constituents have written to me, including an elderly gentleman of 92, who, a couple of weeks before the last Christmas that he would spend with his family, was stuck in hospital—not because of symptom or pain control, but for the lack of a feeding pump. He had a feeding pump in hospital, but because he wanted to go home to die and the community did not have one, he had to stay in hospital. That cost thousands of pounds a day, but more importantly it took precious time away from him and his family, just for the lack of a feeding pump. Such things cost a few pounds—I would have given the money myself if that is what it would have taken.

We know that £500 million would deliver district nurses to provide care, pharmacists, social services, and not just the seven-day-a-week NHS that we are proud we want to achieve, but the 24-hour care that most of those patients need. That would improve care and choice for those patients, and once that initial investment had been made, just £130 million a year would help to sustain it for health and social care. It would be money well spent if we could find it.

I bring good news for the Minister: we do not just need money. I make a plea for him to consider the Access to Palliative Care Bill that is currently finishing its passage through the other place, sponsored by Baroness Finlay. It shows that such an approach has a proven track record of delivering end-of-life care without needing a huge amount of investment, because it forces local CCGs to commission palliative care. That is what we are missing at the moment. Placing such care in the hands of CCGs makes them locally accountable, because what will deliver good palliative care in a London borough is very different from what will work in a rural constituency such as mine. It is important that CCGs take on that responsibility. I know from working in acute cancer care that unless something is commissioned and paid for, it does not happen.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): My hon. Friend is making some excellent points. Does she recognise that there is a particular challenge when commissioners can seem almost to get something for nothing, with local hospices taking on more and more responsibility? It is important that local commissioners—wherever they are in the country—recognise that the services they rely on from hospices need to be paid for. As those services have increased in recent years, commissioners need to think about allocating more of their budget to them, which could then make savings for the other services that they commission.

Maria Caulfield: Absolutely. Those commissioning services realise their value. Hospices have taken up a lot of care. We all value our hospices, but that work is not necessarily valued financially. From working in cancer

[*Maria Caulfield*]

care, I know that my trust was commissioned to deliver day services, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. It was paid on a case-by-case basis. As soon as someone had finished their treatment and needed end-of-life care, however, everyone washed their hands of the responsibility because no one was getting paid for it. That is the reality of the situation. We need commissioning for end-of-life care to happen.

The Access to Palliative Care Bill, which has just gone through the other place, establishes four clear guidelines that would greatly improve end-of-life care without the money needed to back it up. First, on pain and symptom control, we should have an evidence base of what works for each disease and make sure that that is what happens. Secondly, there should be education and training for all staff and not just for those in end-of-life care. There is a huge amount of palliative and symptom control that staff, whatever their speciality—intensive care units, cardiac units, renal units and so on—can provide without needing specialist knowledge. All staff need to know is the point at which they need specialist advice. Simple education and training would enable that to happen and improve greatly the care that patients receive.

Research is the third guideline set out by Baroness Finlay in the Bill. Never underestimate the difference that research can make to end-of-life care. When I was a new nurse in the early '90s, patients with hypercalcaemia were admitted all the time. Hypercalcaemia is when there is too much calcium in the bloodstream. Patients are confused and dehydrated, and they spend their last few days and weeks unable to communicate with their relatives. However, with research and the advent of bisphosphonates, it is very, very rare to see a case of hypercalcaemia. Research into end-of-life care made that difference. Finally, as my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes pointed out, having the CQC inspect end-of-life care would make a huge difference, not just in the acute setting but across the board.

Other Members want to speak on this important subject, so I will just say that if the £500 million needed to implement the "Choice" review is not available, that should not stop us from improving end-of-life care. Many of the aspects of the Access to Palliative Care Bill would make a huge difference to patients and their families. I urge the Minister to consider them in his closing remarks.

5.17 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I am pleased to be able to speak in this very important debate. It is pleasing that, as we have heard from so many other hon. Members, end-of-life care in the UK is ranked No. 1. That is not good enough, however, because there are so many variations across the whole of the UK. I am sure the reason why we are ranked No. 1 is mainly due to the wonderful hospice movement that we have heard so much about. It contributes so much to so many thousands of lives every day across the whole country. It is the medical professionals, the volunteers, the fundraisers and the donors who really make the difference. As I said, the system is not perfect and we still have an awfully long way to go. There are too many times when end-of-life care is a lottery, and that should not be the case.

My constituency has actually done quite well out of that lottery. We have an amazing hospice called Treetops Hospice Care. It is quite unusual because it does not have any beds. It provides all its care either as day care or in patients' homes. As a consequence, the number of people who are able to die in their own homes in my constituency is much higher than in other parts of the country. In the past, Treetops has benefited from two lots of capital funding: in 2010 it managed to get capital funding to extend its day care centre; and in 2013 it got capital funding to build a counselling and bereavement centre, which has been so valuable to those who have suffered the loss of their loved ones. One of my messages for the Minister, therefore, is please do not forget about capital funding. It is so important to hospices across the whole country.

The chief executive of Treetops asked me to say that money invested in hospices often saves the NHS money because hospices can deliver end of life care so much more effectively. The NHS is not for the end of life; it is for acute episodes, not best designed for the time when people need to be in quite a different environment.

As other hon. Members have mentioned, we need to realise that hospices are not only for people with cancer; they are for people with life-limiting conditions. There still seems to be a bit of fear about this: if people are told that they need palliative care and end-of-life care and they do not have cancer, they get confused. We need to make sure that our messaging is a lot clearer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) talked about gaps in the service. My local CCG acknowledged gaps in the services it was commissioning. It was lucky enough to get funding from Macmillan to look at how to pull together the end-of-life care it was able to commission. It realised that the issue is not always about commissioning hospital beds or drugs; it can be about something really simple.

People coming towards the end of their lives need extra laundry, and for the people who are caring for them, having to do all the laundry is, sadly, about the last straw when it comes to the caring commitments they make. Our CCG identified that a local charity, Community Concern Erewash, has a laundry service. The CCG is able to contract out to a local charity to provide the laundry service for those going through end-of-life care. This means that many more people will be able to stay in their own homes because those caring for them can provide the emotional care without being distracted by the need to provide laundry. That provides one practical example of how it is possible to invest money wisely to make end-of-life care so much better.

All too often, our focus is on end of life care for adults, but we must never forget the importance of providing choice and support for children and young people at the end of their lives and of the subsequent bereavement counselling for their families. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work done by the organisation, Together for Short Lives, in providing such counselling. The more we discuss subjects such as end-of-life care in this place, the more open people become about talking about such a difficult subject; they feel more able to discuss it. We never used to discuss cancer, but now we do, so it will be possible for us to talk about end-of-life care in a much more open

way. As individuals, as parents, as children and as spouses, we should be brave enough to talk about end of life.

Our healthcare professionals should also be brave enough to talk about the issues. I know from personal experience that when a Macmillan palliative care nurse had that conversation with my mum, it made the last few months of her life so much easier. It made it easier for us, too, as we no longer needed to tread carefully on the subject. Mum could openly talk about her wishes—what she wanted done with certain bits of jewellery, for example, and other things she wanted to communicate to us. When she did pass away six months after that initial conversation with the end-of-life care nurse, we knew her wishes and what to do, which made it easier for us.

Talking about end-of-life care and knowing the wishes of the patient makes it so much easier for the healthcare professionals and the relatives—and, most importantly, for the patients. We must do whatever is possible to make sure that the final wishes of those with terminal illnesses are met, so we can ensure that they can have good deaths.

5.23 pm

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I hardly feel worthy of catching your eye today, Mr Deputy Speaker, having not been in my place for a question earlier today. I apologise to you and to Mr Speaker for that. I was, in fact, preparing for this debate, as Chairman of my Select Committee. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), the Chair of the Health Select Committee, for her report and for securing time to debate end-of-life care on the Floor of the House.

I shall wantonly use this opportunity to promote one of the reports produced by my Select Committee, the then Public Administration Select Committee. I am not just talking about the report on dying with dignity, which followed a report by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. That report underlines why my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes is absolutely on the right track in making her investigations.

We have urged the Government to recognise the shortcomings that exist in many of our health institutions. People are not recognised to be dying when they are dying, their symptoms are not addressed, and there is poor symptom control. People have watched loved ones dying in pain because of ineffective symptom management. As has been mentioned today, there has been poor communication. Professionals have failed to engage in open conversations with patients and family members. There have been inadequate out-of-hours services, and people have suffered because of difficulties in gaining access to palliative care out of hours. There has been poor care planning, and delays in diagnosis. And so it goes on.

What strikes me about so many of the accounts that we have heard this afternoon is the lack of learning, the sense of helplessness, the sense that this is just what happens in our health system. That is what drove my Committee, at the end of the last Parliament, to produce the report entitled “Investigating clinical incidents in the NHS”. Imagine what it would be like if we had an NHS in which, whenever something went wrong, there

was a proper and open investigation, followed by learning from what had occurred—without blame—to prevent a repetition. So often, in debates such as this, we hear about the same things occurring again and again.

Our report revealed that

“there are 12,000 avoidable hospital deaths every year. More than 10,000 serious incidents are reported”

to the NHS, in England alone,

“out of a total of 1.4 million mostly low-harm or no-harm incidents annually. There were 338 recorded “never events” (such as wrong site surgery) during 2013-14”,

and there were 174,872 written complaints. The then latest estimate of clinical negligence liabilities on the NHS balance sheet was £26.1 billion. If we could get just 10% of that right, we would save millions of pounds. If we could avoid 10% of those incidents, we would save the NHS huge amounts of money.

We looked into the way in which other safety-critical industries dealt with safety management and incident investigation. The most notable is aviation, but similar considerations apply to marine accidents, accidents in the North sea oil industry, and the work of the Rail Accident Investigation Branch, which was set up after the Paddington rail crash. I learned a great deal when I was shadow Secretary of State for Transport at the time of that rail crash. For instance, I observed how hopeless it was that the safety regulator of the railway, the Health and Safety Executive, was responsible for investigating its own failings in the event of a rail accident.

The Committee concluded that what was needed was an independent clinical investigation service that would investigate untoward incidents in the health sector. It would have to have three key elements. First, it must provide a “safe space” in which clinicians, NHS managers, patients and patients’ families could discuss things without fear of recrimination or reprisals. Such a service does not currently exist in the health service. No one dares speak for fear of getting the blame. In aviation, it is quite normal for pilots to report each other and report themselves without fear or favour, because that safe space exists.

Secondly, the service

“must be independent of providers, commissioners and regulators”.

There is no such independent investigative capacity in the NHS. We have a higgledy-piggledy arrangement for investigating clinical incidents. It might be local, it might involve a regulator, but it ends up with the Secretary of State coming to the Dispatch Box and calling for a public inquiry. That is when we really know that it has all gone wrong. The Francis report was very much a jumping-off point for us.

The third requirement is that any such clinical incidents investigation service should have the power to publish reports and to disseminate its recommendations and learning. This should not be about blaming people; it should be about learning. I am very pleased that the Government accepted our recommendations and that they have set up an expert advisory group. The group has been holding discussions for many months on how to implement the proposals.

I am sad to say, however, that three things are still lacking from the Government’s proposals for what they are going to call the health safety investigation branch, which will operate in a clinical incident investigation

[Mr Bernard Jenkin]

capacity. The Government's refusal to contemplate primary legislation on this matter means that there will be no safe space. Their refusal to create new public sector bodies outside the framework of the NHS will mean that the health safety improvement branch will be domiciled within NHS Improvement, which is one of the regulators from which it needs to be independent. And the Government's refusal to contemplate primary legislation means, of course, that there will be no primary legislation.

I think the Minister understands these matters very well, but I have to say to him that if, having accepted our report, the Government go ahead and create the health safety investigation branch of the NHS on this basis, they will not be implementing our findings, which they say they have accepted. It is sad that we are going to lose the opportunity to do this, and I very much hope that the Government will continue to think about introducing at least a draft Bill that would enable us to work in the longer term towards the primary legislation that we need in order to set this up. That would transform lives, and the NHS, in a way that nothing else could do.

5.31 pm

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): I very much appreciate the opportunity to talk about this important topic today. As a GP, I have been involved in delivering palliative care—as has my wife, who is a district nurse. It was mentioned earlier that during the debates on the Assisted Dying (No. 2) Bill last year, end-of-life care was highlighted as an important topic that needed to be discussed. We have a world-class palliative care service in parts of this country. Indeed, many other countries look at our hospice movement and want to adopt it for themselves. My local hospice, St Kentigern, which I visited recently, provides excellent care as well as guidance to clinicians, as do so many hospices. However, there are variations in different areas of our country, between the care provided by different clinicians and between the palliative care available for differing conditions.

I have joined the Health Committee since the general election, so I was not part of the inquiry that led to the report. I do not intend to provide an exhaustive list of issues that I feel need addressing, but I thought it might be helpful to give the House a GP's perspective on some issues that are important to me. The lack of prior planning and discussion for patients is a very real issue. There is certainly a need for more information for patients, carers and family members. It is worth noting, however, that health policy can influence patients' awareness of developing conditions, and I would like to mention dementia in this context.

The Government have focused on dementia in recent times, and the Prime Minister's challenge has been quite successful in increasing diagnosis rates. The rate has now gone up to about 67%. A diagnosis gives patients the opportunity to look to the future and decide how they see the end of their life. Sadly, the diagnosis rate in my area of Wales is only 43%, which shows how health policy can influence the debate in many ways.

Care homes are clearly critical to end-of-life care. My practice certainly felt that it was able to contribute to this domain through a local enhanced service that allowed oversight by one practice and continuity of care, which

is extremely important. That service also helped to prevent unnecessary admissions to hospitals. It resulted in better opportunities for staff training.

Clearly, there is pressure on hospice beds and community hospital beds. There is also a need to address privacy in the acute secondary hospital setting, where hospital is the right place for end-of-life care. We know that so many patients wish to die at home, and out-of-hours services are crucial to that. We have heard a lot about a seven-day NHS in recent times and this is one crucial area where providing services at weekends and in the evenings is so important. If a patient is waiting for a delayed period for a syringe driver, for instance, that prolongs their discomfort. We also know that there are limited community services in some instances, particularly for children.

I have seen discharge liaison services in hospitals moving heaven and earth to meet patients' wishes and allow a death at home. Those need to be focused upon to ensure that, wherever possible, that can take place, with adequate support for carers once the patient is discharged home. Finally, clinicians need the confidence to identify what constitutes an end-of-life situation and to manage it appropriately, and so clearly there is a need for education. One in five of those who die is not receiving the end of life care that it is felt they should receive, so clearly there is still much work to be done, despite the best efforts of so many in this country.

5.36 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): As has been mentioned by several Members, we all share one thing in common: we are all mortal. Although some people think they are not, we will all die. In this House, we make decisions about provision for things that might happen, but this is something that absolutely will happen to all of us and so we all have a vested interest in making sure those services are as good as possible. Three quarters of people who die do so expectedly, which means they die of an ongoing illness they already have. About a third of those are cancer patients, and the palliative care system has focused on them since its inception in the 1960s. As has been said, we should rightly be proud of the fact that the UK is listed as No. 1, but that is largely to do with inputs and resources; it is not always to do with outcomes, because we cannot always measure those. A lot of that top position we owe to the hospice movement. We owe it to people such as Dame Cicely Saunders at St Christopher's hospice. Everyone here knows my background, but even when I was a medical student this was my interest. My fourth year dissertation, "On Death and Dying—Home, Hospice, Hospital", was written at a time when we had hardly any hospices and this was a new-fangled speciality.

The problem is that that is not the choice people are getting, as we have heard from Members from across the House. In Scotland, we did an audit in 2010 and again in 2013 which involved every single person in hospital on one day and following them up for a year. That showed that a third of people in hospital—it was exactly the same both years—will die within a year. That backs up a well-known fact that the majority of healthcare is spent on people in the last year of their lives. Some 10% of those people actually died on that admission, and the average stay of someone who dies in hospital is about two weeks. Some of those will be

deaths we did not expect—they will be things that went wrong. However, a lot of them—three quarters—will be people with an expected illness. It is not just wasteful and it is not just futile, but for the family and the patient it is distressing.

We have heard about how people get stuck in hospital when they would like to be somewhere else. The question is: why? The No. 1 reason is that we do not talk about it; the family have not talked to the patient and the patient has not talked to the doctor—nobody has broached the subject. As someone who has been a cancer surgeon for 30 years, I know that it is difficult. I have often had to help families and patients open that conversation. There are people who say, “I won’t tell my mother”, or, “I won’t tell the children.” The family needs to be front and centre with this. One of the advantages of being at home is that people are in their own intimate space together. They have one luxury: the opportunity to say goodbye. People may have a row, go out the door, slam it and never come back. That is the worst loss. People need a chance to prepare. They need to make sure that they are at peace, that everything is organised, that they are not worrying and fretting, and that their families have the chance to say that they love each other. There is also the need to reconcile. Perhaps that person who went off in a huff 20 years ago comes back. That last bit of time is very precious.

In 2010, Scotland conducted a review of the “do not resuscitate” policy. We moved to what was described as best practice. That answers some of the issues raised by the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately)—people being scooped up by the ambulance and taken somewhere else. This was not just a tick box that the nurse or the doctor went through; it was a discussion that was shared with everyone.

The core person in all this is the GP. The GP provides the continuity. In Scotland, the summary care record is used for out-of-hours care. The GP must register a patient on the palliative care register, and that is automatically shared. If, at the weekend, someone is called in, they know what the aim is, which is that that person wants to die at home. If someone has been kept at home for months with lots of support, there is then nothing worse than if, in the last 24 hours, the family panics—“Mum’s got worse. What do I do? Dial 999”—and the person ends up in an ambulance and then in hospital. That is just a disaster.

As the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) said, we need to tackle training. We need to train our students, our doctors, our nurses and our carers in all the settings, because people will die in all the settings. People will still die in hospital. That is unavoidable, as was said by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is no longer in his place, but it is not an excuse for poor care or poor communication.

Ayr hospice in my constituency provides the liaison services to the hospital in which I worked, so we had palliative care consultants, liaison nurses and training for other staff. We also have a beautiful hospice that provides outreach and home care, and is trying to educate the whole community.

In Scotland, the funding of hospices is 50:50, whereas here, as we have heard, the average is a third, so it is very variable. Hospices now talk about the increased complexity of commissioning. Many of them deal with multiple clinical commissioning groups—the average is four—and they feel that they are having to jump through many

hoops in exchange for whatever bit of finance they get. Hospices need to be put on a safe financial basis, and they also need to be able to plan their funding for the future.

We must not forget the care home. By 2030, a quarter of us will die in a care home, and that is the thing that many of us are most frightened of. That is because we have a sense of it as a place that we are tidied away to, and we fear that. We need to improve the quality of care homes and to individualise the care. We also need to introduce this end of life and palliative care philosophy to those homes.

Of course, the prize is dying at home. That is what 80% of people choose. In Scotland, we are lucky because we already have free personal care. Patients who are under 65 and have had a DS1500, which defines them as within six months of death, get free social care. We do not have the barrier that there is in England of either the difficulty of paying or the sheer time it takes to go through means-testing to get care organised. None the less, we have our challenges. The social care has to be in place. We know that all local authorities are struggling to balance their budgets. As has been mentioned by Macmillan, Marie Curie, Nuffield and the palliative care review five years ago, this would save money in the long term. However, the money cannot just be taken from the hospital and given to social care or to palliative care, because the hospital would fall over. We have to double-invest initially because, as with a Rubik’s cube, we need that little bit of space to move the first piece before anything else will happen.

This has been going around since 2011, and we are calling on the Minister to grasp the nettle and rise to the challenge. We need to follow the patient and support them through the whole journey and, as was mentioned, to support people after that journey through bereavement, to ensure that they have access to support and are not left struggling after the loss of a loved one.

It is well known that people will cope with bereavement better if their loved one has had a good journey. As was mentioned, in the assisted dying debate we threw down the challenge that if we voted against that, we had to provide high quality palliative care, to allow people to end their journey not in fear, not in pain and not feeling a burden. I call on the Minister and the Government to rise to that challenge.

5.45 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I join other Members in thanking the Chairs of the Select Committees for the work on the reports that we are debating today. I was a member of the Health Committee when it produced the end-of-life care report.

Although Ministers have talked of rising to the challenge of improving palliative care, they have yet to take the action needed. They have not responded to the independent panel’s “Choice” review report published in February 2015. I know that the Minister and his colleagues repeatedly promised to respond to that report by the end of 2015, although I note that the Minister has recently changed to saying they will respond “soon”. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) noted that 48,000 people have experienced poor end-of-life care since the “Choice” review was published. Given that figure, we need a swift Government response now, and I ask the Minister to tell us when he expects that response.

[Barbara Keeley]

As many Members have mentioned, the palliative care workforce works extremely hard to provide good care for people nearing the end of their life. We owe a debt of gratitude to our hospices, palliative care staff in hospitals, and Macmillan and Marie Curie nurses, because when end-of-life care is delivered well, the benefits to the patient and the family are immeasurable; when it is delivered badly, it can cause considerable pain and distress to those involved.

Even though we have the excellent St Ann's hospice in my constituency and we have one of the best hospitals in the country in Salford, I have dealt with cases in my constituency where end-of-life care has not been delivered as it should have been, leaving bereaved family members distressed and anguished. The National Council for Palliative Care has said that despite high aspirations,

“there is still unacceptable variation, which would not be tolerated in any other area of practice.”

The ombudsman's report shows us the consequences of people dying without access to high-quality care and support.

In my constituency I have had cases with similar failures to those that the ombudsman highlights—not recognising that the patient is dying, not responding to their needs, poor symptom control, poor communication and inadequate out-of-hours services. One of the cases I dealt with happened in 2005 and was included in a previous report by the ombudsman. Another occurred in 2013. It worries me that I have had constituents suffering the same heartache caused by poor end of life care when it is clear what needs to be done to improve their care.

My constituents died without dignity and in pain. Their carers and family members were left to run around trying to find suitable pain control for them, which meant that they lost the chance to spend precious time with the family member who was dying. The SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), has just highlighted for us how important it is to have those last few hours with a loved one. The Health Committee report recommended that a named clinician support the co-ordination of care. Clearly, that would help in so many cases, and the idea was supported by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood).

We know that each year around 500,000 people die in England and Wales and half of those deaths occur in hospitals, so we must make sure that end-of-life care is fit for purpose in all settings and that staff are trained to recognise when someone is nearing the end of life. However, the End of Life Care Coalition tells us that NHS England has made no substantial move to invest in palliative or end-of-life care. Investment in those services is essential to ensure that they are co-ordinated and that people receive the correct care wherever they are.

The Health Committee report asks the Government and NHS England to set out how universal, seven-day access to palliative care could become available to all patients, including patients with a non-cancer diagnosis. Marie Curie tells us that only one in five trusts in England provide face-to-face access to specialist palliative care seven days a week from nine to five, despite this being the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence standard since 2004, and only 2% of trusts provide a

24/7 face-to-face service. People should not have to die in pain and distress because trusts are not complying with a decade-old NICE standard.

A common theme in the Health Committee's reports has been the need to ensure that choice is on offer. People want to have choice. Will the Government review the choice on offer for children and young people at the end of their lives, as they have done for adults? I have a further concern that without proper investment in community services and specialist palliative care services, choice will remain restricted. In the previous Parliament the number of district nurses fell by 2,400, and many other community nursing posts, particularly senior posts, were cut. With such a hollowing out and deskilling of the community sector, I am concerned that the nurses who provide end-of-life care services are coming under increasing pressure, without the time or specialist skills to provide the quality care and compassion needed at the end of life.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) raised the serious issue of the level of cuts to adult social care. We know that we have already lost £4.6 billion from adult social care budgets since 2010. The King's Fund, the Health Foundation and the Nuffield Trust have said that there will be a gap of around £3 billion in social care by the end of this Parliament. As we approach the Budget, it is important to acknowledge that the Government's funding plans will not address that gap. The Local Government Association reported last week that councils are looking at council tax options that will raise only £370 million this year, which is less than the Government predicted. The promised better care funding is back-loaded, with nothing this year and only £100 million next year. In my local authority area, Salford, we will raise only £1.6 million this year, compared with cuts of £15 million since 2010.

GPs are also finding that they are under increasing pressure. In a recent survey, around 70% said that their workload is sometimes unmanageable, and over half said that the service they provide has deteriorated in the past year. One factor that is key to providing quality end-of-life care—we have heard about this in this debate—is ensuring that doctors and nurses have time to have the conversations needed with patients, families and other care providers, but the funding and staffing pressures I mentioned will not help staff to have time for those conversations.

The Health Committee's report called for free adult social care at the end of life, and we made that a commitment in the Labour party manifesto, as my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) mentioned. In recommending that, there is clearly the issue of where we find the funding that we have talked about in this debate. It is clear that offering better support in the community would mean fewer hospital admissions. Too many people approaching death are forced to spend long periods of time in hospital owing to a lack of social care or alternative support options, and that is unsustainable.

The Chair of the Health Committee referred to the Nuffield Trust's evaluation of the Marie Curie nursing service, which found that people cared for by a Marie Curie nurse had total care costs of around £500 less per person, and hospital stays and costs were often avoided. Only 8% of Marie Curie patients died in hospital, compared with 42% of people without a Marie Curie

nurse. The End of Life Care Coalition thinks that those results can be replicated in other palliative care nursing services. Free adult social care at the end of life could also help to reduce the inequalities that currently exist in end of life care services due to age, gender, diagnosis, geography and deprivation, as has been mentioned.

We have heard that 88% of palliative care in-patients and 75% of new referrals were for people with a cancer diagnosis, even though cancer accounts for only around 29% of deaths. Older people receive less specialist palliative care than other age groups: only 16% is provided to people aged 85 or over, although 39% of deaths occur in that age group. We should be delivering services that enable someone living with dementia and someone living with cancer to receive the same quality of end-of-life care.

Will the Minister tell the House whether the Government will implement free social care for people nearing the end of life? The Opposition believe that altering the funding criteria for NHS continuing healthcare is not enough. He said in response to an earlier debate on end-of-life care:

“We have enough paper evidence. We know what looks good, how to make it happen and that it needs to happen, and we know that many people die in circumstances that leave much to be desired.”—[*Official Report*, 4 November 2015; Vol. 601, c. 1089.]

We need action. We need a response to the “Choice” review, describing what action the Government will take on the key issues of choice, funding for end-of-life care and social care services, co-ordination and the identification and support of carers. If end-of-life care is the litmus test for health and social care services, we are currently failing it for too many people. We need good quality, compassionate end-of-life care to be available so that each person nearing the end of life can feel supported and safe in the knowledge that they will receive the very best care.

5.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): What a fantastic debate this has been on a most important subject, with many Members bringing their personal experiences to the attention of the House, and with such agreement on both sides about what constitutes good end-of-life care and what we need to do to improve the situation.

As Members on both sides have acknowledged, the situation is already very good. As my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) pointed out, *The Economist* recently rated end-of-life care in this country the finest in the world. The hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) said that that fact made her proud to be British, and I am sure many others share that sentiment. My hon. Friends the Members for Henley (John Howell) and for Poole (Mr Syms) said that our end-of-life care was a sign of Britain at its best, not just because we are doing well compared with other countries, but because that care exemplifies many of the qualities we cherish in our communities—community work, giving and generosity, especially in our hospice movement, which is unique to this country, and of which we are proud. There is, therefore, much to be proud about.

Our end-of-life care comes from a deep tradition, which, in its current incarnation, goes back to Dame Cicely Saunders, as the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) pointed out, but far further back too, into our medieval history. It is about care for the dying

and an understanding, as many Members have pointed out, that the special time at the end of life should be cherished and that we should respect care at that time as much as we would other parts of people’s care.

However, as hon. Members also pointed out, there is much too much variation. The hon. Member for Burnley said that that in itself is something of which we should be ashamed, and I agree with her about that too. There is exceptional care in this country for people approaching the end of life, but there is also, I am afraid, care that is not good enough. Constituents have put that to hon. Members across the House, and we need to change that in this Parliament.

We need to eradicate the variation I mentioned; to quote Bevan, we need to universalise the best—that is one of the foundation stones of our NHS. Indeed, that was a promise made during the assisted dying debate. As the hon. Members for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and for Central Ayrshire pointed out, exceptional palliative care is the foundation of all care in the NHS, and it should be the expectation of everyone reaching the end of their life. That is where I would like to start in replying to hon. Members’ remarks.

The quality of care we provide for people in hospitals and at home is a mark of how we think about the national health service and the care services we provide. We should not think of them purely as curative services; they work as curative services only if that cure is on a foundation of care, and that is why getting this issue right is so important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) said this issue should be a priority, not just because of its importance in and of itself, but because it points to many of the efficiencies we can make in the health service and the care sector, which will free up money for care elsewhere in the sector.

The hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) said end-of-life care embodied compassion in the service, and that is why we should place especial importance on it. My hon. Friend the Member for Poole said that respect at the end of life was something all clinicians and all others involved in care should show. Again, if we are able to achieve that for people for whom there is no cure, we can also do something remarkable for those elsewhere in the service, for whom there is, happily, the prospect of a cure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies) said we needed to make particular changes in different settings, whether that was improving privacy in hospitals, improving discharge to home or improving the ability to look after people in their permanent residence, be that at home or in a care home. We need to take a range of different approaches in order to eradicate the variation that so many hon. Members have talked about. People can be expected to achieve choice only if a consistent quality of care is offered in all settings.

Hon. Members have pointed out the need to address funding, and NHS England is looking at the different currencies of care. We need also to look at the measurement of how care is provided. I have taken note of the points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Totnes and for Faversham and Mid Kent about the need to produce consistent measurements for quality of care at a local level. I hope to be able to deal with that in the not too distant future.

[Ben Gummer]

We need to look at the accountability of clinicians. I point Members in the direction of the “gold line” offered by Airedale NHS Foundation Trust. I take very seriously the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), who talked about named doctors, and refer him to the Secretary of State’s comments of 29 October where he expressly said that there should be a named consultant for patients in hospital. I hope that we will be able to extend that principle further afield, as we already have done in the course of the previous Parliament.

This matter should be addressed in a holistic manner. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) mentioned the need for the care of young people to be accommodated within these plans, and I intend to take that forward. We also need to consider those who are very young.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and my hon. Friends the Members for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) and for Erewash (Maggie Throup) referred to people who do not have cancer, especially those suffering from Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer’s disease, falling out of the safety net in some areas. All those points were well made and will be taken into account.

I want to reflect on the comments of many Members about the importance of having a conversation. Professionals need to be brave, as my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash said. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd mentioned the need for confidence from professionals and for education.

John Redwood: Will my hon. Friend take up my point about relatives handling the death and the lack of a medical certificate or a death certificate?

Ben Gummer: I will. I take my right hon. Friend’s comments on that very seriously. We are looking at the whole system of death certification, and I hope to be able to come to the House in that regard in the not too distant future. His points were very well made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) talked about the duty that we all have to ensure that there is a better conversation between patients and clinicians; we should all be able to have that conversation so that we can break what my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent described as a taboo. At this point, not just as a Government or as Ministers but as a society, we need to grasp the nettle. We will all need to be involved so that we can give people the confidence to talk about such matters.

Barbara Keeley: It sounds as though the Minister is about to conclude his remarks, but he has not yet said when the Government will respond to the “Choice” review, which I asked about, as did several other Members. That is very important.

Ben Gummer: As I have made clear publicly, we will respond in short order to the “Choice” review, but I want to get this right. It is important that we make the content of the response as good as possible, and I do not want to compromise on that. Moreover, the hon. Lady’s party did not bring forward such a review.

This has been a very good debate on all sides. I am delighted by the cross-party support for the need to make changes. I hope that we will return to this debate in the weeks and months ahead and will be able to continue making a real change in the way that we approach death and end-of-life care in this country.

6.4 pm

Dr Wollaston: I thank all Members who have contributed to this debate and for making so many important points about how we can roll out the very best care and make it available to all of our constituents. I am disappointed that the Minister has not told us when he will respond to the “Choice” review, because it has been a year since its publication. As we have heard, a number of reports have set out what needs to be done. This is now the time for action and for the Minister to set out when it will take place.

Question deferred (Standing Order No. 54).

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. We have just concluded two days of debate on the Government’s estimates, but the estimated expenditure itself has not been debated. At 7 o’clock, we will be asked to authorise the Government’s spending plans for Departments of State—some £600 billion of public money—without there having been any debate whatsoever about them. How can that possibly be right, and what should Scottish Members of Parliament do now that we are effectively banned from voting on English-only legislation that may have a Barnett consequential? We were told that that would be considered in the estimates process, but we are not getting the chance—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Mr Wishart, you have made your point very well time and again, and I understand why you are frustrated. As you know, it has been agreed by the House and that is what the Standing Orders say. We all know that it is not the Chair who is responsible.

Welfare Reform and Work Bill

Consideration of Lords message

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I must draw the House's attention to the fact that financial privilege is involved in Lords amendments 8B, 8C, 9B and 9C.

Before Clause 4

6.7 pm

The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel): I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendments 1B, 1C and 1D.

Mr Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the Government motion to disagree with Lords amendments 8B and 8C and the Government motion to disagree with Lords amendments 9B and 9C.

Priti Patel: Lords amendments 1B, 1C and 1D place a duty on the Secretary of State to publish data annually on four low-income statistics. Let me start by being very clear about what the Government are not doing in these amendments: we are not returning to the broken state of affairs in the Child Poverty Act 2010; we are not returning to a policy approach driven by flawed income measures; and we are not compromising on the new life chances measures and the approach that we have set out in the Bill. Income measures do not drive the right action. They focus the Government's finite resources on the symptoms of child poverty, not the root causes.

Let me be clear on what these amendments are about. They provide a further guarantee that information on low income will be made available for all to see, every year. We have repeatedly given commitments on that throughout the passage of the Bill, in both Houses. The "Households below average income" publication, which provides a range of low-income data, already has statutory protection as a national statistics product. We are now reinforcing that with a new statutory duty to publish those data annually. Three of the four income statistics—relative low income, combined low income and material deprivation, and absolute low income—are already routinely published in the HBAI publication.

Our commitment goes beyond the data that are already published. It will also place a statutory duty on the Secretary of State to publish new data annually on children living in persistent low-income households. The information will be based on a new data source, and the first figures will be published before the end of the 2016-17 financial year. We believe that those data are a useful addition, because they tell us about families who are stuck on low incomes.

However, although we have given full statutory guarantees that those low-income data will be published annually, we will not commit to the Government's laying a report on them to Parliament. Reporting to Parliament on those statistics would incentivise Governments to take the wrong action and would simply continue to drive actions, such as direct income transfers, that fail to tackle the root causes of child poverty. The duty to publish low-income data is fundamentally different from reporting on or setting targets for them, and Opposition Members should not confuse the two.

We need to move away from the flawed "poverty plus a pound" approach that income measures incentivise. Resources are finite, and it is crucial that the Government prioritise the actions that will make the biggest difference to children. The evidence is clear that tackling worklessness and low educational attainment will make the biggest difference to children's life chances. That is why the Government will report to Parliament on their life chances measures of worklessness and educational attainment every year.

We are also committed to publishing a number of non-statutory measures annually, including family stability, drug and alcohol dependence and problem debt, but we firmly believe that any move to report on those low-income measures would divide Government's efforts and undermine the new life chances approach, which will bring about the transformative change that we all want to see. I urge hon. Members to support the motion to agree with amendments 1B, 1C and 1D.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is really unhelpful, when we look at poverty, to focus on relative income measures? If there is a recession and incomes fall, poverty will appear to have got better when it has actually got worse. We need to look differently at poverty and focus on its underlying causes rather than on relative income measures.

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend highlights the fundamental purpose of the changes that we are making. We are focusing on the root causes: life chances, and key aspects such as worklessness and educational attainment.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): I have two very quick points to make. First, no Government over the next 10 years will have the resources that previous Governments had to drive their counter-poverty programme by increasing cash transfers. We might wish that it were different, but we need to grow up. Secondly, may I push the Minister further on whether the Government are open to looking at birth readiness, toddlerhood and school readiness as additional key indicators if we are, within existing resources, to make a real difference to the life chances of the poorest children?

Priti Patel: The right hon. Gentleman makes my point for me and, importantly, highlights the significance of the Government's work on life chances. That will cover the whole range of ages, because it is of fundamental importance that the Government provide the right measures to support people throughout their lives.

I turn to the employment and support allowance work-related activity component, and the universal credit limited capability for work element measures. I remind the House why the changes are being made. As we stated when we last debated the measures, the change is urgently needed to ensure that the right incentives—and, importantly, support—are available to help more people with disabilities and health conditions to move closer to, and into, employment. We have experienced record employment levels and strong jobs growth over the past few years, but the benefits have bypassed the majority of those who are stuck on ESA. Only one in 100 ESA claimants in the WRAG moves off benefits each month, compared with one in five jobseeker's allowance claimants.

[Priti Patel]

That cannot be right, and the Government believe that people with health conditions and disabilities deserve better.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): My understanding from our debate on the matter last week is that the Government intend to put an extra £100 million into supporting that group. However, will the Minister confirm that the savings she plans to make from the measure are much greater—some £600 million?

Priti Patel: The hon. Lady will know from the Bill and the impact assessments the fiscal savings that will result from the measure. Fundamentally, we are making the change so that we can provide long-term support. For that reason, I think that all hon. Members will look forward to it.

We are committed to tackling the problem that too few people are moving off benefits and being supported into employment. There are economic, social and moral arguments for ensuring that those who are able to work can work, and that they are supported into work. Work is the most effective way to improve the wellbeing of individuals, their families and their communities.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): The Government's equalities watchdog has said that there is

“very little in the way of evidence”

to show that what the Government are trying to do will support disabled people back into work. In the last five years, the number of working-age disabled people has fallen, and the Government speak from a track record of failure. Are disabled people not right to be sceptical about what is about to happen? What direct evidence can the Minister offer about the support that will be delivered to disabled people?

Priti Patel: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware from his participation in the Public Bill Committee and during the Bill's passage through the House, the Government are committed to bringing in reforms. As I will shortly come on to say, the reforms will be set out in a White Paper later this year. Importantly—we are optimistic; we really are—the White Paper will outline our plans to reform further the help to support people with health conditions and disabilities into work.

6.15 pm

A large body of evidence shows that work is good for physical and mental wellbeing. There is also a growing awareness, as I am sure all Members recognise, that long-term worklessness is harmful to both physical and mental health. Reform is therefore vital in itself, but we will go further. We are ambitious; we do not believe in writing people off. Importantly, we will ensure that the welfare system incentivises and supports people into employment.

Neil Coyle *rose*—

Priti Patel: I will give way one more time.

Neil Coyle: In the past five years—in fact, in the past six years, during which the coalition and this Government have been in office—the number of disabled people of

working age in work has fallen, the Government have closed Remploy factories, the number of disability employment advisers in Jobcentre Plus has fallen by 20% and the number of people supported by the Access to Work programme has fallen.

Priti Patel: I will repeat my starting premise: we are more positive and optimistic for people with health conditions and disabilities. Support through the Access to Work programme has increased. We have great initiatives, such as the Disability Confident campaign, which is supporting people back into work. The hon. Gentleman may want to join us, perhaps by hosting a Disability Confident event in his constituency. I would very much welcome such support. I think that we should be optimists. This Government are committed to halving the employment disability gap, which all Members of the House should welcome.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I very much welcome the Minister's ambition, which I share, to halve the employment disability gap, and the pathway that will be a crucial part of the White Paper. Will she provide reassurance that the good intentions in relation to the Lords amendments—identifying those affected in the work-related activity group, the impact on them and their wellbeing, and having better information, as well as tailored support—will very much be part of the imminent White Paper? Can we have some reassurance about that process before the changes start to have an impact?

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. He will know this, but let me tell the House that I have met a number of colleagues who, quite rightly, want to know more about the White Paper. In relation to the changes that will be made, they have expressed concerns about the content and direction of the White Paper. I want to make it clear that this is an ongoing dialogue. I will continue to engage with all colleagues in the House, as well as stakeholders and charities, which have a valuable contribution to make and are interested in this area. In particular, my hon. Friend and my hon. Friends the Members for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland), for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) and for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) have raised with me their desire for the reforms to produce the right outcome. I and the Government share that desire. Importantly, we will work together to make sure that we get the right outcomes.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Will the Minister give way?

Priti Patel: I will not give way. We are pressed for time, so I want to make some progress.

As the Secretary of State said last summer, the purpose of the reforms is to ensure that we give people with disabilities and health conditions all the appropriate and necessary support that they need to move them closer to the labour market and to support them into work. We are basing all that we do around what works for them. Importantly, as applies to the other amendments, we are focused particularly on life chances.

I will, if I may, move on to the debate in the other place. I can report that, since we last met, the other place has chosen not to insist on its amendments 8 and 9, which removed the changes to the ESA WRAG and the UC LCW element. However, it has agreed what is in

effect a wrecking amendment, because it could in practice prevent the provisions from coming into force, despite the fact that my noble Friend and colleague Lord Freud committed to several additional measures to help those affected by the change, which addressed a number of the specific requests raised in the Lords.

Let me set out the extra measures we have committed to in the other place. First, the additional measures include an additional £15 million in 2017-18, when the changes to the ESA WRAG and the UC LCW element come into force, to increase the local Jobcentre flexible support fund. The money, which will be set aside specifically for those with limited capability for work, represents a 22% increase in the overall fund.

Secondly, in response to the concerns that were raised about claimants with progressive conditions, we have committed to improving the awareness of the reassessment process and the guidance for claimants and disability charities about reassessments. We will provide additional support and training to jobcentre staff to ensure that they are aware that they may need to talk about requests for reassessments with claimants with deteriorating conditions.

Finally, we will improve the work incentives for those who continue to receive ESA even further by removing the 52-week limit that applies to permitted work for those in the ESA WRAG. That will allow claimants to gain skills and experience and to build their confidence, while still receiving the benefit over a longer period. We will support these individuals to get back into work.

As I said earlier, despite those additional measures, the other place proceeded with amendments that ignore the clear voice of this democratically elected House, which has supported the changes to the ESA WRAG and the UC LCW element, and the fact that we have voted on this measure five times. Although, on the face of it, the amendments may appear to be reasonable, let me set out how they are, in effect, potentially wrecking amendments.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Priti Patel: I will proceed, because we have very little time. The right hon. Gentleman will get the chance to speak once all the introductory speeches have been made.

First, the amendments would require the Secretary of State to publish a report on the impact of the changes prior to the changes being made, and not to introduce the reform until the report had been published. Specifically, the report would be about the impacts on a person's health, finances and ability to return to work. In line with normal practice, we of course intend to evaluate this change.

My noble Friend Lord Freud has confirmed in the other place that we will monitor the impact through regular national statistics. However, it will be impossible to provide the majority of the information requested in the amendments through our analysis prior to implementation, because the data that are currently available do not allow us to make any meaningful estimate. That means that the amendments would delay the implementation of the measure by four years and cost more than £1 billion of the savings for which this democratically elected House has voted.

The amendments would not only impact on the savings associated with this change, but would hinder the Government in their commitment to do the right thing by providing the right incentives and supporting people with health conditions and disabilities to allow them to improve their life chances, fulfil their potential and get the vital support that they need to enable them to get back to work.

Secondly, the amendments are unacceptable because they seek to require that the commencement regulations be made under the affirmative resolution procedure. At best, that is a delaying tactic that runs contrary to usual parliamentary process. In practice, it would allow the Lords to block the legislation by the back door. I am sure that I am not alone in thinking that the Lords has overstepped the mark on this.

This House voted convincingly for the changes on 23 February. That was the fifth time this House had voted overwhelmingly for this reform—a reform that is financially privileged and that is a key part of our efforts to reform the welfare system by supporting more people into work.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I apologise at the outset for the fact that I will not take interventions, but a lot of people want to make speeches and not everybody got in last week. Also, I am not sure that my voice will hold for very long.

I will speak to Lords amendments 1B, 1C and 1D on child poverty reporting and to Lords amendments 8B, 8C, 9B and 9C on the proposed cuts to the employment and support allowance work-related activity component and its equivalent in universal credit.

On Lords amendments 1B, 1C and 1D, I was going to welcome the Minister's agreeing to publish the percentage of children living in poverty in the way originally described in the Child Poverty Act 2010, based on household income and material deprivation. However, I found the tone that she took in introducing the debate very regrettable. I also regret that the Government have not conceded to the request to submit an annual report to Parliament on the progress on these measures.

As I argued last week, we cannot deny the fact that in relation to child poverty, income matters. As experts in child poverty and child health have stressed in recent weeks and months, it is entirely regrettable that the Government are trying to conflate the consequences of child poverty, for example debt and family breakdown, with the cause—a lack of material resources. I have to disagree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field): there is no evidence to support the Government's proposed interventions. They are likely to have no effect on child poverty and they may even make things worse. Contrary to that, support such as income supplements has been shown to be highly effective.

The Government's predilection for focusing on worklessness, when two thirds of children living in poverty are from working families, reveals exactly where they are coming from. It is about hammering the poor, whether they are in work or not. As I predicted last week, and as yesterday's Institute for Fiscal Studies report shows, the net effect of tax and social security changes will increase the proportion of children in relative poverty by eight percentage points, and those in

[Debbie Abrahams]

absolute poverty by three percentage points by 2020. That means that one in four—2.6 million—of our children will live in poverty. The implications for those children and their families, but also for the country, are stark.

Growing up in poverty limits children's potential and development across a range of areas. Brain scans show how children's brains develop differently when children are subjected to poverty. Poverty leads to poor health and life chances in adulthood, and that has knock-on effects for future generations. We already have the highest mortality of children under five in western Europe, and children from poor families are five times more likely to die than children from rich families. We all need to reflect on that; it should be a concern for us all.

Let me deal with amendments 8B, 8C, 9B and 9C. On Monday, the House of Lords voted overwhelmingly for Lord Low's amendment calling for an assessment of the effects of the proposed measures to reduce social security support for people with disability, impairment or a serious health condition who had been found not fit for work and placed in the ESA WRAG group. In particular, the amendment called for an assessment of the impact on disabled people's physical and mental health, their financial position—we know that disabled people are twice as likely to live in poverty as non-disabled people, and 80% of that is due to their disability—and their ability to return to work.

To refresh people's memory, the Government propose to cut financial support from £102.15 to £73.10—nearly £30 a week or £1,500 a year—for new ESA WRAG claimants from 2017. However, that will also apply to existing WRAG claimants. In April, nearly half a million people who are currently on ESA WRAG will start to migrate to universal credit, and the Government intend to remove the limited capability for work component of the work element of universal credit. That means that everyone currently on ESA WRAG will ultimately be transferred to UC and have their support reduced by that £29.05 a week or £1,500 a year.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Debbie Abrahams: If my hon. Friend will excuse me, I will not. I said that I would not give way, and I want to be fair and consistent.

As Baroness Grey-Thompson pointed out on Monday, the cuts will also affect disabled people in low paid work, who will receive less under universal credit. I acknowledge the Government's concessions in the increase in support to the jobcentre flexible support fund of an extra £15 million in the coming year. However, the payments are flexible and discretionary. I also acknowledge the removal of the 52-week limit on permitted work in ESA and some protection for people with progressive conditions, but they are frankly inadequate.

On the health issues that people on ESA face, we know from the Government's published data from last year that the death rates of people on incapacity benefit/ESA in 2013 was 4.3 times greater than those of the general population. That is an increase of 25% since 2003. People in the support group are 6.3 times more likely to die than the general population, and those in

the WRAG group—the people whom we are saying that we will take this money from—are 2.2 times more likely to die than the general population.

6.30 pm

The innuendo that people with a disability or illness might be faking it or are feckless, and need incentivising into work by having their support cut, is frankly grotesque and belies the epidemiological data. Incapacity benefit and ESA are recognised as good population health indicators, and the release of the Government's own data proves that point. This vulnerable group of people need our care and support, not humiliation.

There is a real risk that these cuts will exacerbate the health and well-being of this vulnerable group of people. The concession that allows disabled people to ask for a reassessment of their work capability assessment is a process that eminent academics in a peer-reviewed journal estimate to be associated with severe adverse mental health effects, including 590 additional suicides between 2011 and 2013. That is hardly reassuring.

All that we know from the Government's impact assessment is that by 2020-21 approximately £640 million a year will have been cut from social security support to disabled people, with £100 million a year to provide unspecified support to help disabled people into work. That is on top of the £23.8 billion that has already been cut from 3.7 million people by the Welfare Reform Act 2012, and it does not include cuts that affect disabled people in social care, education, housing, transport or access to justice. Some 5.1 million disabled people are living in poverty, and last year that number increased by 2%, which is equivalent to 300,000 people. There is no assessment of what this Bill will do to the financial position of disabled people.

Although this is the Welfare Reform and Work Bill, it contains nothing about work. There is nothing about how many disabled people will get into work, or how many extra employers will be involved to reduce the disability employment gap. That is all pushed down the road to the White Paper. As Baroness Campbell said on Monday,

“the Government are demanding a massive leap of faith as financial support to disabled people is cut before publishing details of what a reformed employment and support system will look like.”

I also reject the content of the Secretary of State's letter to Conservative MPs last night, and what we have just heard from the Minister, and the suggestion that the Lords have abused parliamentary process and that the impact assessment is too difficult to do. I suggest that the Secretary of State comes to the Dispatch Box to say that—it is absolute rubbish. He is putting as much spin into the Bill as he is into the EU referendum.

The notion put forward by the Secretary of State is that their Lordships are somehow usurping parliamentary procedure and doing something illegitimate, but in fact they are following parliamentary procedure. Ping-pong, as it is affectionately known, is a fundamental and recognised part of the legislative process. All that their lordships are doing is what every constituent expects their MP, as a legislator, to do, which is to know and understand the impact on their constituents of the laws they vote for. We expect our Government to take their responsibility seriously and provide evidence of the impact of the proposed legislation.

The Secretary of State claims that his Department cannot make a comprehensive assessment of the Bill, but that does not stack up. Five months ago, the Equality and Human Rights Commission wrote to the Minister to say exactly how such an assessment could be undertaken, and it even offered the expertise of its staff to do that. Again, the Secretary of State refused, but any responsible Government should undertake such work. Today MPs are effectively voting on whether they want to make a life-changing decision for their constituents, in the dark or with an understanding of the consequences. It is obvious what their constituents expect, and what they should do.

Lord Low, Baroness Grey-Thompson and Baroness Meacher's report raised the issue of the impact assessment, as have disability charities, disabled people and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. In correspondence to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr Godsiff), the EHRC said:

"We consider that the Government's impact assessments make very little attempt to set out comprehensively how the three aims of the"—

public sector equality—

"duty have been considered. On 16 September 2015, the Commission wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to set out our concerns about the impact assessments for the Welfare Reform and Work Bill. We believe the assessments would benefit from a more detailed consideration of the likely impact of the proposals on people with different protected characteristics. They contain very little in the way of evidence and this limits the accompanying analysis and the scope for parliamentary scrutiny and informed decision-making on the proposed legislative changes."

I am most concerned that the Government have failed to fulfil their public sector equality duty. Under the Equality Act 2010, the Government must properly consider the impact of their policies on the elimination of discrimination, the advancement of equality of opportunity and the fostering of good relations. Supporting the amendments will help to put that right. I urge Members on both sides of the House to support the amendments.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate once again. I know that time is very short, so I will keep my remarks short and speak to Lords amendments 8B and 9B.

I would like to begin by thanking the Minister for the movement she has made so far on the flexible support fund and scrapping the 52-week permitted work limit. That is very welcome and a good move in the right direction. Although I disagree with the Government on this issue and I voted against the Government last week, I am concerned that this ping-pong is evolving into petty politics that is constraining the issue we should be discussing, which is the reform of welfare on a very technical point.

The Lords amendments are based on the amendment my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and I tabled on Report. I would have welcomed that amendment coming back last week, as opposed to this week. We have spent a lot of time on this amendment. I will be voting against the Government tonight, but I feel we should be putting this behind us and moving forward to discuss the White Paper. I want the Minister to be aware that I will be publishing a Green Paper and inviting colleagues who are also concerned to contribute to it, so we can broaden the horizon out on what we would like in terms of welfare reform.

I want to reiterate the fact that the Conservative party considers it its proud duty to look after the disabled in our community. The Conservatives are very happy, ideologically, to provide a welfare state that helps those in need. When people fall on hard times, we will look after them. Nobody is trying to punish anybody in the Bill or in the amendments we are discussing. The reality is that my Conservative colleagues and I want to get to the same position as the Government, which is to help as many disabled people as possible who want to work to get back into work.

Dr Philippa Whitford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen McPartland: I am not going to give way, simply because we are short of time.

In my view, the Work programme has failed. One out of 100 people are moving off it. That is our failure, not the failure of the people on the programme. We all want a fix. We want to get as many disabled people who want to work back into work. We just disagree on how we achieve that. I hope our Green Paper will help the Government to publish their White Paper. I genuinely think we would not have been in this position if the White Paper had been brought forward already and we were not having to take on faith something we are not really sure is going to happen, who the Ministers will be, who will be in charge of the money, and how we are going to move forward for these disabled people.

I want to reassure my constituents in the ESA WRAG that the changes apply only to new claimants from 1 April 2017. There has been a lot of confusion about that in my postbag and I want to reassure my constituents on that.

I will vote against the Government tonight, but I hope it will be for the last time on this particular issue.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland). We use the word "honourable" in this House far too often, but in this case he has been very honourable in the way he has approached this particular subject.

In the brief time available to us this evening, I hope I can set out the clear reasons why the House must accept Lords amendments 8B, 8C, 9B and 9C tonight. Let me first say that I welcome the Government's partial change of heart to place the reporting of income-related child poverty on a statutory footing. Amendments 1B, 1C and 1D are not perfect, but they at least represent some progress. I hope that Conservative Members will now see the merits of accepting other arguments made by the Opposition regarding ESA and the work component of universal credit.

Last week, I was invited to sit on the Reasons Committee after we voted and rejected the previous Lords amendments. For those unfamiliar with it, the Committee meets immediately after the vote and agrees the reason to be articulated to the Lords from the Government as to why their amendments were refused. On ESA and universal credit amendments, the reasons were exactly the same:

"Because it would alter the financial arrangements made by the Commons; and the Commons do not offer any further Reason, trusting that this Reason may be deemed sufficient."

[Neil Gray]

So the Commons did not offer “any further Reason”, which I found shocking. The Government could not come up with anything else to say—no empirical evidence, no logical argument, nothing socially responsible or of any consequence. It relied on a pseudo-constitutional technicality to explain the decision to remove £30 a week from the pockets of sick and disabled people on ESA WRAG. Ping-pong is being used and abused as an excuse in this regard. What message does that send from this Government to ESA recipients? It says, “We don’t need to justify why we are cutting your ESA, we just are. We just can and we just will. We trust that this reason may be deemed sufficient.”

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Neil Gray: I am sorry, but time is tight and other right hon. and hon. Members have refused to take interventions.

As I was saying, the Government said that they trusted their reason “be deemed sufficient”. There is, of course, nothing to say because this Government have not done their homework. The impact assessment has not been done. The Government have no idea how this will impact on claimants, their health or their ability to progress towards work. Tonight, the Government will not have that technicality to fall back on. The revised amendments from the Lords ask the Government to provide the impact assessment that should have been done right at the start of this process and for it to be scrutinised before any cut to ESA would be forthcoming.

This amendment from Lord Low and his colleagues sets a challenge to this Minister and her Government. It sets a challenge to accept the amendment or do a better job of reasoning why the amendment should be opposed. It does not cost the Government any extra money; it just asks for them to do the work they should have done before even bringing these proposals to the House.

Some Conservatives voted with the Government last week, holding their nose. They did so on the “jam tomorrow” promise dangled by the Government in the shape and form of the much vaunted White Paper on health and work. Surely Conservative Members must now be asking whether the cart is being put before the horse. Why not publish the White Paper and explain what is going to replace this damaging cut to the incomes of sick and disabled people? Such a radical cut to social security for sick and disabled recipients merits at least that.

We should also consider the various court cases being brought against this Government regarding their welfare cuts—the bedroom tax, and carer’s allowance as part of the benefit cap. And the UN is investigating the cuts in general. By not doing their homework on cuts to ESA and universal credit and by not producing an impact assessment, the Government risk being dragged to court at great expense to the taxpayer once again and at great embarrassment to themselves once again.

I would rather have seen passed the amendments we tabled at the end of last year or those we considered last week. The Government won the votes on those occasions, but this is back before us tonight from the House of Lords. Universal opposition from disability groups and third sector organisations remains, while the fact that so

many compassionate Conservative Members are thinking of voting against the Government tonight shows they have not won the argument. They have not convinced us that these cuts should happen before an impact assessment has been scrutinised, and they have not convinced us that these cuts should happen before the alternative in their White Paper has even been presented.

Given the apparent importance of this issue to the Government, the fact that the amendments are tabled in the name of the Secretary of State and that so many Conservatives are so close to voting against him, one would have thought that we would see the Secretary of State in his place this evening—if not at the Dispatch Box, at least somewhere on the Government Benches to show that he is not taking his Back Benchers for granted. He failed to attend the debate last week, and he has failed to appear again tonight. He has shown disrespect to the House, disrespect to his Conservative colleagues, and a blatant disregard for ESA and universal credit recipients whose support is due to be cut. As we heard from the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), he has apparently already written to his Back Benchers in a last-ditch attempt to shore up support, saying that the impact assessments satisfy the Equality and Human Rights Commission. That is simply not true: the commission says that they do not.

6.45 pm

I understand that Conservative Members may not wish to agree with what I have to say, or indeed with what is said by those on the Labour Front Bench, but this matter is too important for them not to listen to what is said by those will be affected by the cuts. Last week, I quoted from an excellent speech made by Baroness Grey-Thompson.

Tanni Grey-Thomson, an 11-times wheelchair racing gold medalist, has no political axe to grind; she has no interest in giving the Government a bloody nose for the sake of it. She has campaigned hard on this issue because she can see the impact that the cuts will have. On Monday night, she said:

“Many people are already close to crisis point. They feel so beaten up by the changes that they are finding it hard to articulate. It is not that they do not care. They just do not have the energy left and are just trying to survive.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 29 February 2016; Vol. 769, c. 607-8.]

I could reel off any number of quotations from third sector organisations that have been mentioned in previous debates, and we agree with what they have said. Last week the Minister said that she had worked with them, but they remain concerned about the cuts, and we have to ask ourselves why. They have drawn attention to the impact that those cuts will have on the people they represent. I implore Conservative Members to consider what they have to say, and to weigh that expert evidence against the Government’s failure to provide any evidence at all.

The amendments offer a sensible opportunity for the Government to take stock, gather the evidence relating to a cut of £30 per week for those who are sick and disabled, and explain in detail what replacement they propose. Surely if DWP Ministers have confidence in their arguments, they will have no problem supplying the necessary evidence to the House, and to those who will suffer the impact of these cuts.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. There are 18 minutes left before the debate must end. I trust that no Member will speak for more than two minutes, as a courtesy to other Members.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Playing ping-pong with the other place, or receiving a Lords message, sounds rather genteel and polite, doesn't it? However, I ask all Members almost to divorce their thinking from the issue on which we shall be voting later. Dare I say to my right hon. Friend the Minister, and indeed to the shadow Minister, that virtually everything they said was an irrelevance? The House has already debated the point, and, as my right hon. Friend the Minister noted, we have voted on it on five occasions and have voted in the affirmative. We are now concerned with a much bigger issue, which should, in my judgment, unite all quarters of the House: the issue of the supremacy of this place as the elected House of Commons. As we know, in the last century the House had exactly the same debate on the people's Budget.

The Minister was right. The Lords amendments are wrecking amendments, and the unelectable seem to be relying on the unelected to try to frustrate the policies and the position of Her Majesty's Government, which was well articulated during the general election campaign and has been debated incredibly thoroughly in the House and elsewhere. Last night the House of Lords played a very dangerous game. It said to the democratically accountable House of Parliament in this country, "We know better than you, the electorate; we know better than you, the elected Government." We are on the cusp—issue apart—of a constitutional conundrum which will not end easily for the upper House. The authority of this place is now under significant and serious challenge. It is time for parties to unite, and for us to exercise and exert our supremacy in a democratic Parliament.

Stephen Timms: I think that the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) must be rather inexperienced in the procedures of Parliament, because ping-pong is a well-established feature of our proceedings.

I welcome the change of heart on the publication of child poverty indicators, but I am very disappointed by the position that the Minister has taken on the Lords amendments on the employment and support allowance. It is a shame that the Secretary of State is not here tonight. As we have heard, he has written to Back-Bench Conservative Members to tell them that it is "impossible to provide" the information that is required. However, that is not what the Equality and Human Rights Commission says, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) pointed out in her excellent speech. A letter from the commission's chief executive dated 16 September last year made this point:

"Assessments need to include sufficient detail and analysis to demonstrate that the draft proposals have been adequately considered for their potential impact on equality. We have considerable expertise in this area".

However, the Secretary of State rejected its offer of help and now says that it is impossible to provide the information. It is perfectly possible to provide that information, but

Ministers do not wish to provide it because the House would then be able to see what the effects would be.

An attempt has been made to present these changes as in the interests of disabled people, but they are not supported by a single one of the organisations representing disabled people. Parkinson's UK has made its position very clear:

"The policy is likely to have a significant, harmful impact on the health and wellbeing of people with Parkinson's."

Macmillan Cancer Support states:

"Macmillan strongly opposes the proposed reductions because of the negative impact they will have on people affected by cancer and other long-term conditions."

The judgment that the House has to make tonight is whether Ministers are speaking for disabled people or whether the organisations representing disabled people are speaking for them. I hope that the House will choose in favour of the latter.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): This is a very important debate. It is important to note that these changes relating to the provision of the employment and support allowance work-related activity component will have no impact on existing claimants. They will apply only to new claimants and to claims made after April next year.

Additionally, the Government have said that they will publish a White Paper this spring detailing how they plan to improve support for people with health conditions and disabilities. I look forward to seeing what is in that White Paper, particularly on the role of employers in reducing the disability employment gap. I carried out my fifth jobs and apprenticeships fair in my constituency recently, and the 40 employers I spoke to all agreed that they would commit to a Disability Confident-aware fair, which is what I will hold this year. I am going to play my part, and everybody in this House has a role to play in helping people who wish to get into work.

There is an overwhelming body of evidence that work is generally good for physical and mental wellbeing, and 61% of those in work-related activity groups say that they want to work. The existing policy set up by Labour in 2008 is failing those claimants. Despite £2.7 billion being spent this year supporting those in the ESA work-related activity group, just 1% of the WRAG claimants moved off ESA each month. The policy is clearly not working, and we need a better system than this.

Jo Cox (Batley and Spen) (Lab): I urge the Government to remember that, by their own definition, claimants receiving work-related ESA are not capable of work at that time. They are people the Government's own work capability assessment has deemed not to be fit for work. Surely it is therefore preposterous that the Government think they can cure those people's complex and long-term ailments and miraculously incentivise them to return to work by reducing their financial support.

If implemented, these cuts will surely also hinder the Government's ambition to halve the disability employment gap. Instead, they will push many disabled people further into poverty and have a significant and harmful impact on the health and wellbeing of many people, including many in my constituency. As has been mentioned, a Macmillan survey of nearly 1,000 people living with cancer recently found that one in 10 would be unable, or would struggle, to pay their rent or mortgage if they lost

[Jo Cox]

£30 a week. How can this Government think it is acceptable to risk cancer patients losing their homes as a result of these cuts? Surely, as has been said by many hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland), who spoke articulately and with such passion and principle, it is time to listen to Macmillan, Scope, Sense and Parkinson's UK, to the many experts who have lined up and to the recommendations of the parliamentary review of the proposed cuts and reverse the removal of the work-related ESA component—and the equivalent payment under universal credit—as proposed by these amendments. It is also surely time for a thorough impact assessment of the proposed changes before they come into effect.

Finally, instead of cutting these life-saving benefits, the Government should, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) has so clearly articulated, put in place much more effective back-to-work support and provide more disability employment advisers to help these people deal properly with the barriers they face. We should not be punishing some of the most vulnerable people in our country—we should be giving them a helping hand.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): When I spoke on this matter in this House a week ago, I referred to the issue of the publication of data and the Lords amendments then before us. I recall saying, in answer to an intervention from an Opposition Member, that I felt sure the Minister for Employment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) would be giving an assurance that the Government would be guaranteeing that the sort of data that the Labour party was asking for would be guaranteed and would be published annually. Lo and behold, that is what has happened. She has been absolutely correct in making that concession to the Lords, and the resulting Lords amendments 1B, 1C and 1D are to be welcomed. I hope we can all support them this evening.

On the other Lords amendments, 8B, 8C, 9B and 9C, my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) has articulated the parliamentary process. I will not go through any more of those arguments, but it is clearly the fact that this House—the democratically elected House—has quite properly voted on these matters on many occasions. I served on the Bill Committee, along with the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), for many occasions last autumn, and all these issues have been discussed in full and passed by this House.

Rather than the process, what is important to remember is this: everybody, on both sides of this House, wants to do the right thing. This Government have at the heart of their policy the fact that we will ensure that those with long-term illnesses or physical or mental disabilities will get all the help that they need to move closer to work. Of course that is the right approach, and it is the essence of the Government's policy.

While on the issue, I should say that I am holding a Disability Confident event this Friday in my constituency, with the Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), and that shows that with a rounded package of measures, this Government are absolutely committed

to helping those who need the most support to get closer to work. It is time to get these measures on the statute book.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The proposal to cut the incomes of people on ESA WRAG by £1,500 is one of the most mean-spirited yet from this Government. The fact that the cut applies only to new claimants, in a little over a year's time, demonstrates the unease Ministers have about it and their hope—a vain one—that because it applies only to new claimants, somehow people will not notice. The fact is that Ministers are looking for large savings at the expense of the poorest and most vulnerable. That was not made clear in the general election campaign; then, the Prime Minister said that disabled people would be protected.

The Minister said that she was going to spend another £100 million on supporting these people. If her scheme was going to work, she would not need to cut this £30 from such people's weekly income, because she would get the savings as they all moved into work. This is doomed to fail and the Minister knows it. If she was convinced that it was going to work, she would do the impact assessment, because she would be confident of the upshot. She is not doing so, and she is ignoring the very real impact that this will have on the health of the most vulnerable of our fellow citizens.

7 pm

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am in complete support of my right hon. Friend the Minister and entirely in disagreement with the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray), who is a very civilised gentleman. When he said that this was a pseudo-constitutional issue, he could not have been more wrong. This House's democratic authority is wholly based on financial privilege, which is why, when we reject amendments that engage financial privilege, we give no further reason. Not only is that important to the current Government, but it will be important to the Opposition when they are in government, too. If the House of Lords can challenge the Commons on matters of financial privilege, then the country becomes ungovernable. Those who have the democratic mandate have a right, because of the people whom they represent, to determine issues relating to finance. The other place is increasingly trespassing on that right. The amendment that it passed in lieu decided to give it the right to consider the secondary legislation on a financial matter, which it does not need to do; it has taken it from primary to secondary, upgrading their role on a financial matter. Constitutionally, that is quite wrong. Any Member of this House who thinks that, one day, he may speak from the Treasury Bench Dispatch Box should bear in mind the importance of ensuring that the constitutional norms are maintained.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): There are plenty of cameras in this place, but they do not always pick up what is going on across the Chamber. When my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) was speaking, the Minister was engaged in conversation with a person to her immediate left. I am not sure whether that conversation was related to the debate in hand, but they thought it fit to laugh during the debate when the true impact of these cuts on the people who can least afford them was

being laid out. Either the Minister was not paying attention to the debate because of disinterest, or she thought that what was being laid out was funny. Either way, she should be ashamed of herself.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): The first thing that I did when I was elected to this place in 2010 was to attend a dinner in honour of Alf Morris, the first disabled Minister, to celebrate the passing of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. At that dinner, I sat between Roger Berry, the former MP for Kingswood, and the late Paul Goggins, the former MP for Wythenshawe. Both were excellent Labour disability Ministers, who did a superb job. Also there was William Hague, who brought in the disability living allowance. What that brought home to me was that the only time that real progress is made on disability issues is when there is a spirit of bipartisanship in this Chamber. On this particular issue, that bipartisanship is clearly lacking.

For the past six years—[*Interruption.*] Will the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) please be quiet? Her behaviour now reminds me why I chose not to vote for her for the Public Accounts Committee. She is showing me no courtesy at all.

For six years now, I have believed that we need to improve our support for those with a disability. There is a crying need for reform. We now have a White Paper. I want us all to engage in the process, not just to sit there. I was proud to stand on a manifesto that promised to halve the disability employment gap. Nothing would upset me more than to think that Opposition Members actively want us to fail in that goal, because they see some sort of short-term political gain. They owe it to their constituents and to the country to help us achieve our goal, and I do not think that some of them want to do that.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The cuts to employment and support allowance—

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have just heard a Government Member pray in aid my right hon. Friend Paul Goggins, who is dead, and try to include him on the Government's side of the argument. It is terribly wrong to do that.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Thank you. I call Mr Barry Gardiner.

Barry Gardiner: The cuts to employment and support allowance will make the lives of disabled people harder, the lives of those with mental, cognitive and behavioural difficulties harder, and the lives of those with progressive or fluctuating conditions harder. There are 9,290 people in receipt of employment and support allowance in my borough, Brent. In 2012 one of my constituents was placed in the WRAG group, fit to work—

7.4 pm

One hour having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Lords message, the debate was interrupted (Programme Order, 23 February).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83G), That Lords amendments 1B, 1C and 1D be made.

Lords amendment 1B, 1C and 1D agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83G).

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendments 8B and 8C.—(Priti Patel.)

The House divided: Ayes 309, Noes 274.

Division No. 203]

[7.5 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Davies, David T. C.
Afriyie, Adam	Davies, Glyn
Aldous, Peter	Davies, Dr James
Allan, Lucy	Davies, Mims
Andrew, Stuart	Davies, Philip
Ansell, Caroline	Davis, rh Mr David
Argar, Edward	Dinenage, Caroline
Atkins, Victoria	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Bacon, Mr Richard	Donelan, Michelle
Baker, Mr Steve	Dorries, Nadine
Baldwin, Harriett	Double, Steve
Barclay, Stephen	Dowden, Oliver
Baron, Mr John	Drax, Richard
Barwell, Gavin	Drummond, Mrs Flick
Bebb, Guto	Duddridge, James
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Benyon, Richard	Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Beresford, Sir Paul	Dunne, Mr Philip
Berry, Jake	Ellis, Michael
Berry, James	Ellison, Jane
Bingham, Andrew	Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Blackman, Bob	Elphicke, Charlie
Blackwood, Nicola	Eustice, George
Blunt, Crispin	Evans, Graham
Boles, Nick	Evans, Mr Nigel
Bone, Mr Peter	Evennett, rh Mr David
Borwick, Victoria	Fabricant, Michael
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Fallon, rh Michael
Bradley, Karen	Fernandes, Suella
Brady, Mr Graham	Field, rh Mark
Brazier, Mr Julian	Foster, Kevin
Bridgen, Andrew	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Brine, Steve	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Brokenshire, rh James	Frazer, Lucy
Buckland, Robert	Freeman, George
Burns, Conor	Freer, Mike
Burns, rh Sir Simon	Fuller, Richard
Burrowes, Mr David	Fysh, Marcus
Burt, rh Alistair	Gale, Sir Roger
Cairns, Alun	Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Carmichael, Neil	Garnier, Mark
Cartlidge, James	Gauke, Mr David
Cash, Sir William	Ghani, Nusrat
Caulfield, Maria	Gibb, Mr Nick
Chalk, Alex	Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Chishti, Rehman	Glen, John
Chope, Mr Christopher	Goldsmith, Zac
Churchill, Jo	Goodwill, Mr Robert
Clark, rh Greg	Gove, rh Michael
Cleverly, James	Graham, Richard
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey	Gray, Mr James
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Grayling, rh Chris
Collins, Damian	Green, Chris
Colvile, Oliver	Green, rh Damian
Costa, Alberto	Greening, rh Justine
Cox, Mr Geoffrey	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Crabb, rh Stephen	Griffiths, Andrew
Davies, Byron	Gummer, Ben
Davies, Chris	Gyimah, Mr Sam

Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl

McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Osborne, rh Mr George
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John

Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh

Vickers, Martin
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watkinson, Dame Angela
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:

Simon Kirby and
Jackie Doyle-Price

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Allen, Heidi
Anderson, Mr David
Arkless, Richard
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Boswell, Philip
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Cherry, Joanna
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Cox, Jo
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Mr David
Crawley, Angela
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
De Piero, Gloria
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elliott, Tom
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim

Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glendon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 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, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kinahan, Danny
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 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
 McCartney, Jason
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 McPartland, Stephen
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy

Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, rh 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
 Vaz, Valerie
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

**Vicky Foxcroft and
 Sue Hayman**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 8B and 8C disagreed to.

Clause 14

UNIVERSAL CREDIT: LIMITED CAPABILITY FOR WORK
 ELEMENT

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendments 9B and 9C.—(Priti Patel.)

The House divided: Ayes 309, Noes 275.

Division No. 204]

[7.19 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrows, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Choqe, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David

Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah

Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John

Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr
 John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:

Simon Kirby and
 Jackie Doyle-Price

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Allen, Heidi
 Anderson, Mr David
 Arkless, Richard
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard

Burnham, rh Andy
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Cox, Jo
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Mr David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elliott, Tom
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew

Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 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, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kinahan, Danny
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 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
 McCartney, Jason
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie

McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 McPartland, Stephen
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sheppard, Tommy

Sherriff, Paula
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, rh 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
 Vaz, Valerie
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Vicky Foxcroft and
Sue Hayman

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendments 9B and 9C disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments 8B, 8C, 9B and 9C.

That Debbie Abrahams, Neil Gray, Holly Lynch, Guy Opperman, Priti Patel, David Rutley and Helen Whately be members of the Committee;

That Priti Patel be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee;

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—(*Guy Opperman.*)

Question agreed to.

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Estimates 2015-16

The Deputy Speaker put the deferred Questions (Standing Order No. 54(6)).

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Question put,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2016, for expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office:

1) the resources authorised for use for current purposes be reduced by £20,292,000 as set out in HC 747,

(2) further resources, not exceeding £37,171,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a further sum, not exceeding £16,879,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

The House divided: Ayes 305, Noes 55.

Division No. 205]

[7.33 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartledge, James
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo

Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Elliott, Tom
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy

Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kinahan, Danny
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi

Lancaster, Mark
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philip, Chris
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin

Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie

Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Simon Kirby and
 Jackie Doyle-Price**

NOES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Arkless, Richard
 Bardell, Hannah
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Boswell, Philip
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Day, Martyn
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Hendry, Drew
 Hosie, Stewart
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Law, Chris
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mc Nally, John
 McCaig, Callum
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm

McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McGarry, Natalie
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Mullin, Roger
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Paterson, Steven
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Stephens, Chris
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomson, Michelle
 Weir, Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Wilson, Corri
 Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Noes:

**Owen Thompson and
 Marion Fellows**

Question accordingly agreed to.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE

HOME OFFICE

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2016, for expenditure by the Home Office:

(1) further resources, not exceeding £256,729,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 747,

(2) further resources, not exceeding £356,056,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a further sum, not exceeding £1,328,197,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2016, for expenditure by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills:

(1) the resources authorised for use for current purposes be reduced by £7,152,214,000 as set out in HC 747,

(2) further resources, not exceeding £195,006,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a further sum, not exceeding £72,412,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Resolved,

That for the year ending with 31 March 2016, for expenditure by the Department of Health:

(1) further resources, not exceeding £25,869,317,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 747,

(2) the resources authorised for use for capital purposes be reduced by £945,313,000 as so set out, and

(3) a further sum, not exceeding £252,304,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

The Deputy Speaker then put the Questions on the outstanding Estimates (Standing Order No. 55).

**SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 2015-16 (NAVY)
 VOTE A**

Resolved,

That, during the year ending with 31 March 2016, modifications in the maximum numbers in the Reserve Naval and Marine Forces set out in Supplementary Votes A 2015-16, HC 716, be authorised for the purposes of Parts 1 and 3 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996.—(*Mel Stride.*)

ESTIMATES 2016-17 (NAVY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That, during the year ending with 31 March 2017, a number not exceeding 34,960 all ranks be maintained for Naval and Marine Service and that numbers in the Reserve Naval and Marines Forces be authorised for the purposes of Parts 1, 3, 4 and 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the maximum numbers set out in Votes A 2016-17, HC 715.—(*Mel Stride.*)

ESTIMATES 2016-17 (ARMY) VOTE A*Resolved,*

That, during the year ending with 31 March 2017, a number not exceeding 112,900 all ranks be maintained for Army Service and that numbers in the Reserve Land Forces be authorised for the purposes of Parts 1, 3, 4 and 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the maximum numbers set out in Votes A 2016-17, HC 715.—(*Mel Stride.*)

ESTIMATES 2016-17 (AIR) VOTE A*Resolved,*

That, during the year ending with 31 March 2017, a number not exceeding 35,500 all ranks be maintained for Air Force Service and that numbers in the Reserve Air Forces be authorised for the purposes of Parts 1, 3, 4 and 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the maximum numbers set out in Votes A 2016-17, HC 715.—(*Mel Stride.*)

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES 2014-15*Resolved,*

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2015—

(1) resources, not exceeding £104,823,000, be authorised to make good excesses for use for current purposes as set out in Statement of Excesses 2014-15, HC 749,

(2) resources, not exceeding £406,000, be authorised to make good excesses for use for capital purposes as set out in Statement of Excesses 2014-15, HC 749, and

(3) a sum, not exceeding £275,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund to make good excesses on the use of resources authorised by Parliament as set out in Statement of Excesses 2014-15, HC 749.—(*Mel Stride.*)

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 2015-16*Resolved,*

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2016:

(1) further resources, not exceeding £143,043,583,000 be authorised for use for current purposes, as set out in HC 747 and HC 750,

(2) the resources authorised for use for capital purposes be reduced by £21,730,537,000 as so set out, and

(3) the sum authorised for issue out of the Consolidated Fund be reduced by £5,410,893,000 as so set out.—(*Mel Stride.*)

ESTIMATES, VOTE ON ACCOUNT 2016-17*Resolved,*

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2017—

(1) resources, not exceeding £229,024,490,000 be authorised, on account, for use for current purposes as set out in HC 748, HC 751, HC 757, HC 762, HC 802 and HC 812,

(2) resources, not exceeding £29,298,192,000, be authorised, on account, for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a sum, not exceeding £222,965,394,000, be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—(*Mel Stride.*)

Ordered, That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing Resolutions;

That the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Greg Hands, Harriett Baldwin, Damian Hinds and Mr David Gauke bring in the Bill.

SUPPLY AND APPROPRIATION (ANTICIPATION AND ADJUSTMENTS) BILL*Presentation and First Reading, and remaining stages*

Mr David Gauke accordingly presented a Bill to authorise the use of resources for the years ending with 31 March 2015, 31 March 2016 and 31 March 2017; to authorise the issue of sums out of the Consolidated Fund for those years; and to appropriate the supply authorised by this Act for the years ending with 31 March 2015 and 31 March 2016.

Bill read the First time; to be printed (Bill 147).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 56 and Order 24 February), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

*Question agreed to.**Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

Question put forthwith, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

*Question agreed to.**Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.***Business without Debate****DELEGATED LEGISLATION**

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 13 to 18 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft National Assembly for Wales (Representation of the People) (Amendment) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 17 December 2015, be approved.

That the draft National Assembly for Wales (Representation of the People) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 3 February, be approved.

POLICE

That the draft Police and Crime Commissioner Elections (Amendment) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 17 December 2015, be approved.

PATENTS

That the draft Patents (European Patent with Unitary Effect and Unified Patent Court) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 19 January, be approved.

HEALTH CARE AND ASSOCIATED PROFESSIONS

That the draft Pharmacy (Premises Standards, Information Obligations, etc.) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 21 January, be approved.

ELECTRICITY

That the draft Electricity Supplier Payments (Amendment) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 25 January, be approved.—(*Mel Stride.*)

Question agreed to.

Dog Theft: Sentencing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mel Stride.)

7.48 pm

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I am pleased to have secured this debate, and as a dog owner I was minded to do so for a couple of reasons—first, the inadequate sentencing guidelines for this type of offence, and, secondly, the sheer nastiness of this offence and the fact that it needs clamping down on far more than currently happens.

I do not criticise this or any previous Government, but it is necessary to appreciate the devastating impact that the theft of a dog has on its owner. That emotional impact overrides the financial loss, but too often our court systems are geared up to deal with such thefts simply as a form of property crime. The theft of a dog is a particularly nasty offence. Sometimes dogs are targeted because of their monetary value, but often it is done to allow grief stricken owners to put up reward posters in the area, with those rewards then claimed by the actual perpetrator.

Before coming to this House I spent nearly 20 years working in the criminal justice system so I have some appreciation of the difficulties and complexities that the courts are labouring under. I am also aware that organisations such as the Sentencing Council endeavour to provide user friendly, concise guidelines for a multitude of different situations, but I feel that it needs to reflect on its guidelines for offences of theft, as there is little to ensure that those who steal dogs get an appropriate sentence.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. There was a debate in Westminster Hall a few months ago, initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) on dog theft, cat killing and cruelty to pets and one point that arose then is that the law equates the loss of a pet to the loss of property, which is wrong. The law takes no account at all of the wider emotional impact of the theft, or of the societal needs for proper punishment in such cases.

Gareth Johnson: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point, and he is right when he says that there is a failure to acknowledge the emotional impact of such thefts—that is one reason why I secured this debate. Because of the failure of the system, few statistics are kept, and stolen dogs are often deemed to have run away as there is little proof they have been stolen. There is also no separate category of the theft of a dog, and such thefts tend to be lumped together with all the other chattels that get stolen. It is believed by Blue Cross that roughly three dogs are stolen each day. Three cats are also stolen each day, and my hon. Friend was right to mention that because the same principles apply. Almost half those thefts are from people's gardens, one in five is from burglaries, one in seven is from owners walking their dogs, and most of the other thefts take place when people leave their dogs tied up outside shops.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Dogs have been domesticated for millennia, they have been man's

best friend for centuries, and today they remain an integral part of many families and are loved as much as any member. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that introducing a new category would reflect the fact that, although dogs are animals, for many people up and down this nation their dog is as much a part of the family as any other member?

Gareth Johnson: As is often the case, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to point out the failure of the current system. I argue that we can deal with that by amending the sentencing guidelines. It does not necessarily need a change in the law; it needs a change in the approach to sentencing, which is completely inadequate at the moment.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. To reinforce the point just made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), too often people are sentenced as if they have nicked a garden gnome, TV or video that can easily be replaced by buying another one. The theft of a dog is stealing part of the family, and the sentence should reflect the impact that that theft has, which goes far beyond the impact of stealing a TV.

Gareth Johnson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and this debate generates a fair amount of passion because of the pain that such thefts impose on people who go through the loss of a quasi-member of their own family.

Julian Knight: My hon. Friend mentions how pets are stolen in burglaries. Perhaps the courts could consider an offence of aggravated burglary in relation to crimes involving pets.

Gareth Johnson: That is a very interesting point. There should certainly be an aggravating feature of the offence of theft. Unfortunately, that is not the case according to the Sentencing Council's guidelines. That is what is missing. Dogs are stolen in burglaries for a multitude of reasons: for fighting, for ransoms, for breeding or for selling on.

This crime is increasing and the emotional impact it has on both the owner and the dogs is immeasurable. Anyone who has had a dog stolen from them is able to say how painful an experience it is for both the owner and the animal, yet I fear penalties will now be reduced rather than increased. This is due to the flawed sentencing guidelines introduced just last month. Under the guidelines, theft sentencing is split into three categories—high, medium and lesser culpability. These are defined by specific characteristics. However, none of those characteristics includes anything that would normally apply for the theft of a dog. This forms the very starting point for sentencing. The guidelines then go on to look at the harm caused, which does cover emotional distress to the victim but is assessed primarily by the financial loss to the victim. That cannot be the right approach.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): I apologise for coming late to the debate. I was caught out by the previous Division. The hon. Gentleman mentions the emotional impact of the theft of a dog. That is so important. For those of us who love dogs and have owned them all their lives, we know how terrible it is when we have to say goodbye to them. It is terrible to

[Chris Evans]

lose a dog in circumstances where we do not know what has happened, whether stolen by a criminal gang to be used for fighting or whatever. Does he agree that the emotional impact should be reflected in sentences for people who steal dogs?

Gareth Johnson: I certainly do. I agree with everything the hon. Gentleman says. It is one of those offences where the emotional loss is not catered for in the guidelines. It does not just relate to dog theft and other animals but to personal items. The emotional impact of the theft of family photographs belonging to family members who have passed away is not properly taken into account when the courts are sentencing offenders either.

Courts cannot place dog thefts in the top half of offending categories unless the dog has a high monetary value, and that is not always the case. It means there is a greater chance of prison for the theft of a pedigree than there is for the theft of a mongrel. This approach completely fails to understand the nature of dog theft. The impact an offence like this has on a victim is not even mentioned in the list of aggravating factors that the court should take into account. Dog theft is now seen as an easy way of making money with little chance of a prison sentence imposed on the offender. In fact, under the current guidelines it is very difficult for a court to imprison someone for the theft of a dog that is worth less in monetary terms than £500. It is no wonder, then, that these offences are on the increase.

I fully accept that the Sentencing Council cannot cater for every type of theft and that it has an extremely difficult job, but there needs to be a greater appreciation of the emotional impact an offence can have on an individual.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): I applaud my hon. Friend for securing this debate. I am a dog owner and have been a magistrate for some 10 years. I have never actually seen a dog theft in my years as a magistrate, which is to the good, but I can very much imagine the anguish it would cause. From memory, the sentencing band for a low level theft would be probably from a conditional discharge to a fine, and perhaps in extremis a low level community order. I am sure it would be far more beneficial for the victim impact statement to have a far greater bearing, and the ability to go to a small custodial sentence may be the way forward in such cases.

Gareth Johnson: I completely agree with everything my hon. Friend has said. I am not surprised that he has not seen one of these cases because of the difficulty of bringing them to court. The problem brings us back to the over-reliance on the monetary value of the item stolen. If I were to sell my scruffy mutt, I would be lucky to get a fiver for it, quite frankly—but that rather misses the point. I would sooner have my mobile phone or even my car stolen than my dog. It is not a chattel and should not be treated as such. A distinction should be made when it comes to sentencing.

I have seen posters in my local area and my constituency seeking lost dogs, and they often say something like “reward—no questions asked”. This problem is thus going on under the radar of the authorities, which is

why we do not see as many cases going to court as we should. The deterrent factor that a prison sentence would offer is often missing, yet this is an offence that causes misery for thousands of people around our country.

The message to people who are thinking of buying a dog is that they should do so only from a reputable source. There are some excellent organisations helping to tackle this problem: Blue Cross, Dog Theft Action and Dog Lost, which commended much of the work carried out on this by my local Kent police force and a few other forces as well. Yet if the criminal justice system allows those who commit these offences to walk away with light penalties, this problem will only grow and grow.

8.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) on his habitual tenacity, which enabled him to secure this very important debate. The truth is that many people become very attached to their pets and treat them like family—sometimes better than family. I know at first hand that the distress caused when a pet disappears is heightened if it is suspected or found that the pet has been stolen for nefarious purposes of one sort or another. That can only aggravate the fear that the pet may come to some form of harm. As I say, I know this at first hand, because I grew up with dogs. I had a dog that I loved very dearly, so I know the worry when dogs go missing. In my case, the dog was a Rhodesian Ridgeback. Anyone who knows the breed will realise that it is unlikely to be stolen. None the less, we fretted every time he jumped the gate or the back garden. I know what the feeling is like.

Sadly, the truth is that we are seeing a growing trend of disappearances and thefts of pets, with all the distress that can cause to individual owners. We in government have to make sure that the criminal justice system is able to respond to these incidents, that we have the resources and expertise to investigate the cases, that there is the will to prosecute them, and that the courts—this is the key to my hon. Friend’s debate—have the necessary criminal and sentencing powers to ensure that we punish offenders and, let us not forget, deter offending.

I hold ministerial responsibility for sentencing, so I need to be assured that courts have the right framework and the right powers in place. I would like to talk a little about deterrence, if only because it is not necessarily always talked about, yet it is an important part of the matter, preventing offences from happening in the first place. I will return to that in a moment, if I may.

Let me say a few words about the available offences and the sentences connected with them. First, we have offences of animal cruelty and failure to meet an animal’s basic needs. These are set out in the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Those offences carry a maximum of six months imprisonment or a fine, or both. The courts also have the power to ban an offender from keeping animals in the future. It is not always the case that a stolen pet has been mistreated, but where it has been, this offence may apply.

Where the offence charged is theft, under the Theft Act 1968, the maximum penalty is seven years. That applies to domestic animals, just as it does to any other

goods or chattels. My hon. Friend has made the point that animals should not be treated just like some kind of inanimate object or chattel, and I think he is absolutely right. When it comes to the criminal law, we have to think carefully about how those concerns should be properly reflected.

Of course, justice must be more than the dry letter of the law. The courts will always take into account the circumstances of a case, but that does not necessarily mean that they will need definitions of separate and bespoke offences relating to every possible variation of the crime of theft or every possible contingency. I am slightly worried—I suppose I say this as a Minister, but also as a Conservative—about the creation of specific penalties for behaviour that is already covered; I am not sure that that achieves very much. We need to enforce the penalties that already exist. Creating new offences applying to every conceivable situation risks complicating the law, and making it less transparent and less accessible. I do not think that that is what my hon. Friend was calling for, but I think that the point is worth making. The rule of law requires clear, consistent, predictable rules for victims and for citizens in general, and the sending of a clear message of deterrence to offenders.

It is for the courts to decide the right sentence in individual cases, within the maximum set by Parliament. The courts hear all the circumstances of a case, and are best placed to make that decision. They are helped by the sentencing guidelines that are issued by the independent—I stress the word “independent”—Sentencing Council. They must follow those guidelines, unless it is not in the interests of justice to do so. Even then, there is some wiggle room. The guidelines are there to ensure that sentencing is more consistent, and to identify sentencing ranges and aggravating and mitigating factors. There must be a balance between ensuring that rules are fair and consistent, and doing justice to the particular facts of a case and, in the case of a dog theft, the impact on the dog’s owner.

The new sentencing guideline on theft came into force at the beginning of last month. I understand that my hon. Friend may be disappointed that it does not specifically mention pet theft. If he has not done so already, he may wish to check out the Sentencing Council’s website, where he will see that the council’s consultation on the draft of the new guideline elicited responses and suggestions relating to this specific issue, including the suggestion that there should be a separate guideline on pet theft.

The council’s response to the consultation is available on the website. Having carefully considered the views of respondents, it concluded that the aggravating factors already in the guideline would enable the courts to sentence appropriately for pet theft. Aggravating factors in the guideline include emotional distress caused to the victim, and the fact that the stolen item may be of particular subjective value to the owner regardless of its strict monetary worth. I think that that was one of my hon. Friend’s key points. Judges are human beings, and many have a strong sense of empathy. Moreover, they

have all the powers, and, most important, the discretion, to take account of the full range of impacts on individuals of this very serious offence, including the emotional impact on owners and, indeed, dogs.

The guideline mentions the following aggravating factors: the offender is acting as part of a group or gang, so that there is an organised crime element; there is significant planning of the offence; or the goods are stolen to order. Unfortunately, all those factors are often present when a dog has been stolen. The courts have adequate criminal powers, and I believe that they have adequate sentencing powers at their disposal, as well as recent and substantial guidance to help them to reach balanced, proportionate and consistent sentencing decisions, all the while taking account of all the facts of the case. It is precisely because we want them to take account of the individual impact in an individual case that we must allow judges to retain that measure of discretion.

Let me say a little about deterrence. The sentences passed by the courts are partly aimed at deterring other prospective offenders, but people can, of course, take action themselves to prevent their dogs from being stolen. Improvements in technology are one of the major reasons why we have managed to reduce the incidence of crime in recent years. Microchipping of dogs has been available for more than 25 years, and I am told that about 83% of dogs are now voluntarily chipped by their owners. My hon. Friend was, of course, one of the tenacious campaigners for the compulsory microchipping of dogs, and I congratulate him on his efforts. He, like me, will have been pleased to learn that the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is to introduce compulsory microchipping in England on 6 April this year. Similar arrangements will also be in place in Scotland and Wales.

This measure is to be welcomed because it is an important step for animal welfare more broadly. It will make it easier to identify dogs and reunite them with their owners. It will also make it easier to prove that a dog has been stolen, which is important for prosecutions, and I know that my hon. Friend wants to see more of those. Most importantly, however, it can act as a deterrent. A prospective criminal who knows that a dog is microchipped is significantly less likely to target that animal for theft. The fact that all dogs must now be microchipped is as important a factor in reducing these distressing offences as the effective and flexible sentencing response, which I believe is already available.

I congratulate my hon. Friend again on securing the debate. He has been tenacious in raising this important matter, and we will always keep these issues under review, but I believe that on balance we now have the right powers, criminal offences and sentencing discretion in place to deal with this very serious crime.

Question put and agreed to.

8.10 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 2 March 2016

[MR NIGEL EVANS *in the Chair*]

Southeastern Train Services

9.30 am

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the reliability of Southeastern train services.

It is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, and I welcome the Minister. We had hoped to meet her to discuss the Southeastern situation before this debate, but we are here now and perhaps it is better to discuss it in public, so that people know what is said.

The situation that we have found ourselves in since Christmas is not entirely the fault of Southeastern—Network Rail is responsible for more than 70% of the failures—but quite frankly my constituents do not care who is to blame. They want their trains to turn up on time, as stated on the timetable, and to take them where they need to go. Since Christmas, the situation has deteriorated significantly. Trains are constantly being delayed, cancelled or diverted, and the landslide took services out for about a week.

My constituents and those of other hon. Members are bombarding us with complaints and angry messages. I will give a few examples. One constituent complained about the

“appalling level of service provided by Southeastern on the evening of Friday 19...Trains reduced from 8 and 12 carriages to only four”.

Another wrote:

“Terrible service on the Sidcup line...Constant complaints to Southeastern but no improvements despite repeated promises”.

One constituent said that when the first Bexleyheath service of the day was cancelled, he found that he could not use his season ticket to get the bus and tube from North Greenwich, because it was not recognised by Southeastern as a “reasonable alternative route”. Someone else complained about the

“appalling and deteriorating levels of service on the Sidcup line”, which also serves part of my constituency. She regularly uses the delay-repay compensation scheme, which she found to be “clunky and time consuming”. I will come to that later, but I have received constant complaints about difficulties in claiming compensation for lateness or cancellations. Another person complained about constant delays after Christmas in a commute to London Bridge:

“Been commuting for 40 years and never complained before. Worst it has ever been.”

It just goes on and on, and I am sure other hon. Members could give similar examples.

To give my own experience during this chaos, on one occasion I managed to get a train in the direction of Eltham as far as Lewisham, from where there was supposed to be a replacement bus service. It was impossible to find the bus stop for the replacement service; the signage was appalling. I approached a group of staff, who were clearly beleaguered, and asked them when the bus service was likely to arrive, but they had no idea. I asked, “Where does it stop?” and they waved in the general direction of

the outside of the station. I felt sorry for them, but they were not providing a good service, although that has to be because they had not been provided with the information by the rail company.

On another occasion—it was the same scenario—I went outside the station to get a bus and found a blind man wandering around the building works. I do not know if anyone else has had the pleasure of trying to find a way through the roadworks outside Lewisham station, but it is difficult for someone who is not blind. Yet I found that man just wandering around. I grabbed him by the arm and asked, “Where do you want to go?” He wanted to go in the same direction as me, but how is it that he was not given assistance? Why were the staff not on the lookout for people who clearly needed such assistance? He wanted to get to Bexleyheath; he could have been put on the replacement bus service, but was given no help whatever.

On another occasion, going home late in the evening on a Bexleyheath train, we got to Lewisham only to be told that the train was no longer for Bexleyheath, but for Sidcup. People on the train just got up and blocked the doors. They were so fed up with what was going on that they stood with their feet in the doors and said, “We’re not putting up with this anymore.” When they saw me—I had got off the train and was wandering across to see if a train was ever going to be going in the general direction of Eltham—they said, “We’re protesting: we’re fed up with this.” I do not know what the end of that scenario was, but it demonstrates the scale of the frustration that people are feeling about the standard of the service.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. The Labour party may be divided over its leadership, and the Conservative party over Europe, but what unites us all is Southeastern. It is fair to say that its service has deteriorated of late. Does he agree that Southeastern seems to have all but given up on getting its franchise renewed?

Clive Efford: That is a worry and something the Minister should consider. If that is the case, the Government should take the franchise away now, because if Southeastern is going to look at its bottom line rather than the quality of the service, passengers will continue to suffer. That was a prime example of giving way to someone and then coming up with a better line in their intervention than I have in my speech, so I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on pulling all that together.

People in south-eastern London have suffered for decades. We had the disastrous privatisation that gave us the Connex franchise. We then had a period of relative stability, when the franchise was taken back in-house—in effect, nationalised—but that was followed by the ridiculous decision under the Labour Government to reprivatise it. I opposed that at the time, but we are where we are.

Passengers who use London Bridge station understand that the Thameslink scheme is bound to cause disruption. They have accepted that, despite the chaos at Christmas 2014. At the time, the Minister accepted that there had been an unacceptable deterioration in the service and she took action—I commend her for that—but this year’s performance has deteriorated to an all-time low. Passengers had accepted that train patterns would be substantially altered and that regular journeys had to

[Clive Efford]

change, because trains that people were used to catching might no longer be going to Cannon Street or Charing Cross, but the level of disruption they are suffering now is nothing to do with that. On the lines between Dartford and London Bridge, the service has failed, although when we had discussions before the Thameslink works started, we were told that the situation was under control. As I said, my constituents do not care who is to blame; they want to know that the tickets they purchase will get them to where they want to go.

I am grateful to the Library for an excellent paper it has produced to provide Members with information for this debate. It sets out how the public performance measure is calculated. The PPM shows the percentage of trains that arrive at their terminating station on time and combines figures for punctuality and reliability into a single performance measure. It is the industry standard for measuring performance, but it does not distinguish between extreme lateness and a brief delay. Southeastern's PPM has fallen from 91.3% 12 months ago to 83.2% now. The average for all operators is 89.3%, so we are way below that. Another measure is right-time performance, which uses the percentage of trains arriving at their terminating station early or within 59 seconds of schedule. Southeastern's right-time performance has fallen from 65.2% 12 months ago to 53.5% now. The average for all operators is 64.8%. Again, it is well below average.

The cancellation and significant lateness measure is for when a train is cancelled at origin or en route—this was my experience on the train that was going to Bexleyheath but then went to Sidcup—and when the originating station is changed or the train is diverted. A train is significantly late if it arrives at its terminating station 30 minutes or more late. On that measure, 2.4% of Southeastern trains were cancelled or significantly late 12 months ago, but the figure is now 4.3%—it has nearly doubled—while the average for all operators is 3%.

On every single measure we see poor performance from Southeastern. In autumn 2015, Passenger Focus showed that Southeastern's passenger satisfaction was 75%, down from a high of 84% in 2013. In autumn 2015, the Chiltern franchise had the highest satisfaction rate, at 91%. The bottom three ranked operators were Thameslink, Southern—they are franchised as Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern—and Southeastern, which share the common factor of going into London Bridge. That must account for some of the dissatisfaction that people have with the service.

Last week, Which? published its annual passenger satisfaction survey. Southeastern was placed joint last, with an overall score of 46%; last year it was at 45%. Which? considers the impression of passengers over the previous year of the service provided. The difference between that and the Passenger Focus survey is that Passenger Focus considers the last journey that passengers made. That can be open to all sorts of factors, which can distort the figure. I would say that the Which? methodology far more accurately reflects the passenger experience than that of Passenger Focus, which is now Transport Focus. Those figures demonstrate just how consistently poor the service has been.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I am sorry that the fracture clinic will prevent me from being here for the entirety of the debate. I thank and congratulate

the hon. Gentleman for holding this debate. Many of my constituents have experienced the same difficulties he has described. While I believe there will be better times around the corner once the track and station at London Bridge are developed, I am still concerned that we are short of capacity on these lines. Does he agree that it would be a huge concern if plans to give the Mayor of London wider powers for outer London were to affect the capacity further south? Does he also agree that to free up capacity we need a high-speed rail link from Bexhill and Hastings to St Pancras to create more capacity for his constituents?

Clive Efford: I wish the hon. Gentleman luck in pursuing his scheme; I have got my own, which I will come to shortly. I have to say, Transport for London cannot be worse than Southeastern. It has had a positive impact when it has taken over other lines in similar circumstances, so hopefully it can achieve what Network Rail and Southeastern have failed to achieve in south-east London. Key bottlenecks such as Lewisham have to be overcome to achieve some of the things that Transport for London is talking about. I remain sceptical about whether it can achieve everything it says it can, but I am prepared to run with it and to be a critical friend, guiding it along the path of improving our train services in south-east London.

We need to hold people to account for what the figures demonstrate is consistent failure. The Minister did take action last Christmas when the service was appalling and there was a dangerous number of passengers on the concourse at London Bridge, but we must do more. To quote the Minister back at herself, on 28 January she admitted to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) that

“Southeastern was not at the top of the list for overall satisfaction. It is not quite at the bottom, but it is not at the top either.”—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2016; Vol. 605, c. 526.]

It was actually second from bottom and it has been so consistently. The Minister was reluctant to call it how it is, but we do our constituents a disservice when we do not do that. We really need to call it how it is to hold these people to account.

One concern I have about accountability is that the penalties that the franchise operators are required to pay the Government if they fail in their obligations are shrouded in commercial confidentiality, as are the payments made if they overperform. I would like to see some examples of overperformance—it would cheer me up no end. Why is that shrouded in secrecy? It is public money and a public service, so there should be public accountability. The Government should be proud to say, “We have penalised this franchise” when it fails our constituents. They should say, “Yes, we have made them pay a price and forced them to reinvest this money in this way to address this failure.” We should not say to the companies, “You can come and run a public service. You can hide behind commercial confidentiality and not let people know the price being paid.” All too often we see these people paying themselves huge bonuses in public services after such failures and that is not acceptable.

I want the Minister to ensure that we can see how the companies are being penalised for failures, because of the effect of those failures on people's lives. They are late for work, late for job interviews, late getting a connecting train. We have all travelled on these train

services that get stuck, and we have heard people's life stories on their mobile phones as they go into meltdown around us because of delays. It is not right that the companies are not held publicly accountable when their failure is on such a scale.

Given the scale of the problem, the compensation scheme seems to be underused by passengers. Something needs to be done about that, because if we can make compensation easily accessible the companies might start to consider the standard of their performance a little better. People are eligible for compensation after their train is delayed for 30 minutes. The compensation scale goes up to a 100% refund for 60-minute delays, but according to the Library's document no figures are available for take-up. I suggest that take-up is extremely low. The Office of Rail and Road found that just 11% of passengers surveyed nationally always or usually claimed compensation when they were entitled to it; 15% said they rarely claimed; and 68% said that they never complained.

We clearly need to do more to encourage passengers to come forward. Rather than come to their Member of Parliament, because they see us as the only outlet to vent their spleen, perhaps they could by right claim their compensation and make their voices heard directly with the franchise operators. Which? is running a campaign to make rail refunds easier that calls for

"clear information on how to get a refund for rail delays...all train companies offering cash as the first option"

and for train companies

"to be held to account if they fail to encourage passengers to claim refunds."

I commend that campaign to the Minister and urge her to support it.

The Minister said on 28 January:

"We effectively now have rail fares going up at the lowest level".—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2016; Vol. 605, c. 526.]

Is that absolutely correct? I have figures that say an annual season ticket from Eltham to central London has gone up by £328 a year—33%—since 2010. I do not think my constituents would say fares have been going up at the lowest level. Would the Minister care to comment on that? I do not think it is true. People are being forced to pay more for a service that clearly is not up to the standard they have a right to expect.

I know that an announcement is pending about increased capacity on our rail services—12-car trains. I have been campaigning on that for 15 years and been fobbed off with "The electricity supply isn't up to it. The platforms aren't long enough. We have terrible bottlenecks at Lewisham and London Bridge. Twelve-car trains are such a drag," and all the rest of it. The fact is that in south-east London we do not have direct access to the London underground. Most of our journeys are like the spokes of a wheel, going in to central London and the main terminals at London Bridge, Charing Cross, Waterloo and others. Our constituents rely heavily on those services and have few alternatives. Buses do not really provide an alternative for journeys of that length, nor do buses have the capacity for the number of people who want to make those journeys. There is a transport deficit in south-east London.

We constantly hear from the people at Transport for London about how much TfL must invest in the London underground and how important it is to increase capacity, and I get that. I understand how vital it is to London.

However, TfL is even calling the new underground line going through New Cross the orbital route; that is how far TfL thinks London goes out—as far as New Cross. People outside its orbit are Pluto, or something. Because we do not have direct access to alternatives, our rail services are vital.

For too long people have been crammed on to overcrowded carriages, particularly at peak times. This morning, for example, I was waiting at the station at 7.35 at Eltham. The Victoria train came in and it was six carriages long, at peak time. It is not acceptable. The train that I caught to Charing Cross was eight carriages long. At those times of the day they should be 12-car trains. Trains are packed by the time they get to places such as Eltham, Kidbrooke and Blackheath; anyone getting on at Lewisham needs a crowbar. It is not acceptable. We have got to have increased capacity on our rail services.

TfL is very keen to take over the service and it would have my blessing, but as I said, I will be a critical friend. If it is going to increase the frequency of trains on the service it will have to deal with the signalling system. It is no good putting more frequent trains through with fewer carriages; we need more capacity. I will support TfL's bid for the metro services on Southeastern, but we need to ensure that the Government and MPs scrutinise what it says about what it will deliver. We need to improve the service and increase its capacity significantly.

The landslide caused me great concern. I thought, "What if it had happened as a train was going by?" which was highly likely, because the vibration of a train could have exacerbated the situation and brought a landslide down. Some infrastructure was involved, so I want to know if a proper survey of the infrastructure has been done. As I said, more than 70% of the delays have been due to signals and infrastructure under the control of Network Rail. Does it survey the infrastructure to the point at which it identifies likely problems and puts them right, so that they do not become constant nagging problems and a cause of future delays? It seems that the system is creaking at the seams. Is Network Rail on top of that? I would like the Minister's assurance that she is on top of Network Rail, and that she will ensure it tries to drive out the gremlins that cause all the problems for Southeastern and our constituents.

As I have mentioned, I want the penalties and rewards for train operating companies' performance to be published and the people concerned held to account. I would like the Minister to put pressure on the transport operating companies to make people aware of compensation schemes. Above all I want the Government and TfL to recognise that south-east London has a transport deficit, which cannot continue to be ignored when the future expansion of rail services, including such things as the underground and the docklands light railway, is considered. The situation in south-east London is unacceptable. I look forward to hearing what the Minister intends to do about it.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): Order. As we can see, seven hon. Members want to speak. I will start the winding up speeches at 10.38, which gives 10 minutes each, plus two minutes for Mr Efford to wind up. Please do the maths, but I think we are looking at perhaps just under five minutes each.

9.57 am

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): It is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) for calling this important debate. I stand here as the representative of two communities—the one that relies on and is tortured by the Tonbridge line, and the one that is tortured by the Maidstone East line. On their behalf I voice my displeasure at Southeastern's woeful performance, not just in the past three months, which—let us face it—have been particularly awful, but in the 10 months for which I have represented my constituents, and indeed many years before that.

I have had the great privilege of meeting some people from Southeastern, and only this week I heard that they believed they were still meeting their franchise targets. I do not know quite to the smallest detail how the franchise targets are met, but if their belief is correct it tells me something simple—that the franchise targets are wrong. It cannot be right that one in five trains is coming in late, leaving workers late for meetings, leaving families without a father or mother at home for dinner, and forcing people to change plans—and that that is still somehow acceptable in relation to meeting targets.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I share my hon. Friend's concern about Southeastern's performance. I have travelled by train for the past 15 years, but now, as a Member of Parliament, I do so every day; and it is the regular day in, day out delay, even if it is a few minutes, that means a lot to my constituents. If Southeastern cannot perform it should do as c2c does. After two minutes, if there is a delay, there should be automatic compensation for constituents.

Tom Tugendhat: I agree entirely and thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I have spoken to the Rail Minister about it, and am delighted that she is in her place, because I know she is addressing those very points. I know I am not speaking against her but in support of her as she fights for all our constituents.

Gareth Johnson: On that point about compensation, does my hon. Friend agree that the “delay repay” scheme should kick in far earlier than the 30 minutes that the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) alluded to? Perhaps compensation for passengers who are delayed should commence after 15 minutes.

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. Friend is right; we need to get responsiveness into the system, and the way to do so, I am afraid, is through the pocketbook, as we all know.

I was canvassing in Old Bexley and Sidcup this weekend for the Conservative party's wonderful mayoral candidate, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith). I know that he will be working hard on this issue and ensuring that the trains respond significantly better to his constituents, although perhaps not mine. In his seat as well, the pressure on the trains is great, so I hope he will forgive me as I take his name in vain and press for a better service in Old Bexley and Sidcup.

I have been calling for more rail carriages on the Maidstone East line in my own area. The carriages introduce at least an element—I know that is not all of

it—of resilience and flexibility into the system. That is why I raised only this week with Southeastern the question of what more it can do. It said, “Well, we could have a few more drivers on stand-by.” I asked why it was not doing that, and it said, “It's not about the money.” I ask Southeastern again here today: why is it not doing that? If this is not about money, and if more carriages and more drivers allow for a bit of resilience and flexibility, surely that is the right thing to do for people across our county.

This is a county-wide problem. Tonbridge is the heart of the Kent rail network and, as Members will know, is the most important rail exchange in the county. Indeed, it has running through it one of the longest pieces of straight track in the United Kingdom. It was built in days when the Victorians did not value the land around the beautiful weald of Kent or the extraordinary richness of our communities. However, that is not true today. Our communities are the most blessed and the most beautiful in our country, and those train lines now provide the opportunity for some of the finest people in our entire kingdom to get to work and to generate the income that pays for the schools, hospitals and, indeed, armed forces across our country. It is therefore essential that we look at these rail networks not as a luxury—they are not that—or as some way of getting people home or to work on time, with 15 minutes here or there being just a problem, but as a fundamental part of the British economy.

It is essential we get this right, and the only way to do that is by holding the people who run the rails and the trains to account. This is not a question of public ownership or private ownership. It is not an ideological question for us to discuss; I think one Member of the House of Lords recently described the Opposition as “croissant eating”. No—this is a very important question about how we deliver results for our people. I am adamant that we forget the ideology and focus on what matters: delivery, delivery, delivery.

10.2 am

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I do not want to repeat the points that have been made today but rather touch in my remarks on three particular issues that affect my constituents: the overcrowding of carriages; the reliability of the service; and the poor communication from Southeastern about the delays and overcrowding.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) on securing this vital debate. As other hon. Members have said, Southeastern trains and the lines that run through our constituencies are vital not only for getting our constituents to work and bringing economic benefits—with delays causing a loss of productivity—but for people's general quality of life. There is a historical under-investment in public transport in south-east London. My constituents rely heavily on these lines and have suffered for too many years. We know the particular problems associated with the London Bridge rebuild, but as other hon. Members have said, this issue predates that and has got far worse since Christmas.

I now receive complaints about late, cancelled or overcrowded Southeastern train services nearly every day. As a commuter, I know just how frustrating not

only major disruptions but the disruptions and delays that happen every single day can be. Whether it is two minutes here or five minutes there, it is often without explanation and causes immense frustration to the people waiting, who cannot get adequate compensation and are not regularly notified. The 7.39 train this morning from Deptford was cancelled without explanation, forcing people on to other lines or tube lines such as the Jubilee line which are already crowded.

Rehman Chishti: The hon. Gentleman echoes a point I have made before. If there are constant daily delays, and if Southeastern cannot get its act together—whether that is through trains with more carriages or ensuring that trains run on time—it should surely give up the franchise to someone who can do it.

Matthew Pennycook: I think that Southeastern has lost the chance it had to restore faith and confidence in its service. The franchise should be removed. I would like to hear the Minister's view on whether that should happen now or in 2018, when the contract lapses. However, Southeastern has lost the opportunity to recover that confidence.

The complaints and the frustration have given rise to a number of community groups in my constituency. I think of the Charlton Rail Users' Group and the Greenwich Line Users' Group, which exist solely to represent constituents' concerns about the inadequate performance of Southeastern and to lobby for better services. Those groups are concerned with the three elements I mentioned.

The first element is overcrowded carriages. In late 2014, as a local councillor, I met the then managing director of Southeastern trains with my predecessor, the right hon. Nick Raynsford. We were promised that there would be 12-car trains by January 2015 on the Greenwich line. They did not materialise. I believe that that was because they were put on the Lewisham line, which if anything is more pressured in terms of capacity constraints. It is essential that we get those 12-car carriages, because on many occasions at the moment we do not even have 10-car carriages; as my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham said, they are often carriages with eight cars or even less.

Southeastern, to give it its due, has squeezed out as much as it perhaps can in terms of enhancements via changes to the timetable. It now comes down to a question of rolling stock. There has been a delay in the Government's announcement on rolling stock. I will be interested to hear whether the Minister can shed any light on what may be coming forward, in particular for the Greenwich line.

It is indicative of how Southeastern has planned the improvements to its services that even if we get those 12-car trains, some of the stations on the Greenwich line in my constituency, such as Woolwich Dockyard, will not be able to have those trains stopping at the station because the station has not been fitted in a way that allows 12-car trains to stop, or if the trains are able to stop, it will be with selective door operating to allow people to get on and off at those stations. I would like some assurance that if 12-car trains do come online, the people who will be put out by that problem will get fair compensation if they have to travel onwards to another station, such as Woolwich Arsenal.

I turn to service reliability, which, as Members have said, is extremely poor on these lines. By the magic of social media, I asked my constituents if they had any thoughts or comments in advance of this debate. I asked them to keep it clean, which reduced the number of responses. You could not make up some of the responses I got back. One gentleman told me that the 6.01 pm train yesterday on the Greenwich line was delayed for 30 minutes because of problems with the announcement system; passengers learn that from the driver via the announcement system. That is quite a common example of the bizarre things that happen. I was once on a train that had to stop and wait outside London Bridge because the sun was in the driver's eyes. That sort of service just irritates people, frankly, when they are paying a lot of money for their train journeys.

I will finish on poor communication. I made the case long in advance of the London Bridge rebuild that communication about the disruption that would take place because of the Thameslink programme was inadequate. My constituents still regularly think that the Charing Cross line is going to be restored on the Greenwich line; it is not. I think there are good reasons why it should not be, in terms of increased frequency of trains and reliability, but some of my constituents do not know that. Communication in general is poor and needs to improve.

Turning to the future, I fully support the removal of the Southeastern franchise. There is a good case for Transport for London taking over these services in partnership with the Mayor. The way that that potential deal was announced a few weeks back was rather shabby and got mixed up with the election campaign, but there is general cross-party consensus on that. Some of us have been campaigning on it for a long time. We need to scrutinise that deal. In particular, we need assurances that in the years left to the Southeastern franchise up to 2018 it will not be allowed to let performance slip even further. It has an incentive, as part of the service groups, to perhaps bid for elements of Transport for London's services once it is taken over in 2018. However, we need to know how Southeastern can be pressed in the years ahead, if it is going to lose its contract, to not let performance slip even further. I will be interested to hear the Minister's views on that.

10.9 am

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I will try to be brief and keep to your advised timing, Mr Evans.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) on securing the debate and thank him for asking many important questions about infrastructure, compensation and penalties.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), since becoming a Member of Parliament last May I have received a steady flow of complaints about the problems with Southeastern rail services on the line that goes through Maidstone East in particular, and on the lines from Faversham and Headcorn. Since Christmas, however, that flow of complaints has accelerated, reflecting a substantial deceleration in the train services and their reliability. Regular weekly complaints from people have now become daily complaints, as day in, day out, their trains to and from work are delayed, and not just by two or three minutes, which is irritating

[Helen Whately]

and causes difficulties for people, but often by half an hour or an hour, with train cancellations, too. Many major events have also completely kyboshed the services for hours.

Other hon. Members have shared the data so I will not go through those again now, but as my hon. Friend said, we are now seeing about one in five trains running late. What the averaging of the data obscures is how often it is the same train that somebody is delayed on, day after day, and how very often they are the peak-time trains. That is not to say that other trains do not need to be on time, but we know that people on peak-time trains are rushing to get to and from work and to get to meetings, appointments and other commitments. The statistics mean that people's lives are being affected badly by this experience of the train service. They are unable to be as effective at work and are missing meetings. They have to leave earlier and get home later, which is affecting their family life. Parents are unable to get home to put children to bed. All these things that people build their lives around and make decisions about are being affected so seriously by the problems with the train services at the moment.

Rehman Chishti: My hon. Friend is making a very powerful point about the delays and what they mean for people's lives. Linked to that point is the fact that if somebody gets to the station and their train is delayed, when they do get on a train, it is packed. They cannot even get a seat, so it is also about the conditions they face. The argument to be made to the Minister and Southeastern is that there should be the extra carriage. I see that from Victoria to Gillingham on a daily basis. Capacity is a key issue, along with delays.

Helen Whately: I agree with my hon. Friend that capacity is an issue as well as the problem of delays.

I appreciate that Southeastern and Network Rail have made some effort to communicate with Members such as me, who have been in frequent contact with them, urging them to give us explanations. They have told us about the problem at Dover with the sea wall coming down and how that has made things more difficult for them. They have told us about landslips because of the extra rail, signalling problems with the upgrades and problems with de-icing. The Minister may well cover that in more detail. We understand that it is not always easy to provide a good service and that things happen, but still, that is not good enough. We also appreciate that they are making efforts to improve the services, with extra drivers, more engineers and de-icing at milder temperatures. Those are steps in the right direction, but still, I am afraid that I do not have confidence on behalf of my constituents that these services are going to improve sufficiently to provide a reliable and acceptable level of service.

I say that having directly asked Southeastern and Network Rail just a couple of days ago, face to face, how good the service was going to be as a result of the changes they are making. They were unable to say. They were unable to say even what improvement they are aiming to achieve as a result of the changes. There was a bit of a shrug of the shoulders—"We're trying"—and that is not just not good enough. Along with their warning that the problems with the sea wall at Dover

might continue through to the end of this year and with London Bridge work continuing through all of next year, this will drag on for two years at best. My constituents need to know that they will get a better service within that time.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling said, we also found it bizarre that, given all that is going on with the service—I appreciate that both Southeastern and Network Rail are involved, although that answer is not acceptable to passengers—we are told by Southeastern that it is compliant with its franchise. That suggests that something simply is not right with the way in which it is held to account.

Along with solutions to the short-term problems, we need to start seeing some plans for better service beyond the next couple of years. We are seeing enormous population growth across Kent—my constituency is part of that—and there is infrastructure there that is often 50 or more than 100 years old. It is simply not fit for the level of use that it is getting.

Although we have had High Speed 1, for my constituents that is largely a myth. They sometimes get trains that are called "high speed", but after a short stretch of going at high speed, the trains just clunk along on the old infrastructure and are scarcely faster than the ordinary service, although they are more expensive. The high-speed service simply bypasses most of my constituents who commute on the Maidstone East line. Other parts of the country are getting High Speed 2, Crossrail and great investment. Given all this population growth and with the economy being so dependent on the productivity of all these people—their quality of life is an issue as well—we need to know that there is material investment coming down the line, no pun intended, in the train infrastructure, so that beyond the short-term problems, we will see an improvement in quality.

Will the Minister say what she is going to do to make sure that Network Rail and Southeastern get on top of the problems in the short term? We cannot let them continue all year and next year. We need to ensure better transparency for passengers so that they also know what is going on with performance. We need better communication and to know such things as the level of compensation that is paid out, as well as make sure that it is easy for passengers to get it. When possible, compensation should be automated.

I share the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) that although it feels as though nothing could be worse than it is now, if the franchise for the suburban lines goes to Transport for London, we must not see passengers further out lose out as a result. Finally, I would like the Minister to provide reassurance that work is being done on how to improve the service further out, given the population growth. We know that London Bridge is being refurbished—trains from my constituency do not go into London Bridge—but there is no confidence that that will be a magical improvement, so what is going to be done further out to improve the performance, reliability, speed and quality of the services for my constituents?

10.17 am

Teresa Pearce (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) on securing the debate.

I have just one train line running through my constituency—two tracks, three stations, one train line. What could go wrong? Well, Southeastern could go wrong, that's what. I was elected in 2010 and have used the train line since then, but I also used it a commuter for 20 years beforehand. Before Southeastern, we had Connex, which was terrible. We thought Southeastern would be better, but we were wrong.

I have a real appreciation, as many in this Chamber do, of the frustration of standing on a platform in the certain knowledge of the uncertainty of the train service—wondering whether the train will arrive on time, or at all; whether we will be told what is happening; whether the train will be full when it gets there; whether, once it sets off from the station, it will actually arrive at the other end at the specified time. Commuters have a feeling of being resigned to the inevitable about Southeastern. If they have to be at a meeting a certain time, they will aim for two trains earlier than the one they actually need to get, because they know that the timetable may, on many mornings, be a work of fiction.

During my first five years as an MP, complaints were of the kind that one would expect—they were about unreliability, late-running trains, overpriced tickets, a lack of information—and that discontent was borne out in the passenger focus surveys. There was therefore both some surprise and horror when Southeastern was re-awarded the franchise. At that point, we were told that things were going to improve and that, for instance, there would be more seats. At a meeting that the Railways Minister held in one of the Committee Rooms in Parliament about 18 months ago, I remember pressing Southeastern about those extra seats. I remember my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham also doing that, and at that point, Southeastern admitted that there were extra seats but that they were on off-peak services—so absolutely no use whatsoever.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham raised a point about compensation. Every time I contact Southeastern, it says, “Don't forget to remind your constituent that they can claim compensation.” Compensation is fair enough, but people want a service; they want what they have paid for. If someone keeps going to a shop to buy something that breaks every time, despite the shop saying it will give them their money back, they will stop going there. What happens on Southeastern is that people do not have an alternative and that has a knock-on effect on the clogging up of the A2. People are taking to their cars because they cannot rely on the train service.

It is interesting that since saying that people should claim compensation, Southeastern seems to have changed its compensation for season ticket holders. It wrote to a constituent, a season ticket holder, setting out the formula it is now using: it calculates the number of journeys it thinks the season ticket holder will make in a year and divides the price by that. Southeastern is part of Govia, which divides the season ticket price by 464 journeys, but Southeastern decided to divide it by 546 journeys, which is less generous. The compensation is not generous anyway, but Southeastern's calculation makes it even less generous. I believe Southeastern has decided to do that because it is getting more complaints and more claims for compensation. Will the Minister look at that to see why Southeastern is using a different formula from the rest of the group?

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook) referred to 12-car trains, saying that Woolwich Dockyard is a problem. I have been pressing for 12-car trains on the Greenwich line for a long time, knowing that Southeastern cannot run them on that line because of the Woolwich Dockyard problem, but there is an answer: selective door opening. When I originally wrote to Southeastern, it said there were 12-car trains on my line. I wrote back saying, “No, there aren't, but what time do they run? I want to get one tomorrow.” Southeastern came back to me saying, “Oh no, actually they're not on your line,” and then blamed the council, saying that it could not run the trains because the council had complained about Woolwich Dockyard. So it was saying, “We can't run the 12-car trains that we don't actually have.” Its responses were nonsense and typical of its disrespect.

Eventually, Southeastern said that if it gets 12-car trains it will not run them on my service even if there is no problem at Woolwich Dockyard, because although my line is bad, the Sidcup line is worse and that line will get those trains. It then wrote to me and other hon. Members asking us to lobby the Minister to help it to get 12-car trains. That just added insult to injury.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham said that it appears that Southeastern has given up, but in case it ever diversifies into bus operation, I want to illustrate a point. Currently, it is running a rail replacement bus service at weekends from Abbey Wood station because work is going on every weekend on the new Crossrail. I had an email from a constituent who had recently used the service. The journey from Abbey Wood to Woolwich Arsenal, which should take five minutes, took an hour. The bus did not arrive until 20 minutes after the scheduled time; it took my constituent to the next station, Plumstead, where they waited 30 minutes for a train, which was cancelled with no information announced. My constituent then gave up and took a bus to Woolwich. When I wrote to Southeastern to complain, its response was:

“I am sorry for the excessive delay on the replacement bus service. To be honest, I have no explanation as it would have been quicker to walk!”

That is no way to run a railway. Southeastern has given up. Complaints about its service are becoming more frequent than the services themselves.

10.23 am

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I thank the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) for securing this debate. I know how important the train service is for his constituents. It is also important for my constituents, who live only 26 miles from London. Since being elected to the House, I have had to commute to London for the first time in 15 years. Hon. Members will have heard me say that I do not see an improvement in the delays to the service. It has been an eye-opening to see what my constituents face daily.

In Rochester, we have been lucky to have the wonderful investment of a £20-million station. It was much needed and long anticipated, and we are grateful for it. Sadly, however, the shine has been taken off it because since it opened in December, train users have seen the service decline rapidly, with delays, cancelled trains and lack of communication. One reason why my constituents were so excited about the new station was the hope of more

[Kelly Tolhurst]

train services, using the longer platforms and the potential for increased capacity. Sadly, that has been completely overshadowed by the events since Christmas.

People were hoping that the new station and the longer platforms would enable longer trains to be run, so that they could have seats on the train in the morning—like people in Eltham, my constituents in Rochester struggle with capacity. In north Kent, particularly the Medway towns, we are being expected to deliver high housing numbers over the next 15 years. In Medway we are looking at a 30,000 increase in 15 to 20 years. Southeastern agrees that it has had a 40% increase in capacity and use of its services. My plea for the future is about how we will tackle the growth in the south-east. The reality is that Kent and south London are extremely important in providing a workforce in the City of London and Greater London. How can we deliver that and keep up with the demand?

The hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) referred to the A2, which is another significant issue in my constituency. It is true that people are getting in their cars to come to London rather than using the trains. Frankly, my constituents deserve a hell of a lot more. I need to get to London on time, as do my constituents, but we also need to get home on time. I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) said about the quality of people's lives. People who work in London accept that they may be travelling for one or two hours to get to work, but they want to be able to get home, live their life, spend time with their children and do things other than work. Unfortunately, the service that Southeastern provides does not allow my constituents to have that extra time. I live only 26 miles from London and people further down the line in Kent will be experiencing even more challenging limits on their time.

I welcome this debate and want to hear from the Minister what plans there are for coping with demand and the increasing need for more capacity and longer trains. We want to know whether Southeastern will get its act together once and for all, so that we have a better spring and summer on the train service.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): Order. Clive Efford is forgoing his wind-up, so the Front-Bench winding-up speeches will start at 10.40. Two Members are trying to catch my eye, and perhaps they will divide the time between themselves.

10.28 am

Jim Dowd (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): It is a delight to serve under your sagacious direction, Mr Evans. I start with an apology for having to leave before the end of the debate because I have an appointment later this morning at King's College hospital and it has already been postponed twice. You will understand, Mr Evans, that when one gets to my stage in life, one does not take liberties with one's cardiologist. I look forward to reading what the Minister says and I congratulate her on taking the problems not just of Southeastern, but of Southern and the whole debacle of the London Bridge redevelopment seriously for quite a time.

In my constituency there are seven stations served by Southeastern, and a further six on the borders are used by large numbers of my constituents—all the stations are in zone 4—so it is obvious how critical the Southeastern service is to the life of my community, not just economically but socially. The cost of an annual rail ticket between Penge East and Victoria starts at £1,280, and a zones 1 to 4 annual travelcard costs £1,860. Southeastern even has the effrontery to offer a first-class season ticket between Penge East and Victoria for a staggering £1,920. That is spoiled only by the fact that none of the trains that run between Penge East and Victoria actually has first-class carriages. The ever-increasing cost of rail tickets is a different debate entirely, but it is surely not unreasonable for the constituents of all hon. Members present—I join in the general wailing and gnashing of teeth about the service provided by Southeastern—to expect a reasonable service, particularly in light of the amount of money that they pay.

I wish that Southeastern would put as much effort into running the trains on time as it does into providing excuses for why it does not. I complained on behalf of a constituent about the service from Charing Cross to Hayes and received the following reply:

“The causes have been primarily infrastructure-related, i.e. track, signal, and power supply failure, fatalities”—

I personally would not call that infrastructure—

“the collapse of the Dover Sea Wall”—

other hon. Members have mentioned that—

“landslips on the Bexleyheath and Hastings lines, fatalities at Hildenborough and Dover”—

I think those were probably passengers who gave up waiting for a train—

“a broken rail in the Crayford area and only this morning, a track...failure at Gravesend. While these may seem unrelated to the Hayes line the complexity of our network means that disruption on one line inevitably has a knock on impact on another.”

Well, I would have great difficulty explaining to people at Kent House and in Sydenham and Penge why the collapse of the Dover sea wall means that they cannot get into London. That is just ludicrous.

Recently, Southeastern even blamed service delays on “strong sunshine”—my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook) has already mentioned this—making it difficult for drivers to read signals. Of course, the rail industry once came up with the wrong kind of snow; now, the wrong kind of sunshine affects people's service. It is, as many other hon. Members have said, a scandalous position.

I could quote at length what other constituents have said, because I get complaints about the service three or four times a week, if not every day. One constituent said:

“I genuinely cannot remember the last time the trains were running even remotely close to the timetable. This is hugely frustrating when juggling commuting and childcare commitments. It is not fair on my employer that my time of arrival at work is largely in the lap of the gods and not fair on my son when I have to work late to make up for my late arrival.

As you are aware, it is an expensive business commuting into London and it is absolutely unacceptable to receive such a shoddy service at such a high price.”

And so say nearly all the constituents who have contacted me on this matter. Another said:

“I board at Kent House on the 8.59 or 9.14 trains most working days and the trains have been late by 5-15 minutes every day this year, and some are cancelled on a semi-regular basis. As the services are costing more and more every year, the level of service...is not adequate.”

Indeed, it is going backwards. That is the experience of my constituents and those of most other hon. Members who have spoken. It is completely intolerable. As others have said, if Southeastern cannot run the trains, it should hand the franchise over to someone who can.

10.33 am

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) for securing this very important debate. This is the first time that I have spoken in a Westminster Hall debate, and my reasons for speaking in this one will not surprise anyone. Lewisham, one of the stations that has been mentioned quite a lot during the debate, is in my constituency and I am bombarded by constituents contacting me because of the numerous problems that many hon. Members have mentioned.

I intended to start by shining a light on some of Southeastern's recent performance issues, but the problem with shining any light on Southeastern is that that is one of the excuses that is quite often used by the company. It has said that congestion in Lewisham is down to strong sunlight, so along with snowy days, wet days and windy days, Southeastern apparently cannot function on sunny days. As well as the poor performance that everyone has mentioned, it has poor excuses.

I have spoken to hundreds of people about their dissatisfaction with the state of the trains in south-east London. In my constituency, Southeastern operates six of the 10 stations. I will outline some of the concerns expressed to me. Oliver wrote to me in January, telling me that each time he used Southeastern trains in a two-week period he experienced monumental delays and cancellations, and often no explanation was given at all. Of course, there is a complaints procedure, but when my constituent Jos attempted to complain twice, after being dropped off in the middle of the night at a platform that she did not recognise because Southeastern had failed to announce that the train was no longer scheduled to arrive at her station, she received no response. One constituent even told me that she had considered moving because she was so miserable with the state of travel in Lewisham, Deptford.

I could go on—we all receive hundreds of emails and Twitter messages, and people come and speak to us every time we travel to work, about the poor customer service—but I will not. What I will say is that the current franchise system combines the worst of both worlds. It is definitely not a public system, but neither is it wholly privatised: the taxpayer still subsidises the operating systems to the tune of millions of pounds every year. Astoundingly, it costs the taxpayer much more since the railways were privatised than it did under a public system. Commuters are constantly met with rising fares and diminishing service, while Southeastern's profits continue to soar.

Last month, Lewisham, Deptford welcomed the news that Transport for London will be taking over Southeastern routes and stations throughout south-east London in 2018. That is a great start, but as many hon. Members have said, if Southeastern cannot run the service properly now, perhaps it should lose the franchise sooner.

10.37 am

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford)

not just on initiating the debate, but on the way he—and other hon. Members—brought to life the daily frustrations of travelling life. We all recognise the frustrations that hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have expressed. I can vividly see passengers jamming their feet in doors in protest and frustration; I see that on my own train line. It should not have to be that way. And we can all recognise the collective groan when an aged train that should be 12 carriages long and turns out to be four carriages long comes into the station. We have heard from everyone who has spoken about some of the problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham, very sensibly, pointed to the Which? passenger survey. He is right to say that it gives an accurate representation of where we are at with Southeastern trains. Of course, he and many other hon. Members raised the issue of compensation. The Minister has spoken about that in the past, and I am sure she will say more about it this morning, but it is clear that it does not work for most people and needs to be strengthened. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham also made a very important point about the decline in reliability since Christmas. Again, that point was echoed by many other hon. Members.

I also recognised very much the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook). He talked about overcrowding, reliability and some of the communication issues. Again, those points were echoed by other hon. Members. I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to some of the user groups, which play such an important role on all our lines. Those people beaver away, amassing the information that we need to hold these companies to account. Another important point that he and other hon. Members made is that there is a real sense that passengers have lost confidence in the company, which raises some important questions about what happens next.

I thank the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson), who is not here now, for uniting the Chamber in a vote of dissatisfaction with the current services. There are things on which we disagree, but I suspect we all agree on this.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) painted a vivid picture. A number of us probably got up earlier than we needed to this morning in order to get the train to arrive here on time. It should not be that way. People should not have to get a train that is two trains earlier than one that should get them to their destination on time just to ensure they reach their appointment. She eloquently outlined people's frustrations.

The hon. Members for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) and for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) raised important points about the challenges ahead in a growth region. This is not just about getting the problem sorted out for now, but about how we face the challenges of the future.

My hon. Friends the Members for Lewisham West and Penge (Jim Dowd) and for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) eloquently detailed some of the complaints and problems with which we are all familiar.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham made some opening points about customer satisfaction, which dropped dramatically for the Southeastern franchise from 83% in autumn 2011 to 75% in autumn 2015. A quarter of Southeastern's passengers are dissatisfied with the level

[Daniel Zeichner]

of service provision. Among commuters, that statistic is even starker, with satisfaction plummeting from 77% to just 68%.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham West and Penge mentioned some of the excuses that are proffered. Well, sometimes Southeastern's public relations department is even more bizarre. Some hon. Members may remember an article in *Metro*, in which one of Southeastern's people said that the real problem was that people did not really want to go to work or pay their fares in the first place, and that people were grumpy because the service "takes people somewhere they don't want to be with money they don't want to pay."

That is not great, is it? Southeastern went even further, claiming that if the surveys had been carried out on a "sunny summer's day", the satisfaction ratings would be better because passengers would be more "upbeat". From what we have heard this morning, passengers would need to be very upbeat to ignore some of the crammed compartments and torn up timetables.

Although it is a pretty tough job spinning for Southeastern, let us look at the collection of companies. All the franchises are part of Govia and therefore part of Go-Ahead, which reported that profits in its rail business had shot up by 30.5% to £25.7 million in the year to June. That is astonishing considering what we have heard today. The operator is reporting rocketing profits and is managing to hand out some pretty big bonuses at a time when services are declining. Rising profits should mean rising service standards, not appalling delays, overcrowding and severe disruption. Punctuality was only 87.7% over the past year, with 37% of those delays attributable to Southeastern, not Network Rail. The failures come despite Southeastern receiving £32.5 million in subsidy last year.

We have heard about some other problems, including the Dover sea wall and the landslips to which my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham made reference. I would welcome information from the Minister about whether any warnings have been raised with Network Rail about the condition of the areas in both cases and an update on the progress Network Rail has made in compiling its long-awaited register of the condition of its assets.

The Department for Transport gave the incumbent operator of the Southeastern franchise a four-year contract extension without running a wider tendering competition. The franchise began in April 2006 and was due to end in October 2014, but the Government gave the operator a direct award to continue running the service until June 2018.

Matthew Pennycook: The Government not only re-awarded the contract, but gave an additional £70 million to Southeastern to improve performance standards. All the promises and commitments that came with that have not materialised, as far as I am aware.

Daniel Zeichner: That is a very good point, to which I am just coming. The extension until June 2018 was awarded even though Southeastern had some of the lowest passenger satisfaction scores in the country and even though the Minister knew that passengers on the route have not always received the service they deserve. The Government essentially gave Go-Ahead the go-ahead for four more years of misery for passengers. The direct award was nothing more than a reward for failure.

At the time, the Minister assured us:

"We have also totally changed the contract terms to make sure they deliver on their promises."

Has Southeastern delivered on its promises? Looking at the most recent passenger satisfaction survey, it seems that the answer is no, and I think, having listened to their comments, that hon. Members would rather agree with that.

We have heard quite a bit about the length of trains. My own experience is with the Cambridge line, on which, under the Labour Government, trains were extended from eight to 12 carriages, which made a huge difference. When it happens, it really does help. Again, I will quote the Minister, who said just over a month ago:

"I am determined to review the business case for running the additional, bigger 12-car trains on the metro service in particular. I give the House an undertaking that there will be a decision on that in the next couple of months."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2016; Vol. 605, c. 523.]

I would be grateful if the Minister would let us know whether that decision has been reached and, if so, what decision has been made.

Another question that hon. Members raised is what will happen when the extended franchise comes to an end in June 2018. In January this year, the Government and the Mayor of London announced that they would consult on transferring London's suburban rail services to Transport for London, which many hon. Members have welcomed this morning. Devolving routes in some areas of the capital has been transformative; indeed, significant investment is going into recently devolved routes to Enfield town, Chingford and Cheshunt.

We would welcome the devolution of control to ensure that passengers are put before profits, so that they get the level of service they desperately need and deserve. However, despite the headlines, that devolution is still a mere proposal. There has been no firm commitment from the Department. In 2012, the current Mayor of London attempted to get Southeastern services devolved and he failed. Despite what Government Members might say, there is no reason to believe that the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) would enjoy any more success if he were successful in his mayoral campaign. The devolution of control might well be a calculated pre-mayoral election announcement, unaccompanied by any meaningful action to improve commuters' journeys. It would be helpful if the Minister provided further information about the consultation and her Department's consideration of the proposals.

Finally, with the Shaw report published later this month, it seems worth asking the Minister whether she really believes, after the disastrous precedent set by Railtrack, that breaking up and privatising Network Rail would improve services for passengers. Do we really want to return to the dark days of Railtrack? Passengers on Southeastern trains deserve better.

10.47 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I am sorry that I have not been left with an enormous amount of time. I will endeavour to answer all the questions raised, but if I do not get to them, I promise that I will write to hon. Members.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) on securing the debate. He is an assiduous campaigner for better rail services, and we work best on this when we work together. Many right hon. and hon. Members have attended and spoken, including the Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr Evennett) and the Minister for Immigration, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), both of whom were rendered mute by high office, but made a point of coming.

I want to step through a couple of the tactical questions and then go through some of the broader issues. The landslip and Southeastern's response to it was mentioned several times. Heavy and persistent rainfall closed the Bexleyheath line between 12 and 15 January. A recovery plan was put in place by Southeastern and Network Rail. My officials stayed in close contact with the operator and Network Rail to ensure that those actions were carried out. I was disappointed to hear today some examples of partially-sighted passengers and others not given the care and support they needed. There was a plan to offer taxis to passengers. I will certainly ensure that the company receives those comments and responds to them.

Dover sea wall was mentioned. Of course, major issues happen. I have been asked whether Network Rail's surveying and early warning system is adequate for those sorts of events. I went to see the Lamington viaduct, which washed out and broke the west coast main line for a period of weeks. I am assured that the surveying programme is proactive, comprehensive and appropriate. Extreme weather events are clearly becoming even more common, and there is an important question to be asked, in particular about the level of funding that is baked into the current period—which, again, I am assured is appropriate. I do not have an answer on whether early warnings were received, but I will ask and respond to the hon. Member for Eltham on that point.

The reason why we are all here is that, despite such one-off events, performance on these services is not where it should be, not where I want it to be, not where the operator wants it to be, and certainly not where anyone in this room, or the customers they represent, wants it to be. I would gently point out that if Members look at the overall performance schedule, it has dropped from 91% of trains arriving on time last January, according to the public performance measure—I want to say a word about that, because I think the hon. Gentleman and I agree on whether it is adequate—to 88.3%, which means that almost nine out of 10 trains are getting to their destination on time. It is important to bear in mind that sometimes the vociferous complaints that we hear are a response because a particular line runs very ineffectively, which is important, or because there are certain passengers who are just extremely unhappy and now have the ability to let us know.

As hon. Members know, after the election I set up the south-east quadrant taskforce, which brought together, for the first time, Network Rail, Govia Thameslink Railway, Southeastern, Transport Focus and my officials. I continue to chair that group, and the next meeting is tomorrow. The group is an attempt to sweep away all this blame game and accounting for who is wrong. Our constituents do not care who is responsible for a delay; they just want to make sure that they are going to get to work, or home to pick up their kids from day care, on

time. It is complete nonsense that for generations that was not the case. By the way, this has nothing to do with who owns the railway: it has always been the case that the railway has argued among itself about whether the engineers or the passenger-facing bits are correct. Frankly, I am sick to death of that conversation. If there is a problem, I want all aspects of the industry to work together to sort it out, which is very much the message that we give through the taskforce. Indeed, things are starting to improve, which I will mention.

The hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Jim Dowd) mentioned suicides. Let us not trivialise that. Somebody takes their life every 30 hours on the railways. It is a tragedy, it causes disruption to millions of people and it is absolutely ghastly for the train staff and train drivers. It is something that we must work to solve.

The taskforce is determined to sort out performance. I send a message to the industry that public performance measures, or right-time measures, that ignore the number of people whose lives are affected by disruption are irrelevant. There is no point comparing the PPM on a very lightly used franchise—say, the one north of the border—with the PPM on franchises running around London and the south-east. We are talking about the busiest parts of the railway. Tens of millions of people are travelling every year, and a delay for one train on those lines creates misery for millions, which is why I am working with the industry to try to ensure that these measures that we all like to throw about actually reflect the human experience of what is happening on the tracks.

We talk a lot about one of the fundamental causes of delay, which is the work at London Bridge. That is a real problem. It is a multi-million pound unpicking of a very tangled set of lines, some of which date back to the 1930s, and the rebuilding of what will be a fabulous station. That work is clearly putting immense pressure on the operators, and I am sympathetic. We are trying to encourage them to work much more closely with the Thameslink team to ensure that the works proceed without too much disruption. Let me flag for MPs in the room that, before the station opens, there will be a significant timetable rejigging for Southeastern customers in the summer. I want to ensure that everyone is aware and that that communication work goes out as effectively as possible.

My hon. Friends the Members for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) and for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) asked the important question of what “good” looks like once all this disruption works through the system. What is the level of performance at which we can hold up our hands and say that it is a high-performing railway? Many activities have already happened. New maintenance regimes have been put in place, and new bunches of relief drivers are stationed around the system to ensure that if a misplaced train arises, drivers can quickly get to it.

Right-time starts from stations and depots to ensure that trains leave on time are fundamental. A question has been raised several times about whether Southeastern is meeting its franchise commitments. When the franchise was originally let under the last Labour Government, and re-let under a direct award a couple of years ago, franchising tended to focus on processes and inputs. If an operator said, “Yes—tick—I have deep-cleaned my

[Claire Perry]

stations. Yes—tick—I have hired an additional number of drivers. Yes—tick—I have made sure that all my front-line staff have better information systems,” the Department, under all colours of Administration, would say that that franchise holder was doing its job. That is not good enough. Franchising should be about delivering outcomes, delivering performance and delivering customer satisfaction.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) and I occasionally share a train ride, and it is much better than he likes to say, but there we are. The new franchise for the Greater Anglia area is focused on contractual outcomes on performance and customer satisfaction. It is not just, “Have you done the following things?” but “Have you actually delivered the results that we want you to deliver?”

The important issue of customer care and handling has been raised several times. Indeed, customer satisfaction is not quite at its bottom, but I admit that it is almost there, at 75%, which is actually the highest score in the last two years. The score for the autumn period is improving, but customer care on this franchise has to improve. Many right hon. and hon. Members have pointed out that there are still gaps. Staff have to be outward-looking, and they have to be thinking of people on the trains as customers who have a choice—they are not just units who need to be moved to and from their lives. Indeed, Southeastern is committed to pushing out more information to the frontline and upgrading customer information systems. All those obligations that were in the franchise agreement have been completed on or ahead of schedule.

Southeastern has also invested almost £5 million in improving stations. The scores on satisfaction with stations have gone up, which is important to see. Southeastern is liable under the terms of its franchise agreement if it does not meet its national rail passenger survey scores. At the moment, it is still meeting those scores, but it is liable for penalties if they should drop further. I also want to put into the mix the question of what we expect during major works, such as the London Bridge project. We will face that problem with HS2, and we have to make it absolutely clear what outcomes we expect from operators at those times of disruption.

I will not delight Members and say that we have made a decision on the rolling stock. I am bound and determined to get new rolling stock on the line by the end of this year. New rolling stock will add capacity, particularly on the very crowded metro lines. I do not need to bore

Members with details about the departmental investment cases, but all of them are being worked through. As Members might imagine, I am pushing hard to ensure that I can make a positive announcement for capacity both later this year and again in 2018, because I understand the point and its relevance. I take the point raised by the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook). We must make sure we know where we can use the trains effectively so that people can walk forward, with selective door-opening if necessary. [Interruption.] Oh dear: that’s thunder.

The other point that has been raised is about compensation. We have among the most generous compensation schemes in Europe. People travelling from the constituency of the hon. Member for Eltham have a journey time of only 36 minutes to Victoria, so compensation is not particularly relevant because it kicks in at 30 minutes, which is not terribly helpful. It is a manifesto commitment of my Government, reiterated by the Chancellor, to introduce in a relatively short time—I certainly want to do it this year—a compensation commitment on which the clock starts ticking at 15 minutes. Several Members alluded to the c2c scheme, which is now providing compensation per minute of delay after the first two minutes. That is possible because of the Government’s investment in the south-east flexible ticketing programme. That is being rolled out to Southeastern, which will have the capability to offer compensation for these minutes of delay when it goes live on the SEFT system with smartcard season ticket holders by the end of the year.

Fare increases have been mentioned. I am proud to represent a Government who have capped fares at RPI plus 0% not just for this year but for the whole of this Parliament, which on average is worth more than £400 to every season ticket holder in the country.

I have very little time left. I will write, in particular on the point that the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) raised about changes to compensation, because I am not aware of that and I want to investigate. None of us is satisfied with the performance of the franchise. The question is whether anyone out there could run it better. My considered judgment is no. This is difficult, and there are huge engineering works taking place on the line. The company and Network Rail are absolutely committed to driving up performance, to the extent that Network Rail’s operating director is now devoting 40% of his time to sorting out the performance problems on these very congested lines.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Student Volunteering

11.1 am

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has considered student volunteering.

It is good to have you in charge of this debate, Mr Evans.

As last week was the 15th year of National Student Volunteering Week, I am taking the opportunity in this debate to celebrate student volunteering, to thank the many student volunteers in my constituency and to support action by universities and the Government to build on the enormous contribution that student volunteering makes. I thank both the network development director at Student Hubs, Francis Wright, and the public affairs officer at the National Union of Students, Alexander Lee, for their very helpful briefings.

The value of student volunteering does not often get the credit or attention that it deserves. I suppose that is because good news is never as newsworthy as bad news. So we can bet that any problems that wayward student behaviour causes will get a lot more attention than the many thousands of hours of voluntary commitment by students who are helping to make our communities better places.

In Oxford, our local community benefits from hundreds of dedicated student volunteers from Oxford and Oxford Brookes Universities, who give time every week to help to meet a wide range of local needs. The local student hub currently supports over 30 student-led volunteering projects in Oxford that benefit local residents. There are 281 Schools Plus volunteers tutoring in 12 local primary and secondary schools across some 26 projects, helping pupil achievement in areas ranging from literacy to music to GCSE science. In many cases, of course, the student volunteers are only a few years older than those they are helping, and there is a particularly powerful mentoring effect when student volunteers who themselves come from disadvantaged backgrounds help to raise the aspirations and attainment of pupils in poorer communities. Another project, Branch Up, does that by running activity days for children referred by social services. It supports 30 young people, many of whom come from Oxford's more deprived areas, through projects that tackle educational and extracurricular disadvantage.

Intergenerational support features too, through LinkAges, a student-led project that connects students with older people to tackle social isolation. LinkAges has a particularly strong relationship with Isis House, a care home in Florence Park, where around 20 volunteers help to run activity sessions and away-days. A number of LinkAges befrienders also support older people who live alone. And East Oxford Community Centre is home to Project Soup, a student-led initiative that runs micro-fundraising dinners for community projects by selling soup and bread that would otherwise have gone to waste. So far, over £1,800 has been raised there for local projects.

For a number of years, I have been in touch with KEEN—Kids Enjoy Exercise Now—whereby students from Oxford Brookes and Oxford Universities put on games and other activities for children and young people with special needs, providing real enjoyment for all participants and welcome respite for parents who know that their children are socialising and having fun with

others of a similar age. I was privileged to present the medals at the KEEN Olympics sports day last summer, and to see so much joy on the faces of all those taking part was really heart-warming.

That project brings home an absolutely crucial aspect of student volunteering, namely that there is a huge three-way benefit. Of course, those being helped benefit from the activities that the students organise; the students themselves benefit enormously from the experience, in ways that will help their personal development and often their careers; and the local community and society gains from the social value and benefits of the voluntary activity.

I must also praise students' voluntary political involvement. I go out nearly every Sunday morning, calling round the constituency, talking with residents and taking up their concerns, and listening to their views on politics and much else. Along with other local activists and councillors, in term-time I am always joined by students from Oxford University Labour Club or the Brookes Union Labour society. Getting up relatively early on a Sunday morning to help with community representation is not perhaps a stereotypical student activity, but the thousands of hours that those student volunteers have put in has enriched our politics locally, and I am sure the same is true of student volunteers for other political parties, those working on important campaigns such as the forthcoming referendum, and those involved in the enormous amount of work that goes into campaigning on issues such as equal rights, the environment and homelessness. Students care, and many of them channel that caring into purposeful action that makes a difference.

The experience of student volunteering that we are fortunate to benefit from in Oxford is replicated in various ways in every university and college. Across the country, there is many a food bank, many a faith group community initiative and many a charity that would founder without its student volunteers. As the NUS briefing for this debate points out, last week alone—the volunteering week—more than 16,000 students got involved in over 500 events across 125 colleges and universities. One way or another, more than 600,000 students will be involved in student societies, clubs and volunteering projects this year. That student contribution is a huge win-win resource for our society and merits support at every opportunity.

Student hubs provide invaluable facilities and networking. It must be more than 10 years ago now that those who came up with the student hubs idea—another Oxford first—were sitting in my advice surgery and explaining the difference that it could make in facilitating and expanding student volunteering, and how right they were. This is a success story, and one that commands support across the political spectrum. It is important that everything possible is done to sustain and build on that support.

I am timing my remarks to allow my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) to speak on points coming out of the all-party group on students, but there are some points that I will highlight to the Minister and others.

The first is to stress what a resource student volunteering is for the role of universities and colleges in our communities. Every bit of investment that they can make in helping to provide student hubs, and in supporting funding and

[Mr Andrew Smith]

sponsorship for student volunteering, reflects well on the role of higher education in the wider community, as well as benefiting students' education. Therefore, volunteering should be seen not as an add-on but as a core part of universities' mission.

The training and support that is available for those supervising student societies, volunteering and student projects is very much part of that process. It is important that the Government do all they can to support volunteering, for example by the Cabinet Office and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills making it clear to universities that investing in the provision of high-quality social action opportunities for their students is something that is expected of them.

Within four years, 35% of university applicants will be National Citizen Service graduates, so we need to consider how NCS can help to build bridges to the universities that have invested in community volunteering, for example by showcasing the best examples of such volunteering to people who are thinking of applying to university. We need to create a culture in the UK where community service is valued—it is much more valued in the US—as an indicator of future leadership potential and is taken into account in evaluating applications to university. We also need to ensure, through the support of universities and student hubs for volunteering, that the benefits of volunteering do not disproportionately fall to those who are better off at university because their time is less constrained by the need to do part-time work. The benefits should be accessible and available for everyone. Student volunteering does so much for our society. Let us thank all the students and all those helping them who make that possible. Let us do everything we can together to make it an even greater success in the future, because everybody benefits.

11.10 am

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) for providing me with the opportunity to add to his comments. I echo them, because the landscape that he paints of volunteering opportunities and activity in Oxford is replicated in every town and city across the country that benefits from universities and colleges.

I speak as the Member with the highest number of students of any UK constituency. As of last week, I am also the representative of the student volunteer of the year, and I congratulate Liam Rodgers. He is a creative writing student at Sheffield Hallam University. He is the leader and founder of UpScribe, a project that helps homeless people to express themselves through creative writing, increasing their confidence and ability to work with others, as well as reintegrating them into society. That project not only demonstrates the breadth of student volunteering, but the creativity and innovation that students bring alongside traditional volunteering opportunities. Liam's is a great good news story, and there are plenty like it across the country.

We should put on record our thanks, as my right hon. Friend has, to the almost one in three students who volunteer while they are at university and to the growing numbers in further education colleges who do so, too. Last Tuesday, to mark Student Volunteering Week we

held a meeting of the all-party group on students, which I chair. That meeting was not only to celebrate that activity, but to look at the challenges.

As my right hon. Friend said, volunteering is a win-win. Local communities benefit hugely from the thousands of students involved in every town and city where they are engaged, and that is the main motivator for students. Four in five students responding to an NUS survey said that it was why they got involved in volunteering, but they also benefit, developing skills and improving their employability. We all know that in a competitive graduate market employers are increasingly looking for graduates-plus. Employers do not simply want a good degree, but experience and skills, too, and volunteering helps facilitate that. It is therefore doubly important that volunteering opportunities are available to everyone.

A joint report by Universities UK and the National Union of Students found that not having enough time is cited by students as the main reason why they are unable to volunteer or to volunteer as much as they would wish. The main pressure on time, apart from academic work, is paid employment. Research shows that 77% of students work to help fund their studies. The pressure to earn while studying is increasing with the cost of university. I worry that that pressure will increase further for the poorest students with the abolition of maintenance grants. If we limit volunteering to those who do not have to take paid employment to see themselves through university, we tilt the playing field—it is already tilted towards those with advantages—even further in their favour and in the wrong direction. We would be giving extra opportunities to those who already have an edge in the graduate market, while those from lower income families risk falling further behind. I am keen to get the Minister's views on how we can ensure that volunteering opportunities are available to all, so that in future Student Volunteering Weeks we can celebrate moving from the basis of strength that we have now to having even more people engaged with an even greater impact on our communities.

11.15 am

The Minister for Civil Society (Mr Rob Wilson): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, I think for the first time. May I congratulate the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) on securing today's debate? This is an important topic, as he laid out in his comments. I know what a strong advocate he is for student social action. In some ways, how could he be anything else, representing the constituency that he does? Also, many years ago he went to Reading School in my constituency. It is a top-performing academic school, but it is keen on the wider individual and ensuring that young people give something back to society for the great education they get at that school. I understand where his core values come from on this particular subject.

I am delighted to reiterate the Government's commitment to encouraging young people to get involved in all forms of social action. I will take "student" in its wider context, and not just talk about university students, who we have heard a lot about in the comments so far. Youth social action is close to my heart, so I am delighted to be the Minister leading on this agenda for the Government. We want to see all young people having the opportunity to take part in social action and to go on to form what

should be a lifelong habit—it should not just be for a few years when they are young; the habit should be embedded so that all through their life they are always giving something back to their communities. One of the ways that we as the Government want to achieve that is through the National Citizen Service. More than 200,000 young people have taken part in NCS since 2011, and the NCS Trust estimates that graduates have delivered more than 8 million hours of volunteering time already. Consecutive independent evaluations demonstrate that NCS delivers more confident, capable and engaged young people, and it continues to represent impressive value for money.

I want to expand the opportunity to every young person who wants a place on an NCS scheme, making it a rite of passage that young people look forward to. In January, the Prime Minister set out his ambition that 60% of all 16-year-olds participate in NCS by 2021. To achieve that, we have committed more than £1 billion of funding over the next four years to grow the programme to 360,000 places by 2020. NCS will become the largest programme of its kind in Europe. I am particularly proud of that, and all the young people who have been and will be involved should be, too.

We have already seen NCS graduates go on to achieve great things in continuing their social action journey. One such NCS graduate is now part of the Points of Light team at the Cabinet Office. He works as part of a small team identifying outstanding volunteers right across the country to receive recognition directly from the Prime Minister for their work. NCS graduates from across the UK are celebrating all things social action this Saturday. It is a chance for them to showcase their social action activity and to promote the causes close to their hearts. NCS is all about giving young people the tools, opportunities and respect to achieve amazing things in their community, so the NCS social action day will be a fantastic way to do that.

NCS is not the limit of our ambition in government. We believe in creating a social action journey pre and post-NCS. We want to encourage all forms of youth social action, and the Government are committed to continuing our support of Step Up to Serve's #iwill campaign. That campaign is supported by all parties in the House of Commons. It aims to increase the number of 10 to 20-year-olds taking part in youth social action by 50% by 2020, because we recognise the importance of social action for young people. We know that participation not only develops vital skills for life and work, but helps young people to feel connected to the communities in which they live. Participation in NCS and Step Up to Serve helps to break down social barriers and adds to social cohesion in our communities. It enables young people to meet and work with others from different walks of life.

As part of the Government's continued commitment to all forms of youth social action, the Cabinet Office has invested more than £1 million to grow youth social action opportunities across England, which has been generously matched by the Pears Foundation and the UK Community Foundations. The national fund is working with nine successful applicants to increase opportunities for young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or rural areas. The local fund concentrates on optimising opportunities in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridge: areas previously identified as having low youth social action participation rates.

We have also seen other fantastic results through funding social action. Through our uniformed youth social action fund, Youth United has created 20,000 new places for young people to join groups in disadvantaged communities across the UK, and 90% of the units created are still running with no further funding from Government, which is a great example of sustainability and a really fantastic result, so I congratulate Youth United on doing that.

Part of the fund is to support innovative approaches to reaching the most hard-to-reach young people in our communities. The Boys Brigade has struggled to recruit adult volunteers in some of its more rural locations owing to the timings of meetings, but what is so great about this story is how recruiting NCS graduates as volunteers is really showing how this very natural social action journey can fit together between NCS and other organisations. This part of the uniformed fund is also enabling the Scout Association to be more accessible to young people with disabilities; the Woodcraft Folk to meet refugees and other young people with English as a second language; and the Volunteer Police Cadets to run a pilot programme working with young offenders.

Reports will be published later this year in relation to the fund, and I am sure everyone here will agree that this will be an exciting piece of research that we can learn from. It really shows the diverse range of social action projects that young people get involved in, and the Government are committed to supporting that journey.

Mr Andrew Smith: I agree with what the Minister is saying in this happily consensual debate. Has he had or will he have discussions with the Minister for Universities and Science, his hon. Friend the hon. Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson), to ensure that every opportunity is taken to make the most of the potential to link together the broader social action initiatives he is describing with the opportunities that can be available through universities and colleges, which need to be encouraged by those universities?

Mr Wilson: Yes, of course. I am in discussions with not only the Minister responsible for higher education but with the Minister responsible for apprenticeships, the Minister for Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), as well. We want to ensure that we have joined-up Government and that the social action journey continues through life and gives every young person the opportunity to take part in things that they want to do in their local community. I have seen at first hand the great work being done by young volunteers in a variety of sectors and communities. I was particularly impressed to see the huge contribution that young people can make in the health and social care sector, for example. I visited the Royal Free young volunteers programme, where young volunteers supported patients, staff and visitors primarily in two roles: as satellite navigation guides around the hospital and as mealtime experience volunteers. The young people I spoke to aspired to have a wide impact in society, beyond the hospital, to inspire positive engagement throughout their communities. It was clear to see that those volunteers brought energy, enthusiasm and heart to everybody they interacted with.

The latest youth social action survey demonstrated that 42% of young people between the age of 10 and 20 years old have participated in meaningful social action in the past year. This demonstrates that young

[Mr Rob Wilson]

people have a real appetite to play their part. In January this year we published the outcome of a highly significant new study conducted by the behavioural insights team, which demonstrated a link between social action and improved educational attainment as well as enhanced employability skills, which is something that the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) mentioned in his comments. The study indicated that people who engaged in volunteering were up to three times more likely to get invited for a job interview than people who did not volunteer.

The Government are committed to supporting young people, giving them the power and opportunity to play a real part in their community and to build important skills for life. I am keen that the habit remains through adult life. The Government also support young people to have a say in the community and voice their opinions on issues that are important to them. Some of this work is delivered through a grant to the British Youth Council for youth voice activities. Last year, as I am sure hon. Members are aware, the BYC's Make Your Mark ballot, the largest annual ballot of young people's views, culminated in a record-breaking 970,000 votes cast towards key topics for young people to focus on. That is a remarkable achievement that would not have been possible without all those young people actively getting involved. That sum of nearly 1 million votes means that 16.5% of the nation's 11 to 18-year-olds had their say. That is a great demonstration of young people's interest, and a great vehicle for the collective voice of young people to be heard.

It is therefore even more important that we listen to the voice of young people who can bring a fresh perspective and innovative ideas to many of the challenges that we face. At the annual sitting of BYC's Youth Parliament in November, I was impressed by the level of commitment and enthusiasm shown by the members of the Youth Parliament who want to make a positive change in society. It was truly impressive to watch young people debating important issues such as mental health and the living wage. Colleagues in Parliament have frequently expressed support for the UK Youth Parliament. As hon. Members may be aware, in June 2015 Parliament resolved that the UKYP should continue to use the House of Commons Chamber for its annual debate for the remainder of the current parliamentary term until 2020. In light of that, I decided to offer BYC a grant agreement to support it to deliver its youth voice activities for the remainder of the Parliament.

Last week we celebrated, as the right hon. Member for Oxford East said, the 15th anniversary of Student Volunteering Week. Delivered in partnership between student hubs, the National Union of Students and the student volunteering network, the week is used to discuss the challenges and opportunities in student volunteering. I had the pleasure of being involved in the celebration event where Liam Rodgers, a constituent of the hon. Member for Sheffield Central, was presented with the student volunteer of the year award. As the hon. Gentleman said, Liam founded UpScribe, a writing project for homeless people to express themselves through creative writing. Liam led on the creation and publication of a book created by people who participated in the project, many of whom are now published writers. It was impressive to hear that Liam had donated a third of his £1,000 award to a fellow shortlisted student of the year volunteer. This demonstrated his commitment to the widest elements of youth social action.

During Student Volunteering Week, I also visited one of the successful organisations under the national youth social action fund. Through the fund, an organisation called Whole Education plans to use its network of schools across the country to work with students who implement their own community projects and embed the culture of social action in their schools. I spent time with a small group of young volunteers who were developing an online platform for students to share their youth-led social action ideas, as well as designing a virtual social action badge, which I look forward to seeing later this week. I want to encourage more universities to harness the power and positive outcomes of student volunteering. I am keen to explore how to engage more vice-chancellors to support the growth of student volunteering, and I will speak to my colleague in higher education to see how we can do that. There is a great deal to do if we are to make social action a part of life for 10 to 20-year-olds under this Government, but I am firmly committed to making that a reality.

I will end by thanking all the individuals and organisations that support youth social action for their commitment and dedication. I also extend my thanks again to the right hon. Member for Oxford East for initiating this debate today.

Question put and agreed to.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Egypt: British Support

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered British support for stability in Egypt.

It is a great honour to introduce this debate. I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I visited Egypt many times before I came to this place: I went there as a student and in 2008 I spent a month in Cairo trying to learn Arabic—very unsuccessfully, I should add. I have also had the honour of visiting Egypt many times on parliamentary delegations with the Conservative Middle East Council and others.

This is a timely and important debate, for a number of reasons. First, we need only open the newspaper every day or look online to see the absolute turmoil that much of the region has plunged into. I am also conscious of the fact that a lot of the turmoil and confusion that has crept into our world has emerged very recently. I recall travelling to Egypt for the first time in 1998. There had been a terrorist outrage in Luxor in 1997, a terrible incident in which dozens of people were killed, but when I visited—obviously this was all before 9/11—there was a real optimism about the place. It was a broadly secular country: people could walk freely, there was no real pressure for women to dress in any particular way and alcohol was served freely. It was a country looking towards a bright future.

It is not my place to go through the recent history of the region today, but as a consequence of what has happened there in the past 15 years since the events of 9/11, and everything that has been going on since the Arab spring, the need for stability in Egypt and its role in the world have increased. The mood there has been a lot more pessimistic, and its people and Government have gone through a very difficult past five years.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. The Egyptian people and nation are central to the middle east. Does he agree that it is crucial for the future wellbeing of the middle east and the wider region that Egypt restores itself to a position of centrality and stability in order to spread that across the region?

Kwasi Kwarteng: The hon. Gentleman has highlighted very pithily—more pithily than I did—the key fact that Egypt is absolutely central to the Arab world. We need only look at the numbers: something like 90 million people—well over a third of the Arabic-speaking people across the globe—live in Egypt. In Al-Azhar University, Egypt has one of the key centres of Islamic scholarship and learning. Egyptian media dominate the Arabic-speaking world. The Egyptian Arabic dialect is widely understood across the Arab world.

Egypt is also important for historic reasons. In the 20th century we need only look at the careers of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. These were huge figures in the Arab world who played a role in securing stability in this important region. As the hon. Gentleman said, Egypt is therefore absolutely central to any form of stability or solution to the ongoing problems in the middle east.

I called for this debate because we need to recognise, in this Parliament, throughout the country and throughout the international community, that stability in Egypt is crucial and we should all be investing heavily in it.

Although Egypt has attained a modicum of stability, people will recognise that the degree of stability that has been reached is not complete. There are still dangers. We saw an appalling terrorist outrage in November, when a Russian civilian aircraft was blown up in the sky with huge loss of life. There are threats still lurking in the Egyptian scene. Although there is a terrorist threat, it must be admitted that the Egyptian Government have taken some very severe steps. As friends of Egypt—as people who are interested, in every sense of the word, in maintaining stability in and supporting Egypt—it is our job to ask probing questions about its Government's treatment of political prisoners and people who have expressed doubts about or even opposition to the regime. It is our job to ensure that the Egyptian Government are held to the highest standards with respect to human rights and individual freedoms. I do not deny that at all.

Many people in Britain view some developments in Egypt with considerable concern. I need only mention the Italian University of Cambridge PhD student who was found killed, clearly murdered, in Cairo six weeks ago. We do not know what happened and we have not heard any definitive answers from the regime. The Egyptian Government cannot simply be given a blank cheque by their friends and allies in the west. I regard myself as a friend of Egypt—broadly speaking, Britain and the British Government are friends of Egypt—but being a friend does not mean that we blindly accept everything that the Egyptian Government do, nor does it mean that we should acquiesce or turn a blind eye to the outrages or abuses we have identified.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): Recently, I was delighted to be able to join my hon. Friend, and other Members present, on an extremely informative visit to Cairo. He is making an important point about how the Egyptian Government operate, which is of concern to our constituents. Nevertheless, does he agree that for the Egyptian people—indeed, for the whole region—there is one thing of huge importance that probably dwarfs everything else: stability? He mentioned that Egypt is a very large country, with a population of 90 million. It has a huge history, unlike many other Arab countries. It has a big contribution to make, so stability will be an important factor, and we should be supporting the Egyptian Government in that pursuit.

Kwasi Kwarteng: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. At the centre of this issue is the fact that we have to deal with a very fine balancing act in Egypt, which is why this debate is so important. On the one hand, we have a fragile situation in the region and a country that has gone through enormous economic pressure and two destabilising revolutions in four years. On the other hand, it is a country that is crucial to the stability of the region. There is the need for order and stability, but there is also a Government who have a mixed record, if I can put it that way, on guaranteeing human rights and the pressure and force they have applied in domestic situations.

We in Parliament have to appreciate that very fine balance, because frankly we do not understand the immense pressures that the Egyptian people have gone through. One startling fact is that in 1952 the population

[*Kwasi Kwarteng*]

of Egypt was 20 million. I have spoken to Cairenes who remember those times, and they remember a completely different Egypt. Cities such as Cairo and Alexandria were much smaller, yet much more spacious. In many ways they were much more luxurious than they are today. Over the past 60 years, the Egyptian population has more than quadrupled. That demographic pressure constitutes Egypt's greatest challenge.

As can be imagined, in a country where more than 50% of people are under the age of 25, there needs to be employment, a degree of economic progress and a Government who recognise the ambitions and aspirations of their young people. In that context, government can be very difficult. Against that backdrop of a growing population and economic pressure, there is also the rise of, for want of a better phrase, political Islam and the complications that radical Islamic thinking—takfiri thinking, as it is called—bring to the political mix.

While I am talking about the demographics in Egypt, we also should remember that there are nearly 10 million Copts—Egyptian Christians who have been there for 2,000 years, since the birth of Christianity—who comprise something like 10% of Egypt's population. They will point out that they have been there for longer than Islam has existed as a religion, so they have a deep historic connection to and experience of the country of their forefathers.

I have had the privilege of visiting Egypt a number of times in the last six years. In that time, I have seen four or five different Heads of State and three different Governments, and I have had the privilege of speaking to several Ministers. In the brief period after the Muslim Brotherhood took over and were running the country, it was clear to me there was huge pressure on the Copts. Churches were being burned and Coptic people were being attacked. No community breathed a greater sigh of relief when the Muslim Brotherhood was removed, as it were, from government than the Copts. No group of people was happier to see a restoration, as they would see it, of some kind of order under the form of General Sisi.

For us in the west looking at that development, we can quibble about the details and say that, like Mubarak, Sisi is some kind of military dictator, but that is to overlook a lot of the changes that have happened in Egypt. We had the privilege of meeting Egyptian parliamentarians, who treated us and hosted us incredibly generously and respectfully in their Parliament. They were very keen to adopt the best parliamentary practices from Britain and apply them to their new Parliament, which met less than two months ago. They are absolutely committed to building a form of parliamentary democracy. That process might take a long time. Egypt's parliamentary democracy is certainly not perfectly formed, but few parliamentary democracies can claim to be perfect and fully formed. We have just been considering how the House of Lords operates in our country. Parliament has existed for hundreds and hundreds of years, yet we are still evolving and trying to look at the nature of the two Houses and how they co-ordinate with each other.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although Egypt has had its unique problems since the Arab spring—or the Arab winter, as it is called in some quarters—the fact

that the Egyptian Government are forcefully putting forward a democratic mandate is a good thing for the region?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I think my hon. Friend is right. People will dispute the extent to which Egypt is a full, participatory democracy—people can have different views—but it is clearly going in the right direction. We can discuss where along the road we think it is, but the movement is positive. Many of the elections that were held in Mubarak's time were far more tightly controlled than the parliamentary election we have just witnessed in Egypt. The nature of political life in Egypt is evolving. That goes to the core of what I am saying. Stability—some degree of law and order in the streets—is absolutely essential. Anecdotally, we were told that at the time of the Muslim Brotherhood there was practically a self-imposed curfew in Cairo. Now people are beginning to go out—they feel a bit more secure and safer—and a civic society is growing.

I have talked briefly about political developments and aspirations, about structures and about Parliaments, but we need to think about a basic economic question, which I alluded to when I was talking about the population increase. Demographic pressures and the economy are absolutely crucial. Anyone who knows anything about Egypt will know that, broadly, about 20% of its economy is based on tourism. One thing that we can do directly to help Egypt to build up its economy is to help tourism. Our delegation learned that the suspension of British flights to Sharm el-Sheikh was a matter of grave concern to Egyptian businessmen and the Egyptian Government. I recommend that the Government look seriously at that—I know we are doing that and are inching towards lifting the ban and stopping the suspension of flights. If that were to happen, sooner rather than later, it would be an immense boon to Egyptian tourism and its economy.

Sir Gerald Howarth: I apologise for intervening again—I am not seeking to catch your eye, Mr Pritchard, as I have to entertain 101 Logistic Brigade from Aldershot shortly, so I will not be able to make a speech—but I want to pick up on this important point my hon. Friend has made. Does he agree that the British Government have moved heaven and earth to do whatever they can to ensure that we can resume flights to Sharm el-Sheikh, and that the Egyptians have come a long way towards meeting the British authorities' safety requirements? It is imperative that both sides work even harder so we can resume flights in time for the summer season.

Kwasi Kwarteng: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Something like 1 million British tourists go to Egypt every year, under normal circumstances. We have tried extremely hard to help in that regard—I know that my hon. Friend the Minister and others have spoken eloquently and tried hard behind the scenes—but this is a matter of critical importance. Egypt has a deficit of something like 10% or 12% of GDP, which is very high. It has a very high unemployment rate—it is something like 12%—and the demographic pressures that I have talked about are not getting any easier. The economy is critical to the stability of Egypt and the wider region. That is something that we can do directly to help Egypt.

I would not want to anticipate or prejudge any of the security considerations, because they are obviously paramount, but I want to put on the table the fact that

directly supporting Egyptian tourism will have a knock-on effect. It will help the Egyptian economy and provide employment. That in itself will defuse a lot of the tension, militate against the attractions of extremism and prevent young people from going down that route.

In conclusion, I think we have a good and helpful relationship with Egypt. I would not want to inflate his ego too much, but we have a Minister responsible for the region who has a deep knowledge of and commitment to, not only Egypt, but other countries in the middle east—I know, because I have travelled with him. Broadly, our relationship with the Egyptian Government is very strong. I would suggest that we closely consider the issue of flights. Economic support will obviously be important in years to come. Lastly, while we have done many good things and built up a good relationship, there is some way to go. This is an evolving relationship and there will be challenges ahead, but I hope that in those challenges Egypt can find a solid and steadfast friend in Britain, the British Government and our people.

2.50 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) for securing this debate. Instability in Egypt and across many areas in the middle east is a grave concern. It is one of the major global challenges faced by this generation, and such is the intricacy of the challenge that one fears that it may well be faced by generations to come as well. I am here because I and my constituents in Cambridge care deeply about the human rights abuses and political volatility that the people of Egypt are facing. I am also here because I want to tell the House about Giulio Regeni, whom the hon. Gentleman mentioned and whose appalling murder has drawn international condemnation.

Giulio was a 28-year-old Italian PhD student at Girton College in the University of Cambridge. He spoke five languages—Italian, English, Spanish, Arabic, and German—and was researching labour unrest and independent trade unions as a visiting scholar at the American University in Cairo. He went missing on 25 January, which was the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the 2011 uprising against former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. He was on his way to meet a friend at a restaurant near Tahrir Square—known, of course, as the symbolic centre of the Egyptian revolution—but nine days later his body was found in a ditch between Cairo and Alexandria.

I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members have seen the details in the news, so I will not avoid being explicit about the horrors of Giulio's death. In the past few days, we have learned from the post-mortem that earlier accounts have been corroborated: Giulio had been stabbed, burned with cigarettes, bruised, beaten and mutilated; he had suffered broken ribs and a brain haemorrhage, and his nails had been ripped out. The Italian Interior Minister described his ordeal as “inhuman, animal-like” violence, and the senior prosecutor said that Giulio probably suffered a “slow death”, but initially there were conflicting reports about the cause of his death. Early reports about signs of torture were contradicted by claims that a traffic accident was to blame. People were rightly suspicious about these explanations—right to think it unlikely that a traffic accident somehow systematically ripped out his fingernails.

Giulio's family and friends need answers. Italy wants answers. I suggest that we all need answers, not only because this case was brutal and because it was the first case that we know about of a foreign academic researcher working in Cairo being subjected to such sadism, but because it was not an isolated incident for the people of Egypt. According to human rights organisations, the torture that it appears Giulio suffered is a matter of routine for those imprisoned by state security organisations in Egypt. According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, Egyptian citizens are seeing “repression on a scale unprecedented in Egypt's modern history”. According to the Al-Nadeem Centre for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, almost 500 people have died at the hands of Egypt's security forces and over 600 people were tortured while in detention in 2015. According to *The Guardian*, hundreds of Egyptians are being “disappeared”, tortured and held outside of judicial oversight.

What can one do against such brutal barbarism? Why on earth did this happen to Giulio? Some have speculated that the politically sensitive research that he was undertaking on labour unions in Egypt was a factor, or perhaps his extracurricular journalism for the *il manifesto* communist newspaper in Italy meant he was targeted. We do not know, but that there are countries in this world where people are imprisoned, tortured, or murdered for their academic pursuits, their writing, or their political views is the sad truth.

We recognise that the situation in Egypt is complex and challenging, and like my hon. Friends I desperately want to see the region underpinned by stability and democracy. I hope the Minister will enlighten us about recent representations that the Government have made to the Egyptian Government regarding human rights issues. In a written answer on 11 February, the Government said:

“We are aware of the tragic death of Mr Regeni, an Italian national, following his disappearance on 25 January and pass our condolences to his friends and family at this difficult time. We support Italian and Egyptian efforts to investigate into the circumstances of his death.”

I would welcome some clarification of what can only be described as “diplomatic language”. In what way are the British Government supporting the Italian and Egyptian investigative efforts?

I conclude by quoting from the letter signed by more than 4,600 academics from around the globe. They wrote of Giulio:

“Our community has been enriched by his presence. We are diminished by the loss of a young researcher whose work tackled questions that are vitally important to our understanding of contemporary Egyptian society.

They continued:

“We...call on the Egyptian authorities to cooperate with an independent and impartial investigation into all instances of forced disappearances, cases of torture and deaths in detention during January and February this year, alongside investigations by criminal prosecutors into Giulio's death, in order that those responsible for these crimes can be identified and brought to justice.”

2.55 pm

Charlotte Leslie (Bristol North West) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I refer right hon. and hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

[Charlotte Leslie]

I too have been able to visit Egypt to inform myself about what has been and is now going on. I associate myself with and echo the concerns hon. Members have expressed about the tragic fate of Giulio Regeni and other human rights abuses, which I will discuss further later in my speech. Recent events in Egypt have fundamentally disturbed us and have challenged us to think about the dynamics underlying the Arab spring, posing basic questions to western politicians which have been played out in Egypt on a global stage. In many ways, events in Egypt fundamentally challenge our sometimes lazy notions of democracy and challenge us to consider the realities of the balance and tensions between freedoms and the merits of stability.

We should not underestimate the uniqueness of Egypt's position. Look at its neighbours, which also experienced the Arab spring tidal wave in 2011. In Syria, horrific, blood-stained chaos is suckling the diabolical death culture of Daesh. It is a humanitarian catastrophe and a centre of global tensions, the effects of which include not only untold numbers of inhumane acts of cruelty against individuals, children, and homosexuals, but the destabilisation of the whole of Europe. Look at Yemen, sunk beneath a flood of war, and Iraq, struggling against the onslaught of Daesh. Libya is now a failed state and an arena of warring militias and jihadists. These are Egypt's neighbours and it is important to consider Egypt's actions and challenges in that context.

By contrast, look at Egypt. There was an uprising in 2011 and Mubarak was removed in February. In June 2012, Egypt held elections and Morsi was elected, but then the direction that Morsi began taking dramatically alarmed the country, including many of those who had thought that the Muslim Brotherhood would prove genuinely moderate. Between January and the summer of 2013 public protest reached boiling point, and on 30 June Morsi was removed. In May 2014, after some constitutional preparations and changes, General el-Sisi, a Muslim who was appointed by Morsi, was elected as president to serve as a Muslim who wants a secular state. At the time, the west described that as undemocratic, but this is one of those times when we should step back, take a reality check, and consider our priorities and where our judgment should lie.

A close friend of mine who is half-Egyptian and whose Copt family lives in Alexandria and Cairo reported to me the rapidly growing mortal fear felt by Copts, as members of their congregation began to disappear and churches were attacked. The culture of fear under Morsi escalated quickly and alarmingly. Egyptian Muslims have anecdotally told me that they also became frightened when the Muslim Brotherhood appeared not to be what it originally said on the tin. They became alarmed at Morsi's attempt to make himself constitutionally unchallengeable. We can all think of a great leader—perhaps not so great—in the last century whose first challenge to Europe was to make himself constitutionally unchallengeable. In that growing fear and alarm about oppression, Egypt simply rejected the path to political Islam that it was being hurled down with brute force.

We have to remember that democracy was never going to happen in Egypt as it does in Tunbridge Wells. To think otherwise is to demonstrate the naivety that the west sometimes displays when it tries to impose on

other countries standards and structures that took our countries several hundred years of bloody war to establish, and then becomes judgmental. When travelling around Egypt, I looked for the results of the process that Britain called undemocratic. I was lucky enough to be at the opening of the new Suez canal expansion, which was achieved in less than a year—necessary, but far from sufficient in aiding the Egyptian economy to stabilise and thrive. This is anecdotal, but in the city of Cairo I observed nothing but tangible relief that at last someone had taken control of a country people had felt was teetering over into oblivion. To my surprise, that feeling was expressed by conservative Muslims as well. That fundamental sense of relief was echoed by mothers, students and taxi drivers—yes, there was apprehension for the future, but there was fundamental relief that Egypt was finally under some kind of control. Ironically, although not democratically elected as the west might have preferred, Sisi, as far as we can tell, enjoys a popularity that many elected leaders in this country would do a lot for.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Sisi was democratically elected. Although some of the returns were impressive—something like 90% or 95% of the vote—there was a democratic process.

Charlotte Leslie: I thank my hon. Friend for clarifying that. There was of course a democratic process after considerable institutional and constitutional preparations were made for the transition, which, given the context, was quite remarkable, particularly compared with the fates of other countries surrounding Egypt. I was referring to the fact that many people did not want Morsi to be removed; they wanted him to hang on and then elections to take place. From what I saw of people living in Egypt—I admit this is only anecdotal—the idea that elections would take place in a free and fair way in that culture of fear was optimistic at best.

I do not want anyone to think that I am describing a rosy situation—it is far from rosy. The younger population is very concerned and, interestingly enough, their concerns chime with the concerns about human rights abuses and clampdowns that we have heard in the Chamber today—concerns about the imprisonment of journalists and the appalling, tragic and diabolical treatment of the Italian Cambridge student. I do not have to take up valuable time in expressing how abominable that case is, because other hon. Members have done so far better than I could. Interestingly, students and young people said that it was not only abominable, but politically unnecessary, because Sisi enjoyed sufficient popularity not to need to clamp down in that heavy-handed way.

That brings me on to my next point: that such human rights abuses are not only fundamentally morally wrong, but dangerous for the country itself. Human rights abuses foster the kind of radicalism, extremism and takfiri thinking that Egypt is fundamentally pitched against. In looking at radicals such as Ayman al-Zawahiri, we see the detrimental effect that prison torture plays in radicalising budding or existing extremists. If we think that we have an incentive to crush extremism, look at Egypt's neighbours and see just how urgent the crushing of that extremist takfiri mentality is to them. How can Egypt become more successful in eradicating extremism? My impression is that, in common with many countries that are facing modernisation and a perhaps already

modernised younger generation, Egypt is experiencing the counterintuitive paradox of needing to grip less tightly in order to be stronger.

We had the great privilege and interesting experience of meeting many Members of the nascent Parliament. I remember the confusion in this Parliament—a great institution—when in 2010, for the first time in a long time, we had a coalition Government. Everyone ran around not quite knowing what was going on. Imagine a completely new Parliament, a set of 200 or so pieces of legislation that had to be reviewed in a short space of time and the establishment of much of the constitution—something we take for granted in this country. That is a Parliament that is really trying to get off the ground, so it would seem bizarre for Britain, which has such an established Parliament, not to take a lead in helping and nurturing that fledgling to fly and to become the solid institution that is so important to form a politically stable Egypt. The country is a brave and resilient one, trying to form a bastion of democracy amid a sea of hostility.

There are also deep concerns about Egypt's economy. With oil prices falling, support from the Gulf is waning, and that is worrying. To create a healthier economy, Sisi has to perform a difficult balancing act by weaning the country off subsidies, while avoiding the public protests that would emerge to destabilise Egypt were prices of bread on the street to go up. Tourism accounts for 10% to 15% of the Egyptian economy—about 1% to 5% is from Britain. If we want Egypt to remain stable and to flourish, we need Sharm el-Sheikh flights to resume as soon as possible. The work there must be concluded quickly. In assessing the security of Sharm el-Sheikh flights, obviously we must put the safety of our citizens first, but we should also consider the security implications of not resuming the flights. An awful lot of Egyptian people depend on tourism. If they are left jobless and feeling spurned by Britain, we have to consider where they might turn for a livelihood and security. We do not want them to turn to extremism.

The stakes are high. If Egypt crumbles economically and social disorder breaks out, the ongoing migrant crisis in Europe that we fear now and this summer will increase dramatically. The exchange rate of the Egyptian currency is artificially high and floating the currency on the open market is a frighteningly risky prospect for the country. It would be a leap of faith, and in making any leap everyone needs to feel surrounded by friends who will help. Furthermore, if we do not help Egypt to modernise, social disorder will feed and nurture Daesh and other pro-Islamic State players.

We can do so much. We have a rich experience of democracy, so we can help Egypt to form a Parliament and functioning state institutions. Education is also vital. The broken-down education system in Egypt needs almost a complete revamp. That, too, is something in which Britain has expertise and experience. As we all know, education and forging a future for young people is one of our key weapons in preventing young people from falling prey to the predatory nature of extremist and takfiri thinkers. If we are not proactive in forming such a relationship with Egypt and in helping it to become the democratic nation that it is trying hard to be—not perfectly, but it is trying—other nations will step into that gap. I am not sure that we especially want Russia to in and to be seen as the primary friend of Egypt. We need allies in the region, so we need to support them.

When looking at the human rights abuses, which are appalling, we need to ensure that we are measuring carefully what it is that we are concerned about. If we are concerned about human beings and their suffering, the metric of our judgments and actions on human rights abuses must be the number of people enduring such suffering. It can be easy to focus blame on the locus of responsibility, whether a Government or an institution, but much less easy to blame a failed state, because there is no one there to blame. We are, however, concerned about human beings and their lives, so we need to look at where the most human rights abuses take place: in a stable state or in a failed state.

Kwasi Kwarteng: With respect to human rights abuses, it is important to mention Giulio Regeni, a research student who I believe lived in the constituency of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner). I followed the case and it seems difficult to apportion blame directly, because not only are the Government responsible for some abuses, but there are rogue elements within the security apparatus. One thing that we have not mentioned is the fact that the Egyptian military is broadly involved in ramifying branches of economic and social life, business and so on. When people talk about the Egyptian Government, the notion is complicated.

Charlotte Leslie: My hon. Friend makes the case most eloquently. The more that we can help the Egyptian Government to stabilise institutionally and to have a better grip on its institutions, the more we can help the security services to operate in a way that we in the west like to see our security services operate. The more the security service and its activities can be aligned with the state, the more stable the country will be.

To go back to the point I was making, just because it is hard to allocate blame in countries such as Syria and Libya and to solve the problem that is causing untold numbers of human rights abuses, we should not let the fact such abuses are taking place under a Government deter us from tackling them where they are happening on an abominable scale. It is easy for us to put our own moral virtue, in liking to blame someone, ahead of our concern for human welfare.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) made a powerful case for the need for stability in Egypt. We owe it to the Egyptian people, to the British people, who are concerned about stability and the migrant process, to Europe and to everyone everywhere, whether moderate Muslims, Christians or of any religion, not to sit and condemn and carp at a country that is certainly not doing everything well and that certainly gives rise to much concern, but to help it to obliterate the things that cause us concern—to help one of the lone islands of stability attempting democracy that has not succumbed to instability and an Islamic takfiri alarming state to thrive and flourish. That is in the interests of all of us.

3.11 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I thank the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) for giving us a chance to speak on this matter. It does not seem like it is three years since we had a similar debate in Westminster Hall. Incidentally, I think the leader of the Labour party was part of that debate. Remarkably,

[*Jim Shannon*]

we seemed to agree across the Chamber on all the human rights and equalities issues, and I do not believe it will be any different today, because the Members here are of the same mind.

For decades, Egypt has not only been a beacon of hope in the middle east and north Africa for freedom and liberty in comparison with its neighbours, but done well economically. The hon. Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) in her last few words referred to democracy in Egypt. Co-operation with NATO and the west has been priceless; we saw how much that meant when Egypt suffered from instability following what was called the Arab spring.

It is pleasing to see the shadow Minister and the Minister in their places. I look forward to both of their contributions and I am quite sure that the Minister will be as positive as ever. He has the ability to understand what we are thinking and put that in his answers.

At the end of last year, my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr Donaldson) was appointed the economic envoy to Egypt—the Minister will know that. We are pleased that someone from this House has direct input and can carry the banner, so to speak, for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—in Northern Ireland we are fond of carrying banners. That is fantastic news and we fully support him.

Charlotte Leslie: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the very appointment of a trade envoy to Egypt—our current envoy is excellent—illustrates that the Government really want to engage? Does he also agree that in John Casson and Nasser Kamel we have two good ambassadors who are extremely good at engaging with their respective populations and acting together?

Jim Shannon: I can only agree with the hon. Lady on all those points. I will mention one of the ambassadors later on in my speech, because lots of good things have been done.

I want to look at the debate in a positive fashion, but I also want to highlight some issues. While we recognise the small and giant steps that Egypt has taken, we must look at some of the changes needed. I want to talk about them in a respectful fashion, which is important.

Relationships, which are proving fruitful, still exist as we seek to foster peace in the region. They are invaluable in the fight against Daesh. Egypt needs to be a lead nation in any coalition against Islamic State. We may not hear about it often, but Egypt's borders are crossed on many occasions from Libya, where Daesh groups operate in units. They have attacked and in their activities a number of Egyptian soldiers and civilians have been murdered. They are on the front line, so let us give them the support they need. When the Minister responds, he will probably be able to tell us a wee bit more about what we are doing. I know it is not his remit, but perhaps he can say how we can support them militarily. It is important that we do so and that we are seen to do so.

We need to do everything we can to support one of our strongest allies in the region in its drive to return to stability so that it can not only use its military and diplomatic capabilities, but reignite as the beacon of hope that once shone in north Africa and the middle east. For all its problems, Egypt has shown itself to be a

bulwark against the instability and chaos that plagues other countries not too far away in the middle east and the Arab world. Instability has swept over them like a tidal wave, but it has not to the same extent in Egypt.

Egypt is strong, Egypt is our friend, and it makes economic, political and strategic sense to ensure that it remains our friend to provide the stability necessary in the middle east, now and in the years and decades to come. Notably, al-Sisi's top security concern is the presence of Daesh in the Sinai peninsula. Earlier I mentioned the attacks from Daesh groups in Libya, which illustrate that. That is dangerous from a human point of view, a regional and global security point of view and an economic point of view. It offers a new launch pad for the abhorrent Daesh disturbingly close to our other ally in the region, the state of Israel.

It should be remembered—no one in the Chamber will have any doubts about it—that Israel has been Egypt's ally from the beginning of biblical times. In the past the relationships were strong, even with the Arab and the Jew. We still have that working relationship between Egypt and Israel, which is perhaps unique in the middle east, not only on economic things, but to combat Daesh and take on the threat of Palestinian terrorists. Egypt sees the threat, Israel sees the threat, and they work together to ensure that the tunnels that have been used by some, coming from Egypt towards Israel and the Palestinians, are closed off. We must recognise that Egypt plays a part in that.

Members should be aware that that is being taken seriously by our diplomats in the region. The hon. Lady referred to our ambassador in Egypt, John Casson, who last week addressed an Egyptian Ministry of Tourism conference in Cairo. All Members who have spoken so far have rightly referred to the importance of tourism, which we need to reignite. We need to provide security first of all. Ambassador Casson stressed the importance of the points I have raised: the economic, diplomatic, strategic, and defence and security ties.

Charlotte Leslie: Will the hon. Gentleman join me in becoming one of the first people on a flight back to Sharm el-Sheikh? I am asking him on holiday.

Jim Shannon: As a married man, I have to be careful. [*Laughter.*] I am very loyal and dutiful to my wife, who I love, but if it was in a purely platonic way, I think that would be okay.

The ambassador praised the efforts of Egypt to re-emerge from the years of instability she suffered following the Arab spring and the Muslim Brotherhood takeover. Three years ago I had a chance to visit Egypt with the all-party parliamentary group on Egypt. I had always wanted to visit Egypt—I had a purpose. The APPG met President el-Sisi in his palace, so I had a chance to put to him issues about freedom of religious belief, which are important for me and for my Christian brothers and sisters in Egypt, and I was impressed by his response to the questions put—I could not say otherwise. He showed his commitment to the change he wanted to see and the society he wanted in Egypt. I was impressed by that. He also won the election shortly after that, and let us be quite clear: a democratic process was carried out and he was overwhelmingly elected. The people were not happy with the Muslim Brotherhood—although they were not happy with Mubarak either—but I believe that President al-Sisi delivered a democratic process to them.

On our visit the members of the all-party group had a chance to raise some issues. We met a pastor in a church in Cairo, called Pastor Sami. People often say to me, when I mention him, “Is he from Belfast?” I say, “No, he is not; he is from Cairo, and he is an Egyptian.” Seven thousand people attend that evangelical church in Cairo, but you will never hear about that, Mr Pritchard. It is one of those things that come out only from visits to Egypt or from having direct contact with places in the area. Pastor Sami wanted the changes. I expressed to him my concerns about people who had converted from Islam to Christianity, and a block being put on them, and asked about the level of direct representation at every level of the democratic process—not just with respect to President el-Sisi. There was a meeting about a month ago of the all-party group on religion or belief, which I chair, and we met some people from Egypt. There are a number of Christian MPs in Parliament in Egypt, taking part in the democratic process and making changes, as they should.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Would the hon. Gentleman suggest how, if at all, what he describes is an improvement on the regime of the Muslim Brotherhood?

Jim Shannon: First, it is an improvement because people can pursue their religious beliefs without fear in Egypt today. There are still attacks, but there is a change, and I have seen that. When I visited I had a chance to meet the Grand Mufti. It was an opportunity to meet someone of Muslim beliefs at a high level and to ask him his personal opinion on the new Egypt that we would see shortly afterwards. He made a commitment to ensure that people would have the opportunity to express their religious belief without repercussions. I want that to come from the top, and to go all the way down; and I think there are levels further down that it has not yet reached. There are steps to be taken—small ones and big ones.

The Islamic groups that have infiltrated into Egypt are more violent. In the Sinai region, radical groups seem to operate with impunity. Christians are punished and pushed outside the proper legal process. Coptic Christians, as the hon. Member for Spelthorne mentioned, have been expelled from their villages. There is persecution and discrimination, and one example I know of concerns a schoolgirl whose name is Marina. She is 10 and the youngest of six children. Her mum and dad are illiterate, but they send all the children to school. As a Christian, she has to sit at the back of the class on her own, isolated and perhaps marginalised. It is such levels that must be reached if there is to be real change for people in Egypt. I know that everyone in the Chamber wants that to happen as well. Christian women have been kidnapped and raped, and involved in relationships that they find abhorrent. Christian buildings and churches have not been repaired in some cases, but in fairness there has been some change on that. There has been rebuilding of churches, and protection, in Cairo.

The response to the saddening and shocking events at Sharm el-Sheikh is an example of exactly what is needed on every level. Britain, Germany and Russia, to name a few of the nations in question, have taken steps to co-operate further with the Egyptian Government to ensure that Sharm el-Sheikh can be a model for security at airports and show strength and resilience in the face of terror and cowardice. There is a young girl who

works in my office as my researcher, and when she got married she had her honeymoon in Sharm el-Sheikh. At the time there was not any bother, and she recommended it for a holiday—a honeymoon is of course a bit better as a holiday—and an opportunity to enjoy some special time.

There is great development potential in the Nile delta. On our visit we hoped to see some of that development. With the water source there is agriculture and agribusiness, which create jobs and enable food to be grown, moving Egypt, with its massive population, towards some sort of self-sufficiency, if that is possible. Among various issues there has been talk of Ethiopia building a dam, which might cause some problems. I do not know whether the Minister will be able to respond on that, or give us an idea of where things are in that process, but Egypt can develop and create jobs. The resurgence of gas and oil and access to Egypt’s vast energy resources are of interest to everyone, and helping an ally to develop those resources is much better than relying on enemies for energy, as the west too often finds itself doing. BP and British Gas have found Egypt to be an ideal business partner recently, and utilising our relationship with Egypt to further voluntary co-operation and trade across the region will open up the prospect of prosperity to millions of oppressed people—a vast population who need employment. We should remember that they need prosperity as well as the peace we all continue to work for.

I have outlined an array of issues on Egypt, including the concerns of the all-party group. I have mentioned the role of my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley as an envoy to Egypt, and there is already an apparatus that we can build on to ensure support from the United Kingdom. I hope that will help to ensure that what was once a towering pillar of stability and a beacon of hope in the Arab world can come roaring back to its former self and sit again at the top table of global powers and economies, alongside the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

3.27 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am pleased to be called to speak in the debate, and I commend the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) for securing it. I thank him for the brief background he gave us, from his own experience, reminding us what a great country Egypt is, and what a much greater country it can become. It is, I think, the 16th biggest country in the world, and often we do not appreciate that. Not too long ago different cultures and traditions, and people of different faiths and none, could mix comfortably, respecting one another’s traditions but with the freedom to carry on their own. Clearly, that is what we want Egypt to return to.

We must recognise that Egypt belongs to the Egyptians, so in our dealings with them we must be careful. By all means we should encourage them to move towards the kind of society that we think the citizens are entitled to; by all means we should use diplomatic and other ties to try to develop the interests of the United Kingdom in relation to Egypt; but at all times we should respect the rights of Egypt’s citizens to choose a Government and un-choose them should they see fit.

I think we can see optimistic signs even in the behaviour of President Sisi. A lot of what he has done recently is completely unacceptable and contrary to any interpretation of international human rights law; that must be made

[*Peter Grant*]

clear to him. However, he has the potential to change course. There has been some sign of a small but welcome softening of attitude on law and order, for example. It is unacceptable that hundreds of people can be taken and sentenced to death almost at one time. Some of those death sentences have been commuted, and that is something we should encourage. President Sisi received military command training in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America, so he knows where the boundaries lie between using military means to ensure security and abusing military power to oppress either his own people or anyone else. He knows what is acceptable and what is not. I think there is something there that we can work with, which perhaps we do not have with some of the other dictators or semi-dictators in the region.

The hon. Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) rightly reminded us what can happen if someone who is elected democratically stops being democratic and is allowed to get away with that.

The persecution of religious minorities, to which the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) referred, is something that we cannot afford to ignore. We should remember that the persecution of Christians is an anti-Islamic action in exactly the same way as anti-Semitic or Islamophobic persecution is an anti-Christian action. All of those faiths teach fundamentally that we are all free to take our own decisions and that we will all be held to account for those decisions at some point. We should not allow our concern for persecuted Christian minorities in Egypt or anywhere else to develop into a claim that it is somehow Islamic actions or an Islamic group of people that are responsible for those crimes and that persecution.

We need to ensure that when we talk about stability, we do not mean the stability there has been in some countries in the past, where stability meant military dictatorship. Often, if there is a brutal military dictatorship, there is stability, but it comes at the cost of the violation of the human rights of tens of millions of people. That, again, is not acceptable.

The influence that the United Kingdom can exert in Egypt comes from our shared history, since a lot of the history of Egypt has been closely bound up with that of the United Kingdom, and from the fact that the United Kingdom is now the single biggest foreign investor in Egypt. There is an avenue for the Government to encourage businesses that are investing in Egypt to invest in things that will help Egypt, not hinder it, and in projects that will support the development of a democratic society rather than simply prop up a discredited regime.

The Government must also continue to remind the Egyptian authorities that the United Kingdom has—or should have—a policy of not investing in Governments whose human rights record is poor and not showing signs of improvement. The carrot of investment would then be there, but the stick—the threat of that investment being stopped—could be used, not to ensure that Egypt develops into the country we say it should, but to allow and encourage Egypt to develop the fundamental principles that cross international borders such as human rights, the rule of law, respect for democracy and respect for diversity in society.

I believe there is a good possibility that if we play it right, we can help Egypt to develop back into the kind of society that will be in the best interests of its 90 million citizens. That means, for example, that we need to encourage the development of Egypt's tourist industry and see the air routes into Sharm el-Sheikh and elsewhere reopened, but we should not just do that to give our people a nice place to go on holiday; we should do it because it helps to stabilise Egypt's economy. Once the economy is stabilised, it will become much easier for ideas such as democracy and the rule of law to be re-established.

We have to be very careful indeed that we do not allow tourism to destroy the extraordinary and ancient culture that people are going to see in the first place. We cannot allow tourism to cause the Nile valley, for example, to become one great big western holiday resort—partly because that would be morally and ethically wrong, but also because that kind of behaviour creates a climate in which young Muslims growing up in Egypt will readily believe the myth that the country has been taken over by evil western heathens.

We have to be careful to ensure that allowing opposition groups to flourish without persecution in Egypt does not mean that terrorist groups or groups that espouse terror are allowed to develop undetected. I have a concern about the way that President Sisi has been treating the Muslim Brotherhood. It may be that some of its members are resorting to or promoting terrorism; if they are, they deserve to be taken through the courts and imprisoned. However, we have to be very careful indeed if we are outlawing the single biggest opposition party in any country simply because all its members are accused of being terrorists. Going in too heavy-handed in that way will create a climate where if young people who want a more Muslim society—whether we agree with that ourselves or not—do not have the right to promote their views through peaceful, lawful and democratic means, there are other avenues open to them that they may want to pursue. As has been said, there are others in Egypt and elsewhere who will be only too keen to encourage them to adopt such other methods.

Mention has been made of the high-performing UK ambassadorial staff. I have not met any of the embassy staff in Egypt, but I have certainly been very impressed with the embassy staff I have met in the other countries I have visited so far. The fact that the UK ambassador was prepared to speak out against the treatment of the three al-Jazeera journalists is an encouraging sign. That is the kind of diplomatic pressure that we should continue to apply.

Just this week, we saw a TV presenter in Egypt jailed for mocking a woman who came on a television programme to be interviewed about a claim she had made of sexual harassment. It is appalling for a TV journalist to suggest to an alleged victim of sexual assault that it was her own fault because she went out wearing jeans and a sleeveless top; that is not an acceptable way for a journalist or anyone else to treat a victim of crime. However, throwing someone into jail for that is an overreaction. I do not condone making videos that mock someone else's religion, but it is a serious overreaction for the Egyptians to have thrown three young Christians in Egypt into jail for producing a video that appeared to mock Islam. In that case, the teenagers said they were mocking Daesh, not Islam. I do not agree with anyone

mocking another's religion, but I do not agree with throwing people into jail for doing that. There are other ways in which we can encourage respect for one another's faiths.

I am concerned about an apparent shift in emphasis from the UK Government. Whether it is through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills or any other Department, concern for promoting human rights in the countries in which we do business appears to be moving further down the order of priorities, while the promotion of interests of UK business and UK investors appears to be moving further up. I understand and support the desire to let British businesses prosper in other countries, but I ask the Government to ensure that we never do anything that is seen to give succour to those in either government or opposition who want to undermine the rule of law and democracy and those who may want to turn Egypt into a country that is a significant danger for us and for those who live there.

It is appalling that a young Italian student who had previously lived in the UK was taken away, tortured and murdered. It is also appalling that hundreds—perhaps thousands—of Egyptian citizens live with the danger of the same thing happening to them. Many of them have died in similar circumstances. The torture and murder of an Egyptian citizen should appal us just as much as the torture and murder of an Italian or UK citizen. I want to see an Egypt where all 90 million Egyptian citizens can live in peace and harmony with one another.

3.37 pm

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) on securing the debate. He spoke with great experience and knowledge of Egypt and set it in its proper context; I think we all benefited from that introduction. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), who spoke clearly and effectively about the horrific death of Giulio Regeni. I will say a little more about that later on.

The hon. Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) set out so well the context of Egypt in the region. She used what I thought was a very good phrase: "democracy was never going to happen as it does in Tunbridge Wells". That was very telling. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), as ever, stood up for religious freedoms and, of course, blushed at the offer of a holiday with the hon. Lady in Sharm el-Sheikh.

As we have heard, Britain and Egypt have a long, close and often tumultuous relationship, but Egypt remains a key ally for us in the middle east. We are key trading partners, and as the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) said, the UK is the biggest source of direct investment into Egypt. More than 1,000 British companies invest in and operate in Egypt in sectors such as finance, energy, construction, pharmaceuticals and IT.

Of course, as the hon. Members for Spelthorne and for Bristol North West said, there are also the thousands of British tourists who visit each year, or would if they could get to Sharm el-Sheikh. I hope that when the Minister responds, he will be able to update us on the

progress made on restoring flights to Sharm el-Sheikh. Those flights are vital for the Egyptian economy, which desperately needs the summer season, and for British holidaymakers, who are already making their plans. In fact, numerous holiday firms, including Thomas Cook, are currently offering holidays to Sharm from May, so is the Minister confident that the security measures will be sufficient by then for flights to resume?

Egypt is, of course, more than just an economic partner to the UK; it is also an important strategic partner in the Arab world and a key ally in the fight against extremism, against Daesh and Assad in Syria, and in north Africa and the Sinai. We need to work with Egypt to tackle extremism, and we want it to do more to tackle terror financing. All of that gives us a very good reason to work with Egypt and, for those reasons, we need a stable Egypt.

It is clear that over the past two years, the Government have improved relations with Egypt. Since the election of President Sisi in June 2014, albeit on quite a small turnout, the Government have gone out of their way to build relations with the Sisi Government, and I welcome many aspects of this Government's work to improve those relations. First, as I have said, it is very important that we co-operate on security and countering extremism. Secondly, as an MP for Hull, which is a key centre for renewable energy, I was very pleased to see the memorandum of understanding signed on a multibillion pound renewable energy deal with a British company. Thirdly, I am very pleased to see that 2016 is the year of British-Egyptian co-operation on science, innovation and higher education.

However, we have to remain critical friends of the Sisi regime. To promote stability, we need not just to support the Government of President Sisi, but to encourage his Government to tackle some of the underlying issues that have caused so much instability over the past few years. Stability requires respect for human rights, for the constitution and for democratic participation. It requires corruption to be tackled and the rule of law to be promoted, and we cannot promote academic co-operation and innovation unless we also promote academic freedoms.

The Amnesty International report from 2015-16 paints a bleak picture for those aspects of Egyptian society. The rule of law has been undermined by mass detentions and mass trials, which are rarely fair. The relationship between the state and its citizens has been undermined by routine allegations of police brutality, torture, arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearances. The treatment of women is a particular concern in relation to sexual violence.

Respect for democratic institutions has been undermined by repeated attacks on freedoms of assembly and non-governmental organisations, and I am very concerned that those actions, as the hon. Member for Bristol North West said, are fuelling the disquiet that has previously led to problems and revolutions in Egypt, and are making it more difficult for there to be a transition to a fully stable democracy.

Charlotte Leslie: Although I agree with much of what the hon. Lady outlines, does she agree that there is a ray of hope in that in the new Parliament, it is surprising how many women representatives, in particular, there are and how many people from different faiths?

Diana Johnson: I am very pleased to have taken that intervention. I think that is a good sign—if there are more women in any Parliament, it is usually a good sign of progress, so I welcome that.

To get back to my point, it is important that the British Government should be prepared to make it clear to the Government in Egypt that we expect them to operate to a higher standard on human rights issues. It is in our interest to promote British values of human rights and democracy, and it is also in the interests of Egyptian stability for it to do the same. However, as an example of the Government's reluctance to do that, I want to return to the case of Giulio Regeni, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge. He set out so effectively what happened in the horrific murder of this academic and talked about what has been described—the systematic ripping out of fingernails, the broken ribs, and the brain haemorrhage that happened to this man. It is just appalling.

I raised some parliamentary questions with our Government to ask what their response was. I was told that the Government support the Egyptian and Italian investigations, but reports suggest that the Egyptian investigation is seriously flawed. The Italian ambassador has complained of a lack of access. There are real concerns about whether Egypt has the capacity to conduct a genuinely impartial investigation.

I wrote to the Minister on 16 February 2016 pressing upon him the importance of this case and the need for Britain to intervene to ensure that an impartial investigation takes place and to offer British assistance. I look forward to receiving a response from him. In particular, given that we are in this year of co-operation on education and research, I would think that the Government have had many opportunities to raise this case. There have been press releases, partnership agreements and a visit from the Prime Minister's special envoy, but academic freedoms seem to have been excluded from that academic dialogue. We appear to have had a situation in which the Prime Minister's special envoy was in Egypt discussing academic co-operation, weeks after the body of a murdered British academic was found, but as I understand it, that was not raised.

Other countries have not remained silent. The Italian Prime Minister Renzi stressed that it was because of his Government's "friendship" with President Sisi that he stood in a position to demand the truth and stressed that it was critical for the future of Italian-Egyptian relations. The UK Government need to realise that it is because of the strength of our economic, social and security co-operation that we can also be in the position of critical friends. Weakness from the Government in not taking the matter up is not helpful. I hope that the Minister, in his response this afternoon, will be able to reassure us that he is having those conversations with the Egyptian authorities. I also look forward to him responding to the other points that I have raised, particularly on tourism.

3.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): It is a pleasure to work under your chairmanship again, Mr Pritchard, and I echo the comments that have been made across the floor; this has been a very timely and important debate. I congratulate, as others have done, my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne

(Kwasi Kwarteng)—my good friend—on securing this debate and on opening it with an exposé of his knowledge and understanding of what is happening not just in Egypt but in the region itself, and of Britain's unique relationship and the role that Parliament is playing.

I want to say thank you to colleagues; it is because we are able to visit the country a number of times and develop relationships to understand what is going on that we can speak with some authority about matters there and have debates such as this in this House. We are all the wiser for that, and the relationship is all the stronger, so I am very encouraged. I have visited the country a number of times as a Back Bencher and as a Minister, and I know that Egypt very much appreciates such visits and appreciates the dialogue too.

We have heard some excellent contributions, as the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), has said. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) raised specific points, and the link is understandable given the academic connection with Giulio Regeni. I will come to that matter and speak in a bit of detail.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) spoke of the challenges in Governments and the changes that have taken place. It is fair to say that any country that had endured the decade of change that Egypt has had to go through would have been severely tested. It is pleasing to see the direction of travel that Egypt is going in but, none the less, a huge amount of work still needs to be done. That is why Britain must stand firm in providing that support.

I was pleased that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) took a bit out of my speech by commenting on the importance and role of the trade envoy, the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr Donaldson); we are very pleased that the right hon. Gentleman is able to take on that role. It underlines the significance of having these trade envoy positions, which allow detailed knowledge to be exchanged and for that relationship to be pursued. The hon. Member for Strangford also spoke of some of the military support that we are providing as Egypt deals with terrorism, and I will come to that in my speech, too.

The hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) spoke of the importance of the continuing governance of reform and I very much agree. I am sad to say that he also made this very binary: either we challenge the human rights situation and therefore the prosperity agenda stops, or we are happy with the human rights situation and therefore prosperity can start. I am afraid it is not as simple as that. I should make it clear that our work and our relationship, which comes not just from the commercial angle, allow us to have frank conversations to the frustration of those who would like to see more in the public domain. We often find ourselves having greater leverage in and influence on what is going on behind the scenes because of the manner in which we conduct our activities, which is not always on the front pages of the newspapers.

Peter Grant: I certainly did not intend to give the impression that the choice is between human rights on one hand and economic prosperity on the other. If I gave that impression, I apologise. The point I wanted to make was that Egypt gives us the best possible opportunity to demonstrate that respect for human rights, diversity and economic prosperity can all happen at the same time.

Mr Ellwood: I will come to that point as I develop my argument.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North spoke in her usual formidable style and clearly understands these matters. We spar on a number of issues across the middle east and I thank her for the tone she adopts in these debates when putting forward extremely important points. She spoke first about the flight concern, which I will come to, and the case of the Italian student, the importance of the economy and, linked to that, stability and the opportunities in front of us. I am grateful for the points she made. As always, if I do not cover all the points that have been made, I will write to hon. Members in due course.

In the limited time available, I want to take a step back and place Egypt today in context. It is worth reminding ourselves that it is a cradle of ancient civilisation and a very proud part of the world. It has gifted to the world some of the earliest forms of central governance, literature and major feats of engineering. It connected the world with the Suez canal in the 19th century and has been a centre of Arab culture and regional political leadership in the 20th century.

In the Arab world, Egypt sits astride the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League and occupies a unique position in international affairs. Despite experiencing some tumultuous times in the 21st century, Egypt has delivered another major feat of engineering through expansion of the Suez canal in just one year under President Sisi. That truly represents Egypt's ambition in looking forward.

Although not as long standing as Egypt's ancient history, Britain's interests are also deep and long standing in modern times and include an historical British presence, close business links, more recent efforts to bring peace in the region and working together on the UN Security Council. President Sisi's visit to the UK in November was an important moment in deepening our relationship further and an opportunity to have those frank conversations I spoke about.

Egypt is the Arab world's most populous country, is on the frontline in the war against Daesh and in north-east Sinai, and has a critical role in bringing stability and security to Libya. Egypt is a vital partner in a troubled region. It is clear that its stability is in our interests. I am proud to say that since 2010 the UK has spent some £30 million in Egypt and we plan to spend a further £50 million between now and 2020. All this funding has the ultimate aim of helping to support the country's continued stability. There are, of course, many aspects to stability. Our work in Egypt focuses on security, the economy, governance and education. I will take each in turn.

A number of hon. Members asked about security. The crash of the Metrojet airliner, the murder of a Croatian oil worker and the attacks on Egyptian troops make it clear that Egypt faces a real threat from terrorism, so security is key. To protect ordinary Egyptians, tackle radicalisation and safeguard tourists, we are working closely with the Egyptian Government, training bomb disposal officers and close protection officers, and welcoming military officers to Sandhurst and other prestigious military training establishments here in the UK. This will help to meet the threat emanating from north-west Sinai and the region.

Egypt's greatest external security threat remains Daesh's planning and launching of attacks from bases in eastern Libya. The UK is supporting Libyan efforts to finalise a Government of national accord, which is vital because only a unified national Government can begin the difficult work of restoring stability and tackling the threat posed by Daesh from the west of Egypt. In Gaza, the UK is providing aid and working to convince Israel, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority to take steps to improve conditions, which is in the interests of Egypt's long-term security.

We are, of course, continuing our extremely close co-operation on aviation security so that we can resume flights as soon as possible. Sharm el-Sheikh is proven to be a clear favourite with tourists. Prior to the changes, almost 1 million visitors wanted to go to Egypt every year. I am unable to give further details, but huge efforts have been made. I spoke to the deputy National Security Adviser yesterday. Some final pieces of the jigsaw need to be put in place, but I hope it will not be too long before flights are resumed.

The hon. Member for Cambridge raised the very sad case of Giulio Regeni. I can only echo what I said in my reply to the question. We are very saddened by this tragic death and very concerned about the reports that he had been tortured. He is an Italian citizen and there is protocol on who can lead and participate in the investigation. Having said that, we have raised our concerns with the Italian authorities. We very much support Italian and Egyptian efforts to investigate and have requested that that be done in full to recognise what happened. The Italian police now have a team on the ground in Egypt. We will continue to raise the matter. I will be visiting the country very soon and will certainly ask further questions, but although the individual studied in the UK, there is a protocol on which country can lead and be involved.

Egypt has elected a President, has a new constitution and now has a Parliament, which is to be celebrated. We are working to help to make parliamentarians stronger and to encourage visits. I hope that the work with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy will continue. As the new Parliament beds in, we want to do more to strengthen this vital institution and I hope that Members with a keen interest in Egypt, many of whom are here today, will be able to play an active role in that.¹

We are looking to President Sisi and the Egyptian Government to make more progress on human rights—that has been echoed today—and on freedoms. We are concerned about detention of political and civil society activists and journalists, deaths and reports of torture in police detention and prisons, and the continued narrowing of space for civil society to operate freely. We continue to believe that respect for human rights is vital to effective governance for the Egyptian people and long-term stability.

A vibrant economy is a necessary precondition for security and democracy. I am proud that Britain remains the largest foreign investor in Egypt. British companies have invested over £25 billion in recent years. I was pleased to lead the largest trade delegation to Egypt for 15 years when we had the pleasure of meeting President Sisi.

Education has an important role and I am pleased that the British Council has taught English to over 90,000 Egyptians in the last five years.

1. [Official Report, 9 March 2016, Vol. 607, c. 3MC.]

[Mr Ellwood]

I want to give my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne a few minutes to respond so I will conclude. We remain a close and important partner of Egypt. I am grateful for this debate to underline our commitment to the country and pleased that other Members of Parliament have also been able to do so.

3.59 pm

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am grateful for this wide-ranging debate in which we have hit many of the principal issues. The tragic death of Giulio Regeni stains Egypt's reputation, but I am sure that with the Minister's good offices our Government will do their part in bringing some form of closure and justice to the situation.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered British support for stability in Egypt.

School Provision: Christchurch

[MRS ANNE MAIN *in the Chair*]

3.59 pm

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered planning for school provision in Christchurch.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I am grateful to Mr Speaker for this timely opportunity to discuss a very important issue in my constituency.

I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 30 December, requesting that he call in for his own determination the planning application made by Dorset County Council to itself—application 8/15/0665—to develop a site wholly within the green belt for the construction of a new school. The county council has accepted that the proposal is a significant departure from the local plan because it involves development on green-belt land that was reconfirmed as being within the green belt as recently as 2014. It is hardly surprising that the application has generated 688 letters of objection. There was, Mrs Main, an earlier plan to remove the land from the green belt for housing, as part of the core strategy, but following consultation, that proposal—to remove land from the green belt—was abandoned. I am sure that you can imagine the consternation of local people that it is now being revisited after such a short interval. That is creating anger and despair.

In response to my letter and a parliamentary question, my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning, whom I am delighted to see in his place, told me that he would wait to see whether the county council granted itself planning permission before deciding whether to call the matter in. To the surprise of no one, on Thursday 18 February the county council duly granted itself detailed planning permission for a new two form entry primary school at Marsh Lane, Christchurch. I therefore wish to use the opportunity presented by this debate to press the Minister very hard, on behalf of my constituents, to call in the application and have a proper independent examination of the issue and, in particular, whether a suitable alternative site for a primary school is available. I say that because almost all those who have supported the planning application have done so reluctantly and on the basis that extra primary school places are needed in west Christchurch and there is no alternative place to put them. It is the great TINA—there is no alternative. That is why they support putting the new school on the green belt.

In my submission, the county council has failed to consider seriously potential alternative sites. It failed to look at two brownfield sites that are currently vacant and awaiting redevelopment. One is a site for which planning permission was given for a new Asda supermarket. That development is not now proceeding and the developer has sold the site, but no new plans have been drawn up. I am told that the site is available on the open market. The other site, on which I will concentrate, is the Christchurch town centre site variously known as the Bargates site, or the site of the former magistrates court/police station and the Pitside car park.

In the report to the planning committee on 18 February, at appendix 9, consultants engaged by the county council described the Bargates site as

“not big enough for the accommodation required for a two form entry primary school”.

That would have been correct if the site in question was only 2.8 acres, as they asserted in their report; however, the site is 4.74 acres and comprises land currently in the ownership of Dorset County Council, the Dorset police and crime commissioner, the Hospital of St Mary Magdalen Trust and Christchurch Borough Council. Under Department for Education guidelines set out in “Building Bulletin 103” of June 2014, the actual area would be more than sufficient for a two form entry primary school.

As co-owners of the site, the county council and the borough council must have known that the Bargates site is much larger than described in the report. Local people are wondering why they—and, I think, many county councillors and borough councillors—have been kept in the dark. The suspicion is that all the public authorities that own the land would think themselves financially better off if they used the Bargates site for more lucrative development than the provision of primary school education. It is therefore in their financial interests that the school be built on much less expensive green-belt land. As I am sure the Minister will agree, that pattern is repeated up and down the country. The cheapest land available is often the green-belt land, precisely because of its protection. If a local authority is proposing to develop green-belt land where the consequence is that it will save itself money, it is incumbent on my hon. Friend to be even more circumspect in deciding whether to allow that to go through without intervention from the centre.

It has taken some 12 years to assemble this unique town centre site. Plans for the development of the site have not yet been published, let alone been the subject of public consultation, but I understand from a meeting that I had at the beginning of last month that there are proposals for a 3,000-square-metre care home and 1,850 square metres of retail. The remainder of the site would be for housing, but there would be no community use.

Government policy on green belt is designed to encourage the redevelopment of brownfield land. The land at Bargates is exactly that. There are 221 car parking spaces there, on open land; there is a redundant magistrates court and police station; and there is a substantial residential building, currently boarded up, with a big adjoining garden, which certainly until recently was used for the keeping of pigs. That is being released by the Magdalen charity. That is the site, but at the meeting of the planning committee council officers argued that it could not possibly be used for education purposes because it was not mentioned for education in the core strategy. Of course, nowhere was mentioned for education in the core strategy, because the education authority was asserting at that stage that there was no need for any new sites in the borough for schools. Therefore, this site was not mentioned, nor was the green-belt site at Marsh Lane. If the county council had been more up front, the debate about the core strategy could, and indeed would, have included the relative merits of building a new school in the town centre as against building a school on the fringes of the town, on the green belt.

The advantage of building the school in the town centre is that it would form part of a new education cluster. It would be much easier for families with children at both the secondary school and the primary school to do the school run, because the primary school would be very close to the secondary school, Twynham Academy, for which it is the feeder and, indeed, in the grounds of which the primary school is currently housed. It will also be part of the Twynham Learning Federation, which is headed by Twynham Academy but will also include the new Twynham primary from this September. It would be easily accessible by public transport from both east and west Christchurch and it would be close to town centre car parks. The buildings would be available for community use during the evenings, holidays and weekends in a location convenient to the public. The school pupils would be within easy walking distance of town centre amenities such as the library, the Regent Centre, the Priory church and the playing fields and recreation ground on the opposite side of the road. Adequate undeveloped land on the site would be available for play space.

The report that went to the planning committee from the officers said that there would be no room for playing fields. However, in the letter sent to Councillor Jamieson by the principal planning officer, Mr Williams, on 17 February, Mr Williams says that the provision of playing fields would be very expensive. He does not refer to the fact that it would not be possible to provide playing fields on that site. That goes to the core of the issue. It is much cheaper to provide playing fields on open green-belt land adjoining the marsh and the flood plain but that is not what planning policy is, or should be, about.

At the meeting of the planning committee, the report to the committee from the county council officer also said,

“The current buildings would be unsuitable and would have to be demolished and replaced.”

Well, that is accepted. Everybody accepts that the old magistrates court with the cells down below and the police station need to be knocked down, but I do not see that as an objection to building a new school on the site. The county council officer raised other concerns including the one to which I referred earlier—that the site is too small. In other words, the council officers were misleading the councillors who were considering the planning application by providing facts that were not correct.

The officers went on to say that the school is geographically in the wrong location for the community it needs to serve. That is not correct either. The school that is proposed to be built on the green belt is currently temporarily housed at Twynham Academy, which is a few hundred yards down the road from the Bargates site.

Another objection raised by the county council officers is that because the Bargates site is in a town centre location, it is unsuitable for a primary school. Again, that is in defiance of local experience. One of the most popular primary schools in Christchurch is the Priory Church of England Primary School, which is on a small site in the centre of town and has the same catchment as the new school. The new school is already in temporary accommodation right in the centre of the town and there has been no suggestion that parents have been put off by the location. Indeed, many regard it as much more convenient for the school run.

[Mr Christopher Chope]

From what I have said, the Minister may agree that the conclusion reached by the responsible officer in paragraph 6.14 of his recommendation is not consistent with the facts. Yet the officer went on to say,

“I am satisfied that there are no other sites of sufficient size to meet the identified development need that are available and should be regarded as preferential alternatives to the application site”.

As I have said, that conclusion was based on false information. That the Bargates site is not available is an extraordinary assertion to make, because the site is still owned by the county council, the borough council and the police authority. If the county council and borough council were prepared to recognise educational needs as a priority, the solution to the development of the site for a school would be in their hands. Public consultation on future uses of the site is not intended to start until May, with a view to a planning application later in the year. That consultation could easily be about using the site for a primary school, with a planning application later in the year to meet the timetable required for the new school.

The other issue worth mentioning is the size of the school. The new Twynham Primary Academy to which the Secretary of State for Education has recently given authority is one form entry. Expressions of interest were invited by Dorset County Council on the basis that,

“The projected pupil numbers have identified an immediate requirement for 1FE with a further growth to 2FE when population figures warrant it and agreed”

by the county council. The statement is reinforced in the county council’s January 2016 paper, “Christchurch pupil place planning strategy 2016-2019”. The paper is marked as a confidential document, but for the purposes of the debate it is important that everybody should know that paragraph 2.1 says,

“For west Christchurch, DCC continues to pursue the establishment of a new 1FE Primary School. The site/building will have capacity to expand to 2FE if required in the future.”

So the county council accepts that there is no immediate need for a two form entry school, which bears upon the issue of the timescale within which the situation should be sorted out properly.

The county council says that the area only needs a one form entry school with the capacity to go to two forms, partly because that would deliver six forms of entry for primary school places in west Christchurch. That takes no account of the new Parkfield School, a primary free school that opens in 2016 with two form entry and is located in the western part of west Christchurch, close to the airport. Yet the county council gave itself permission for a two form entry primary school with the potential to extend to three form entry. Why did it do that? It involves an unwarranted impact on the neighbourhood and intrusion into the green belt that is not justified even by the county council’s own evidence.

The implications are that the proposed design of the school, as approved, has been criticised by the borough council as being intrusive in the landscape. In response, the county council has said that the school needs to be in that position so that the council could make it into a three-form entry school in the future. The borough council’s criticism could have been addressed if the school were to be one form entry with the option of additional

buildings to make it two form in the future. A one form entry school with the potential to be two form entry would obviously have much less impact on the green belt, the sites of special scientific interest and local traffic. It would also fit more easily on to the town centre site to which I referred, and on to some of the other sites that the county council said could not accommodate it because it needed a site for a two form entry school.

This is a serious issue. If we have a public inquiry, the inspector could look at the alternative sites to the green belt and could examine the evidence, which is contradictory. The county council is asserting that it needs a two form entry primary school, but the county council officers, in a confidential document, say that it only needs a one form entry school.

Many people have asked why the draft core strategy, which was adopted in 2014, did not envisage the need to propose or allocate a site for a new school. Christchurch county councillors were informed by Mr Williams in a letter on 17 February that,

“Late in the preparation process my understanding is that discussions took place between Planning Officers at Christchurch Borough Council and representatives of the County Council as local Education Authority over the possible need for a new primary school to serve West Christchurch. As the Draft Core Strategy was already at a very advanced stage, a decision was taken not to modify the Strategy to take account of the potential additional development requirement. The planning application proposal has, therefore, fallen to be promoted as a departure from the Development Plan.”

The problem is that as a departure from the development plan is decided by the county council itself, it is not open to the same independent scrutiny and examination as it would have been had it been dealt with as part of the core strategy, which is another reason that it is essential that this—

Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he might want to hear what the Minister has to say on the matter. He has already eaten somewhat considerably into the Minister’s time.

Mr Chope: I am familiar with that, Mrs Main. I am using, say, 20 minutes of the 30 minutes available to put my case, because I know, having been a junior planning Minister in the past, that the Minister will not be able to give me a very substantive reply today. I hope he will be able to say that he has listened to what I have had to say, and then to make some other comments about the importance of preserving the green belt. I have not had an opportunity to put all the concerns on the record, and I thought it was important to do so in this debate, which I hope will not cause my hon. Friend, the Minister, any problems.

In conclusion, I hope that, taking all I have said into account, the Minister will call in the application for the Secretary of State’s consideration and will effectively have an independent public inquiry into the issue.

4.20 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) on securing this debate and on putting so fully his case on behalf of his residents. I appreciate his concerns, particularly on the more

general issue of development on green belt, which I know is of considerable importance to him, to communities including the ones he represents, and to other parliamentary colleagues.

As my hon. Friend has outlined, and as he understands, the proposal is currently before the Secretary of State to determine whether call-in is appropriate. As we have also received a request to intervene from my hon. Friend, it would be inappropriate of me to comment on the specific application, as that could prejudice any consideration of these matters. I know he understands that. I will, however, outline a few things more generally, as he rightly guessed I might, to give some background to the present situation.

To put the matter in context, about 475,000 planning applications are made to local authorities every year. Obviously, we have powers to call in some decisions, and the current approach is set out in a written ministerial statement of October 2012. To put it in context, in 2015 just 24 cases were called in by the Planning Inspectorate for inquiry. He will be reassured to know that the officials of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government are currently considering the application on the Secretary of State's behalf. Their assessment will consider whether the application, or the issues raised by concerned parties, justifies intervention based on the Government's call-in policy. The Secretary of State or one of the other Ministers will decide whether to intervene.

The national planning policy framework is very clear that the purpose of planning is to deliver sustainable development. I make it clear that it is not development at any cost, nor is it development anywhere. Localism means choosing how best to meet local needs, not whether to meet them. Meeting local need is not just about houses; as my hon. Friend rightly outlined, it is also about the wider needs of the community, including educational needs.

We are committed to improving the education of our younger generation. We have worked hard to encourage efficient use of land and buildings to facilitate the schools we need. We have also ensured that the national planning policy framework makes it clear that local authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting educational needs. The framework and accompanying guidance are clear that local planning authorities should work with other providers to assess the quality and capacity of infrastructure, including education infrastructure, as part of their local plan. Such plans are important, and they should set out a positive vision for the area; they should also be realistic about what can be achieved and when, including with regard to infrastructure. In areas where there is both a county council and a district council, it is important that those bodies work together constructively to gather

evidence of likely educational needs and to look for the correct and appropriate sites for any new required schools.

I congratulate Christchurch Borough Council on putting in place a core strategy in 2014. An up-to-date local plan, prepared through extensive public consultation, sets the framework in which decisions are and should be taken, whether locally by the planning authority or, I stress, at appeal.

My hon. Friend knows that the Government attach the highest importance, as he does, to protecting our green belt. Our new guidance in 2014 re-emphasised the importance of green belt and adds that the presence of constraints such as green belt can constrain the ability of a planning authority to meet its needs. We make it clear that green-belt boundaries should be established in local plans, which can be altered only in exceptional circumstances using the local plan process of consultation and independent examination. I note that Christchurch Borough Council decided and successfully argued for changes to its green-belt boundaries to allow for new development to go forward, which is why it was a locally led, properly calculated decision.

I understand what must be my hon. Friend's frustration that, following that review of green-belt boundaries by the council in a proper and appropriate way, proposals are still being made for green-belt land. Our planning system allows people to make proposals for development in areas such as green belt, but most types of new buildings are inappropriate development in the green belt and by definition, therefore, are harmful to it. The national planning policy framework makes it clear that such development should not be approved except in very exceptional, special circumstances. Each planning case obviously has its own unique facts and contexts that have to be determined on their own merits.

When I am out visiting communities and speaking to constituents, I hear widespread support for the provision of more housing, more schools and more hospitals for our growing population, which I know my hon. Friend recognises and supports, but that support is often swiftly followed by concerns about where those homes, hospitals and schools should be built, with appeals to protect our open and green spaces and countryside. It is therefore important that new developments are located in the right place for each local area. We are committed to ensuring that delays in the planning process are kept to a minimum, but I assure him that we will be aiming to issue a decision on whether to call in the proposal as soon as possible. He has made his views clearly known today, and he will be formally notified as soon as that decision has been made.

Question put and agreed to.

Human Rights Framework: Scotland

4.27 pm

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future framework for human rights in Scotland.

The framework for human rights in Scotland is reaching a critical point, and determining its future has therefore become an issue that my colleagues and I have been attempting to bring before the Attorney General and the Secretary of State for Justice for quite some time. We believe that any future framework currently rests on a constitutional precipice, one that requires more substance from the Government than we have received up to now. I personally stated my concerns to the Attorney General and the Secretary of State on numerous occasions and in many forms—written questions, oral questions and through my duties on the Select Committee on Justice. My colleagues and I are yet to receive answers containing any kind of substance. For that reason, I am delighted to secure this Westminster Hall debate.

Our position, and the crux of this debate, is predicated on a sound legal assertion that human rights are devolved to Scotland, and not something on which this place can legislate for Scotland. The legal basis for that assertion is the Scotland Act 1998, which is in effect the Scottish Parliament's constitution. We argue that it is as close to a written constitution as Scotland can acquire at present.

I will take this opportunity to explain exactly why, in legal terms, we believe that human rights are devolved to Scotland. Before I do that, I ask the Minister in his response to save us from the message repeated ad nauseam that he believes in human rights but that he just has a problem with their interpretation by the European Courts. We understand that point. I do not seek a debate on the rights and wrongs of human rights constituted here or in Europe; I want a debate surrounding the legalities of any action this Government could take on human rights and how that affects Scotland. If he fails to give those answers in clear terms, I will write to allow him an opportunity to consider his response further so that the issue of human rights in Scotland can be clarified and this damaging uncertainty on our citizens' protection can end.

I will outline the legal basis for my argument. The Scotland Act does not specify which powers are devolved to Scotland; that is simply not how our constitutional settlement works. Schedule 5 to the Act actually lists the powers reserved to the Westminster Parliament, with the rest—*de facto*—being devolved to Scotland. So, for any matter to be reserved to the UK, it must—simply must—be listed within schedule 5 to the Act.

I certainly hope that the Minister is aware that human rights are not listed in any form within schedule 5 to the Act, meaning that they are—as a matter of fact and of constitutional law—devolved in their entirety to Scotland. I also assume that he is acutely aware that any attempt by this place to legislate on schedule 5 will require—again, as a matter of constitutional law—the explicit consent of the Scottish Parliament, through a legislative consent motion under the Sewel convention, and that convention has arguably been strengthened by the Scotland Bill that is making its way through this place.

Consequently, my next request of the Minister is this: can he please confirm, in clear terms, whether the UK Government agree with this analysis? It is essential that we put this matter to bed, once and for all, so that we all understand that human rights are indeed devolved to Scotland.

The UK Government have various proposals—mooted proposals—on the table. One of those is the potential withdrawal from the European convention on human rights. The rights contained within the ECHR are enshrined in the Scotland Act, in section 57, meaning that the Scottish Parliament cannot do anything contrary to convention rights contained within the ECHR, essentially enshrining those rights in the Scotland Act. Section 57 of the Act combines with schedule 5 to the Act to mean that no UK Government can remove section 57, meaning that the ECHR—even if the UK removes itself from its effect—will always apply to devolved issues in Scotland.

So my next question to the Minister is this: do he and the UK Government accept that even if they withdraw from the ECHR, they cannot remove section 57 from the Scotland Act, meaning that the ECHR will continue to have an effect on devolved matters?

I am very proud of the UK's role in the creation of the ECHR and we should never forget the reason it was established in the first place—to prevent the atrocities of 1914-18 and 1939-45 from ever happening again. In my view, we fragment the ECHR at our peril; it sets out minimum standards. So I often ponder why we would even moot removing ourselves from those standards, unless—in effect—we wanted to dilute them.

The repeal of the Human Rights Act 1998 has often been mooted by the Government. Schedule 4 to the Scotland Act contains a list of Acts that the Scottish Parliament is deemed not capable of repealing or amending. It includes, most obviously and in my opinion regrettably, the Act of Union. The Human Rights Act 1998 is also listed in schedule 4 to the Scotland Act, and as a measure of comfort—or, indeed, otherwise—to the Government, I can assure the Minister that Scotland will continue to comply with schedule 4, as she has absolutely no plans to repeal the Human Rights Act or indeed the Act of Union. We understand that it would be *ultra vires* to do so.

If we combine schedule 4 to the Scotland Act with schedule 5, it is clear that the UK Government cannot repeal the Human Rights Act from effect in Scotland. If the UK Government did so, they would require a legislative consent motion from the Scottish Parliament, and I do not think that any Scottish Government of any party of any colour would agree to that. Nevertheless, if the Human Rights Act is considered capable of being repealed in Scotland by Westminster, the Scottish Parliament could easily legislate to enact our own Human Rights Act, which I stress would not be a desirable outcome, as we could not insist that any new Act passed in Holyrood could cover reserved matters. The Human Rights Act provides important protection to Scottish citizens in relation to the laws passed on reserved matters in this place.

It is also worth pointing out that the Human Rights Act merely ensures that the convention rights are applied by the UK courts. Perhaps that is why it attracted cross-party support in the 1990s; it was hardly controversial then, and in my view it remains uncontroversial in Scotland.

This Government have not only mooted repeal of the Human Rights Act and withdrawal from the ECHR but they have made clear their ambition for a British Bill of Rights. Although I accept that nothing of that kind has been published yet, a British Bill of Rights was a manifesto pledge and we expect it to come to the Floor of the House at some point during this Parliament. So my next question to the Minister is this, and it is a question that my party has asked many times since May: will any proposed British Bill of Rights apply to Scotland? The name would suggest that it would be intended to cover Scotland. However, our position—founded on schedule 5 to the Scotland Act—is that, as a matter of constitutional law, the UK Government cannot impose a British Bill of Rights on Scotland without a legislative consent motion under the Sewel convention, which we believe would be withheld.

Hopefully I have made it clear that, in our view, human rights are devolved to Scotland. Of course, the Scottish Parliament could legislate for a Scottish Bill of Rights, but it has absolutely no plans to do so. As yet, we have no idea what a British Bill of Rights would contain, but no one can seriously believe that this UK Government would take the opportunity within that process to strengthen our citizens' protections.

The protections of the ECHR and the Human Rights Act are hugely important to our citizens: the right to life; the right not to be enslaved; the right to liberty and security of the person; the right to a fair trial; and the right to marry, to name but a few. As Lord Bingham memorably said in 2009:

“Which of these rights... would we wish to discard? Are any of them trivial, superfluous, unnecessary?”

We say that none of them are. We view the convention not as a ceiling but as a baseline—a minimum. We should be building on these rights and not diluting them. Indeed, Scotland can go further if she so wishes.

Repeal of, or withdrawal from, the ECHR would not strike a blow to lawyers, criminals or ambulance chasers; it would strike a blow to the poor, the vulnerable and the dispossessed. Scotland wants to increase our citizens' protections. We want to put human rights at the heart of our domestic policy, as we pledged to do in our national action plan on human rights, which the Scottish National party Government launched a couple of years ago. For example, our dementia strategy in Scotland is based on agreed rights for patients, including the right to have access to treatment, and the right to have dignity and respect. We see this process as the way forward—strengthening our citizens' rights, because we are here as lawmakers essentially to protect the citizens who put us here.

My view is that we would look rather insular to our partners in the wider world if we repealed or withdrew from the ECHR. When most countries in Europe have adopted the ECHR, what message would it send out to the world if we withdrew from it or repealed it, and diluted our citizens' protections? It would be a sad day indeed for the UK's reputation abroad.

I look forward to the sovereign people of Scotland coming together to draft a written constitution for Scotland, enshrining these rights forever in a future independent Scotland.

4.37 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) for securing this very important debate.

Last December, I had the great pleasure of tabling an early-day motion to recognise Human Rights Day 2015. As a lifelong advocate of human rights, one of the great privileges of being an elected Member is now being in a position to effectively defend them, and they do need defending, as they are under attack from the current Government. They will say that this piece of legislation—the Human Rights Act—is not one and the same as our actual rights and that the reaction to their plans has been overblown. I say that is nonsense. Plans to scrap the Human Rights Act are no less than a full-on assault on the rights that I hold dear. The dismissiveness of the Government betrays the seriousness of the implications of their plans. It is a decade since the Prime Minister set up a panel of legal experts to draw up a British Bill of Rights to replace the Human Rights Act. Ten years on and that plan is still met with the fiercest opposition. Ten years down the line, the Tories are still unable to spin their plans as favourable, useful or in any way feasible.

It is important to remember that the Human Rights Act received cross-party support back in 1998. It is just as important that the Prime Minister's plans do not even have the full support of his own Back Benchers, let alone Members from other parties.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights visited the UK in January and said:

“My impression is that the debate over the HRA in Westminster is not a true reflection of concerns outside England”?

With regard to the position in Scotland, does she agree with the Commissioner's statement?

Margaret Ferrier: Yes, I totally agree with that statement. It is important, not only in England and Scotland but worldwide, that we support human rights and hold firm our thoughts on how important they are.

The tenacity of the Prime Minister in pursuing this wholly unpopular and unnecessary move is deeply unsettling. Like a hunting dog with a scent, he simply will not accept defeat. One wonders precisely what the motivation behind that staunch attitude is. After all, the plans are not only appalling, but risk a complete constitutional change and crisis in the UK.

Human rights are not reserved, and it is not conceivable that the Human Rights Act could be scrapped without legislative consent from the Scottish Parliament. I am proud that the Scottish National party will stand up to the Tories and will not buckle over our fundamental rights. I stood for election under the party promise that we were “Stronger for Scotland”. For me, our steadfast and unyielding opposition to this attack on human rights is our motto in practice. People in Scotland want a strong voice standing up to the unscrupulous attacks on our rights and core values, and that is what we are providing. Human rights are not Scottish, English, Welsh or Northern Irish—they are not American or

[Margaret Ferrier]

Australian for that matter. Human rights are universal, and we will not stand by and allow them to be diluted wherever they face threat. Repealing the provisions of the Human Rights Act would be nothing short of a colossal misjudgment, as it would remove important protections for people in the UK.

It is important to point out that the Human Rights Act did not give any new rights to UK citizens when it became law in 1998. It ensured that convention rights could be interpreted and considered by courts here in the UK. The UK was one of the first states to ratify the European convention on human rights. It is only right and proper that those rights are upheld in British courts, without the need to take cases to the European Court of Human Rights, if we are still in Europe. Justice should be accessible, yet just as we have seen with the introduction of tribunal fees, the Tories seem hellbent on making it as prohibitive as possible, particularly for those on low incomes. Human rights are centred on fairness for all of us. Removing access to justice, or at least making it much more difficult for vulnerable people, is itself an attack on our rights. What does that say to the rest of the world? What message does it send if we are unwilling to stand up to regimes such as that in the Saudi Kingdom, and instead pour our efforts into degrading our own protections?

My early-day motion called on the Government to work constructively with other Governments to promote the universality of human rights. The convention on human rights remains as much the shining beacon of human achievement that it was decades ago when Winston Churchill was championing it. I want to see human rights protected not only in Scotland, but across the UK and beyond. I want to see our human rights strengthened, not diminished. I want to see fairness at the core of everything we do as legislators. We can only do that if we stand up against these plans, loudly and clearly, and say no.

4.43 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) on obtaining this debate. I apologise for being a little late, but I caught up during the latter stages of his contribution. I was interested to hear the speech by the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier), who dealt with the threat posed by the discussion that is clearly going on within Government on the future of the Human Rights Act 1998. Without disagreeing with what she said, this is a moment where we might stop and take stock. If the Government are conducting a good-faith exercise, it need not be a threat, and it could be an opportunity.

Let us not forget that the implementation of the Human Rights Act brought a greater and more immediate degree of access to convention rights. The convention was written in the 1950s and the framework of human rights and wider jurisprudence was very different from the one we have today. Nowadays, there is a whole range of different rights, including employment rights and social and economic rights, that are worthy of protection and of being given the same status as the right to a family life, for example, which is an important part of the ECHR. Those are the sorts of rights that I would

like to see brought in. If this is a good-faith exercise on the part of the Government—that remains to be seen, and I am prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt for the moment, because we have never heard much by way of progress, although perhaps the Minister will have something to tell us today—I am happy to engage with them on the basis of broadening and strengthening the human rights covered by the Human Rights Act.

At this stage, it is useful to remember the history of the debate that brought us to where we are today. Essentially, the creation of the Human Rights Act and the terms in which it was introduced were something of a fudge. Throughout the 1990s and back into the 1980s—and possibly before that, for all I know—there was ongoing and substantial debate about the creation of a British Bill of Rights. I say that it was a fudge because the creation of a Bill in the terms that were discussed would have brought with it a fairly substantial challenge to the conventional Diceyan view of parliamentary sovereignty and the sovereignty of this place.

The justiciability of decisions taken by Government and Parliament was something that Tony Blair just did not have the stomach for taking on, even in the early years of the 1997 Government. For that reason, he came forward with a fudge, albeit an elegant one. It compelled courts to bring consideration of convention rights in an immediate way that meant that citizens did not have to go through the whole rigmarole of taking things to the European Court of Human Rights. Indeed, it has worked well ever since. In the time since the Human Rights Act was introduced, we have seen a substantial revision of the Diceyan view of parliamentary sovereignty. If we were to start with a Bill of Rights today, it would not scare the horses in the way that it clearly scared Tony Blair back in the late 1990s.

Joanna Cherry: Like me, the right hon. Gentleman is a Scots lawyer. Does he agree that the Diceyan view of the sovereignty of Parliament is very much a doctrine of English constitutional law? In Scottish constitutional law, there is a very strong foundation, recently reiterated by Lord Hope in the Supreme Court, in *Jackson v. Attorney General*, that the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty is an English doctrine and that in Scotland the people are sovereign.

Mr Carmichael: That was a debate that we enjoyed in the 1990s—I say “enjoyed”, but I use the word in the loosest possible sense—in the days of the constitutional convention. It was the underpinning of the claim of right that led to the Scottish Parliament being founded. There is a fairly long pedigree of jurisprudence in Scots law. Dredging my memory of the days of constitutional law, I go back to the case of *MacCormick v. Lord Advocate*, where that view was well-founded, albeit in *obiter dictum*.

The opportunity is there for something more to be done with human rights and a new Bill of Rights that would build on the Act that we currently enjoy. I hope the Minister would be open to that. More important and more fundamental to me than the Human Rights Act is that this country should remain a party to the European convention on human rights. If the worst predictions of the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West were to come true and the Human Rights Act were repealed, that would not deprive us of the convention rights; it would just make them that much

more inaccessible. It would take us back to the situation we had before the 1998 Act, when citizens could access their convention rights, but it ultimately required going all the way to the European Court of Human Rights. That would be a genuine retrograde step.

To pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway, that would also put us in rather poor company. In fact, leaving the convention on human rights would leave the United Kingdom sitting—I hope rather uncomfortably—with Belarus.

Richard Arkless: The right hon. Gentleman is putting a typically articulate view. What is his view on the potential legalities and problems that the UK Government might have in either an imposition of the British Bill of Rights, repeal of the Human Rights Act, or withdrawal from the ECHR? That is what I would like the debate to focus on.

Mr Carmichael: To take each point in turn, the imposition of a British Bill of Rights would require an Act of Parliament. If that were to extend and build on convention rights, and if it were not in contravention or conflict with convention rights, I would see no difficulty with that. If we were to seek to withdraw from the convention, that would bring with it enormous problems. It would bring the political problems that I have already touched on and would put us in the company of nations that, frankly, I do not want to find myself with. Beyond that, it would put us in breach of treaty obligations, because the convention rights are built into the Good Friday agreement, which, above all else, is a treaty between ourselves and Ireland. It would also throw our own constitutional structure into disarray, because the Human Rights Act is hardwired into the devolution settlement in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Again, this is one of those things that was probably not given consideration when the Conservatives set up their commission 10 years ago. That probably explains the fact that this seems to have landed in a pile of things in the Ministry labelled “a bit too difficult to deal with; we’ll maybe look at it next month”.

Richard Arkless: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his answer. He makes the position clear from a UK point of view, but I am interested in his view on whether a potential imposition of a British Bill of Rights would require a legislative consent motion from the Scottish Parliament and whether, in his view, that consent is likely to be given by any party of any colour or any Government in Scotland?

Mr Carmichael: We would have to see what the terms of the Bill were before deciding whether it required legislative consent. There are a lot of social and economic rights where the Bill would of course cut across devolved areas and would need a legislative consent motion. Employment rights, for example, are clearly reserved. We would need to see what the terms were. Like all such changes—if I can expand the thought for a second—these things are based on building consensus before introducing a Bill, so that everybody knows exactly what it will cover. I am talking about my fantasy Bill of Rights and the things I would like to have in it, which are not reflected much in a great deal of what we have heard from the thinking of the Government. However, I am ever the optimist, so we do not know what we might get from them.

If we were to get a Bill of Rights that built on the convention rights, did not interfere with them and left us still a party to the European convention, I think that would be well received in Scotland. I would be disappointed to think that, just because such a Bill had been initiated here in Westminster, it would not be accepted by people in Scotland. The protection of human rights has been reserved broadly since the days of devolution, and people in Scotland would still respect that, having voted to remain part of the United Kingdom.

I shall be interested to hear what the Minister has to say. The last time we went round this course in Westminster Hall, he assured us that we would be hearing more. We have not heard quite as much as I had hoped we would; we have heard just as much as I thought we might. We shall wait to hear what he has to say. I hope that at some point we will get the answers to how the Government are going to get out of the hole they have been digging for themselves, in terms of the constitutional difficulties that any repeal of the Human Rights Act would bring.

4.55 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Mrs Main.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless), who secured this debate, made it clear that he specifically wanted to talk about legalities. He has argued that human rights are integral to the devolution settlement, and he referred to the fact that the European convention on human rights is written into the Scotland Act 1998 in sections 29 and 57, which provide that the Scottish Parliament cannot pass any legislation that is contrary to any of the convention rights, and a Scottish Minister or a Member of the Scottish Government cannot pass legislation or carry out any act that is contrary to convention rights. Neither of those sections would be changed by a simple repeal of the Human Rights Act, because they are part of the Scotland Act.

My hon. Friend also made the point that if we look at the scheme of devolution that was devised by the late Donald Dewar, who was the first ever First Minister of Scotland, his plan was simple and, in my view, to be lauded: everything would be devolved unless it was specifically reserved. We find in schedule 5 of the Scotland Act a list of the matters that are specifically reserved to the United Kingdom Parliament, but one will search in vain for any mention of human rights in schedule 5, so in my respectful submission it is not correct to say that human rights are a reserved matter. They are a devolved matter. My hon. Friend asked the Minister to confirm whether he agrees that, as a matter of statutory interpretation, human rights are not reserved to the United Kingdom Parliament.

It must be recognised squarely that in terms of schedule 4, the Human Rights Act cannot be modified or repealed by the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish National party and the Scottish Government accept that. However, we argue, as my hon. Friend did, that because human rights are not reserved in terms of the Scotland Act, if the British Parliament wants to repeal the Human Rights Act and replace it with a British Bill of Rights, it will be legislating in the field of human rights, and under the Sewel convention it must seek the legislative consent of the Scottish Parliament. Hopefully, by the time we get to that stage, the Sewel convention will be on a statutory footing as proposed in clause 2 of the Scotland Bill.

[*Joanna Cherry*]

I reiterate my hon. Friend's question to the Minister: does he accept that for repeal of the Human Rights Act, and for repeal of anything in the Scotland Act, a legislative consent motion would be required from the Scottish Parliament? Also, does he appreciate that as recently as the end of 2014, more than 100 Members of the Scottish Parliament indicated that they supported the Human Rights Act? A cross-party majority was in support. Is he also aware that the First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, has made it very clear that her Government, which has a majority in the Scottish Parliament, would never support repeal? So does he accept that, with regard to the future framework for human rights not only in Scotland but across the UK, the British Government could not repeal the Human Rights Act and replace it with a British Bill of Rights without the consent of the Scottish Parliament and that that is extremely likely to be withheld? The third question that my hon. Friend posed was the question of whether the British Bill of Rights will apply to Scotland. If it is going to apply to Scotland, does the Minister accept that there would have to be a legislative consent motion?

The First Minister of Scotland has been keen to emphasise on several occasions that she wants to preserve the Human Rights Act for the whole of the United Kingdom, not just for Scotland. There is no question of the Scottish Government doing a deal whereby Scotland would get out of the repeal of the Human Rights Act and leave the rest of our partner nations in the United Kingdom swinging in the wind. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) stressed the universality of human rights, and the First Minister of Scotland has argued that it is important they are kept for the whole of the United Kingdom, so it is not the intention of the Scottish National party or the Scottish Government to do any deal. We would like to be involved in the cross-party movement to keep human rights for the whole of the United Kingdom.

That feeds into another point made by both my hon. Friends. The repeal of the Human Rights Act would send out completely the wrong message to the world about the United Kingdom's direction of travel on human rights. It is striking to look at the testimony of Hossam Bahgat, the director of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. He was involved in the Tahrir square uprising five years ago and said:

"The most important thing that the British can do to support human rights in Egypt is to support human rights in the United Kingdom...It is significantly more difficult for us to fight for universal human rights in our country, if your country publicly walks away from the same universal rights."

To his great credit, the former Attorney General, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), made a similar point when he recently highlighted the fact that Russia is already using the UK's position on human rights to delay implementing European Court judgments and that the UK is being cited by countries such as Venezuela as justification for ignoring obligations under the American convention on human rights.

When the right hon. and learned Gentleman spoke in Edinburgh last September, he described the ECHR as "arguably the single most important legal and political instrument for promoting human rights on our planet."

He has previously stated that if the UK is "instrumental in damaging its effectiveness it will sit very strangely with our settled policy of promoting human rights globally."

That is a voice from the Minister's party supporting the notion that it would be unfortunate if Britain sent out the wrong message about our support for human rights.

Mr Alistair Carmichael: I very much agree with the hon. and learned Lady on the question of universality. When I went to Cameroon a few years ago to work on a Voluntary Service Overseas-funded project that provided legal aid to people who could not afford it, I was struck by the fact that when I went into lawyers' offices and courts, there was the universal declaration of human rights. We always think of it as being quite high-flown and possibly even overblown, but they rely on it in courts of first instance. Does the hon. and learned Lady agree that the Human Rights Act need not be the last word in human rights? Legislation could be introduced in several areas to give protection that is more contemporarily relevant than that envisaged in the 1950s.

Joanna Cherry: I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway indicated, the Scottish Government are already attempting to hard-wire human rights into all their social policy—not only the human rights enshrined in the ECHR, but social and economic rights. For example, the Scottish Government have made it clear that when they have the additional powers they hope to get to develop a social security system for Scotland, respect for the dignity of the individual will be at the heart of the system. We are keen to move the human rights debate on in Scotland, which is why the Scottish Government brought in Scotland's national action plan for human rights. When the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights visited Scotland in January, he singled out the national action plan for support.

I totally agree with the right hon. Gentleman that socioeconomic rights are important. Many other countries in the world recognise that and have such rights in their written constitutions. The constitution of the new Republic of South Africa, which was drafted, at least in part, by one of the finest lawyers on the planet still living, Albie Sachs, recognises the importance of socioeconomic rights, which are embedded in it. Some of the Nordic states' constitutions also embed socioeconomic rights. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway said, it is our hope that when we become independent we will have a constitutional convention to write a constitution for an independent Scotland. We will look at the models and examples of other forward-looking democracies—not only in the west, but including examples such as South Africa—and seek to write socioeconomic rights into our constitution.

There is universal recognition among all those who have spoken so far of the importance and universality of human rights. We are of one voice, across the SNP-Lib Dem divide, in saying that socioeconomic rights are important and that the rights in the ECHR are only a floor for human rights, not a ceiling. The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) expressed the hope that the currently proposed consultation might be brought forward and might look at socioeconomic rights. I am far less of an optimist than he is. All the noises I have heard coming from the Government Benches

have suggested that it will be an exercise in reducing rather than bolstering human rights protections. Regardless of the purpose of the exercise, do the Government accept that human rights are devolved, not reserved, and that the legislative consent of the Scottish Parliament must be sought before there is any interference in the human rights regime that affects Scotland?

5.5 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I, too, commend the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) for securing this important debate. For him and for you, Mrs Main, these are obviously fresh and interesting developments, but for the rest of us there is an element of groundhog day. The Minister, the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) and I were present on 30 June last year for what I think was the previous human rights debate in Westminster Hall, which was secured by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael). One would have thought that in eight months we might have moved on somewhat, but we have not moved far at all.

First, I shall explain what we now know that we did not know then, and then I shall outline what we still do not know. The hon. and learned Lady made essentially the same point as she made in the previous debate:

“Ministers... suggest that they believe that the UK Government could repeal the Human Rights Act without reference to the Scottish Parliament. They argue that the Sewel convention would not be engaged because human rights are a reserved matter. That is wrong and legally illiterate. Human rights are not a reserved matter and are not listed as such in schedule 5 to the Scotland Act 1998.”—[*Official Report*, 30 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 424WH.]

I do not have the benefit of the expert legal advice that the Government have to enable me to comment on that—I am not sure whether Minister himself does these days, as he and the Lord Chancellor are in that interesting lacuna in which the outers currently find themselves—but I can at least say that this is a hotly debated matter. This is one of the most intractable issues in which the Government have engaged in since beginning this rather sorry and unwise attempt to unravel the Human Rights Act, which was introduced by the last Labour Government.

If nothing else, the Lord Chancellor is candid and answers questions as honestly as he can. When called upon to give answers about this matter, he struggled and said that it was still under review. That is probably right. Given the proximity of the Scottish Parliament elections, there is an additional problem: we will shortly be entering a period of purdah. The former leader of the Labour party, now Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), wrote to the Lord Chancellor asking him to confirm that “no part of the consultation period will overlap with the period where purdah applies or the Scottish Parliament will be dissolved”. The response simply said that the Lord Chancellor will “adhere to any Cabinet Office guidance”.

Can the Minister shed some more light on those matters? It might not be important now as it does not look like there will be any movement before the Scottish Parliament elections or, indeed, the EU referendum. Nevertheless, I would appreciate some clarity. If the positions of the

devolved authorities—not only the Scottish Parliament but the Northern Ireland Assembly—are going to be significant in any legislation that is drafted, there will need to be a full consultation, which cannot be done properly during a period of purdah.

Let me throw one other thing into the mix. The Scottish Conservative general election manifesto—a rather recherché document that I am not sure we are all terribly familiar with—said:

“The Scottish Parliament will retain the final say on the role of the European Court of Human Rights in relation to the Scotland Act 1998.”

The Minister may wish to clarify the Government’s attitude to the European convention on human rights. From what both he and the Lord Chancellor have said recently, it is pretty clear that they now do not envisage our withdrawing from the convention, but that is always hedged with the phrase, “Nothing is ruled in and nothing is ruled out.” It would be helpful if the Minister ruled that out, because that would remove one of the major problems that we face.

That is the territory we are in and those are the questions that we can glean answers to. Although it is always valuable to run these issues around the Chamber again, until the Government actually bring something forward, we are all stumbling around in the dark.

Mr Carmichael: I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the timetabling. It is unlikely that we will see anything this side of the purdah period for the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish elections. It is impossible at this stage to consult with the Administrations in any of the devolved regions before the elections. However, it would be exceptionally unwise thereafter to start a consultation in the middle of the referendum campaign. This discussion is best conducted in a period of relative calm and stability. I fear that the period between 6 May and 23 June is not going to be—

Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair): Order. Interventions are getting rather long and are not in the form of questions.

Andy Slaughter: I apologise on behalf of the legal profession. Once we get going, it is difficult for us to stop.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. This will probably be my last or my last but one point, so the Minister has time to respond. If nothing else, we must have some clarity on the timetabling. I remind the Minister, although I am sure he engraved these milestones, that the Conservative manifesto said:

“We will...scrap the Human Rights Act and curtail the role of the European Court of Human Rights”.

Last year, the Prime Minister, writing in no less a paper of record than *The Sun*, said that it is

“one of the first tasks I set the new Justice Secretary”.

In May 2015, the Minister said:

“The Government will consult fully on its proposals for a Bill of Rights during this session.”

From what we read today in the papers, it may well be that the Prime Minister gets round that by simply extending the Session and pushing the Queen’s Speech back. Nevertheless, we need certainty.

[*Andy Slaughter*]

Nothing could be clearer than what the Minister said in Justice questions on 8 September 2015:

“We will bring forward proposals on a Bill of Rights this autumn. They will be subject to full consultation. The preparation is going well.”—[*Official Report*, 8 September 2015; Vol. 599, c. 205.]

The Lord Chancellor modified that on 2 December 2015, when he said:

“My original intention was to publish the consultation before Christmas. It has now been put back. I expect it will be produced in the New Year.”

I think we can say that we are quite firmly in the new year now. It would be helpful if the Minister to give some clarity, because I am reliant on another authoritative source—*The Mail on Sunday*—which told us at the weekend that the Bill has been put off indefinitely to avoid an explosive new row over Europe. Specifically, it said that the work

“has now been completed by Justice Secretary...and is sitting on a desk inside No 10... Downing Street is refusing to publish the legislation, they say. Insiders believe the explanation is Mr Gove’s decision to defect to the Out camp in the referendum.”

We know that there are political difficulties for the Government, which may be why it has been convenient to postpone what seems to be the entire Parliament’s business, including the Queen’s Speech, until after the referendum. It would just be nice to be told that in terms.

Two weeks ago, we were told that there will be a sovereignty Bill, possibly published this week. What has happened to that? How does it relate to reform of the Human Rights Act? It may be that the boat has sailed and that, because the people whom the Prime Minister wished to keep within the tent—including the Minister—are already outside the tent, there is not much point in introducing a sovereignty Bill. It is extraordinary that we talked for so long about the European Court of Human Rights and the European convention on human rights, but we barely hear them mentioned now. Everything is about the European Court of Justice. I wonder whether it was just the words “human rights” that caused difficulty for some Government Back Benchers, and that in the hothouse atmosphere of the European Union referendum debate the caravan has moved on. That is no way to run a Government. If nothing else, I ask the Minister to give us some clarity on whether we are going to have a proposal, so when we next debate this matter we can have a substantive debate rather than run around the houses.

Let me end on this point. Although there have been some comic—or tragicomic—aspects to how the Government have handled this matter, in essence it is extremely serious. Other speakers talked about the universality of human rights and the importance of giving effect to international law and human rights in our domestic courts. That is not something to trifle with and it should not fall prey to internal disputes within a political party, even if it is the governing party.

I remind the Minister of what the director of Amnesty International said last week when its report was published—it is a shame that Amnesty needs to remind the Government of their duties on this matter—

“The UK is setting a dangerous precedent to the world on human rights. There’s no doubt that the downgrading of human rights by this government is a gift to dictators the world over and fatally undermines our ability to call on other countries to uphold

rights and laws. People around the world are still fighting to get basic human rights and we should not let politicians take our hard-won rights away with the stroke of a pen.”

I know that the Minister is a sensible, intelligent man, and I hope he takes those comments on board and is not swayed by the passions of Europe, pro or anti.

5.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): It is an honour and a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main, for the first time, I think. We have stood shoulder to shoulder on many issues and you have steered us wisely through this debate.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) on securing the debate, and other hon. Members on their stimulating contributions. In particular, I thank the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for sharing his fantasy of a British Bill of Rights with us. The serious point that he made is that the Human Rights Act is not the last word on human rights: it is not the perfect incarnation of human rights in this country, and therefore it can admit of change. I sensed agreement on that point, so the real bone of contention is what that change might look like, rather than the principled question of whether the Human Rights Act has become untouchable.

The Government are fully committed to the protection of human rights across the UK. This debate is an important opportunity to reflect on what that protection looks like now, what it might look like in the future and how it might be improved. The Prime Minister made it clear that the Government will work in the interests of all four nations of the UK, and it goes without saying that I share that commitment. One of the things that unites us as a country is our shared commitment to liberty and the rule of law. Although that commitment has evolved through different instruments, from Magna Carta and the 1689 Bill of Rights in England and Wales, to the Scottish Claim of Right, the nations of the UK have evolved with a shared commitment to the common values that underpin human rights and, indeed, the Union.

As an Englishman, I am proud to pay tribute to the Scottish landmarks on Britain’s long road to liberty. I mentioned the Claim of Right, to which can be added the Criminal Procedure Act 1701, which established and entrenched the principle of habeas corpus in Scots law. Scotland has produced some of our very finest thinkers on the subject of liberty and the rule of law. I would single out David Hume and his essays on the liberty of the press and civil liberty. He regarded Government not as the enemy of liberty but as a necessary condition for liberty. As hon. and right hon. Members will know, his work came in the context of the period after the Act of Union, so it was part of the intellectual fabric that binds this United Kingdom.

We share not only the values, but the things that emanate from them—the practical products of a commitment to liberty, such as free elections, a ban on cruel and unusual punishment, free and fair trials, and free speech. Those values and their product found voice and strength in Scotland as in the rest of the United Kingdom and are shared across the UK. At the same time, we must reflect on the pluralism within the UK and that the UK is a union of diverse interests, history and legal traditions.

Notwithstanding our shared commitment to rights and liberty, there are areas where we diverge. We can look, for example, to the right to trial by jury that exists in England and Wales. Jury trial is practised in Scotland, but it is not there as a strict right, which is perfectly legitimate and respectable. There is room for different applications of fundamental freedoms across the UK. That diversity is not merely to be expected; it is to be welcomed. It would be odd were the SNP, which is effectively committed to secession, not to think that that pluralism was a good idea.

Joanna Cherry: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Raab: I will just make a little progress and then I will certainly take interventions.

The balance between shared values and the different application of those values finds voice today in Scotland's human rights framework. The protection of rights and liberty remains at the heart of Scotland's devolution settlement—a point made well by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) and the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway. The compatibility of devolved legislation with fundamental human rights is central to the competence of the Scottish Parliament. While competence for the UK's human rights framework remains with the UK Government and this House, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government are responsible for the application of human rights in devolved areas and are free to act on human rights issues within devolved policy areas. The core substantive rights are common across the UK, but we have an element of pluralism in our approach to the procedural mechanism for protecting human rights. That variable procedural geometry means that the application of human rights admits some measure of variation across the UK.

We had lots of theoretical considerations of the human rights position as it applies in the UK and in Scotland, but let us discuss some tangible illustrations. Unlike in England and Wales, for example, the Scottish Government do not provide for mandatory fatal accident inquiries for unnatural deaths of persons detained under mental health laws, despite some criticism from the Scottish Human Rights Commission. Another example is the hourly rousing of detainees in police cells, which takes place in Scotland but applies only to vulnerable detainees in England. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland recommended reform in that area. A third example—again, this list is illustrative, not exhaustive—is the notification period for demonstrations in Scotland, which is 28 days compared with six days in England. That has been the subject of criticism by the UN's special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. It is also highlighted in "Is Scotland Fairer?" the Equality and Human Rights Commission's latest report, along with other areas that the commission concluded required improvement, such as violence and harassment against children and young persons and hate crimes perpetrated on grounds of disability or sexual orientation.

I should make it clear that the Government support the principle that Scotland should have the freedom to take action on rights in devolved areas, in line with its own priorities for implementation, and to decide how it balances fundamental human rights with the need to implement practical and sensible policies for the people of Scotland.

Joanna Cherry: I mentioned in earlier that the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights recently visited the UK. Is the Minister aware that the commissioner complimented the Scottish Government on the fact that they are looking to go beyond the European convention on human rights by implementing other international human rights treaties directly into Scots law? Is the Minister aware that the commissioner also said:

"The Scottish National Action Plan for Human Rights is also a good example for the rest of the United Kingdom?"

Mr Raab: I read the remarks of the commissioner. Indeed, I met him in person and he seemed satisfied with the assurances I gave him that our reforms, proposals and what we have in mind will not see us turn into the basket case of Europe or become like Belarus, which is nonsense that is bandied around frankly rather irresponsibly. I did meet the commissioner and did read his comments about Scotland, and it is right to pay tribute to the improvements and to what the rest of the Union can learn from Scotland. Action plans and the theoretical stuff is fine, but it is what we do in practice that really counts for the citizens of Scotland and indeed the rest of the UK.

In addition, the more powers that the Scottish Government assume for the implementation of human rights for the people of Scotland, the more they can be expected to be questioned and evaluated on the degree to which they live up to the responsibilities that they acquire. We hear an awful lot from the SNP in this House about how the UK Government and Parliament are threatening human rights in Scotland, but I hope that that is not being used as a distraction from considering the degree to which the Scottish Government meet their commitments in reality in Scotland. It is not about brandishing action plans, to which the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway referred, and making pious policy statements about human rights in theory instead of focusing on delivering in practice. Perhaps the hon. and learned Lady would like to respond to that point.

Joanna Cherry: I would not, because the Minister is here to answer questions put to him by us in this debate. I am conscious of the clock and that there is about three and a half minutes left. He has been asked a number of questions by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) that he has not yet answered. He has also been asked some important questions by the spokesperson for the official Opposition about the purdah period. Will the Minister answer those questions?

Mr Raab: I thank the hon. and learned Lady. We have given answers to all those questions before.

Richard Arkless: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair): Order. It is usually customary to let the Minister respond to the question being asked.

Mr Raab: I am happy to give way, but if we have a Gatling gun salvo of interventions, that rather eats into my time and opportunity to address such matters. I will, however, give way to the hon. Gentleman, as it is his debate.

Richard Arkless: The Minister says that the issues have been dealt with before. The question is simple: do the Government believe that human rights are reserved or devolved? He says that they have given the answer before. Where and when? We have never heard it.

Joanna Cherry: Tell us.

Richard Arkless: Tell us!

Mr Raab: We have made it clear that the Human Rights Act can be revised only by the UK Government, but the implementation of many human rights issues is devolved. The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland neatly summed up the position on the Sewel convention and legislative consent motions. Scotland cannot responsibly take a decision on such things until it has its package. In relation to the European convention on human rights, which the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway also asked about, I do not know how many times I have said it in the House, but our current plans do not involve our withdrawal from the convention. If the hon. Gentleman has been in for Justice Question Time once over the past six months, he will have heard me say that.

In fact, the Scotland Bill, which is currently completing its passage in the other place, serves as a reminder of the Scottish Parliament's role in deciding the right balance for Scottish people in Scotland. To take just one example, when competence for the franchise in local and Scottish parliamentary elections is devolved to the Scottish Parliament, it will be for the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government to determine whether the current ban on convicted prisoners voting ought to remain, as in the rest of the UK. The SNP has made it clear that it did not want the franchise extended to prisoners for the Scottish referendum. Nicola Sturgeon made that clear in May 2013.

Joanna Cherry: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Raab: I will not because I have so little time left.

Under the Human Rights Act, however, once Scotland has devolved responsibility for the franchise, the only way that the Scottish Government will be able to retain the ban on prisoner voting is by relying on the nationwide ban enacted by the UK Parliament here at Westminster. It is one of those things that SNP Members should remember, 'fess up to and be a bit more honest and straightforward about when they hurl around the suggestion that we are attacking human rights.

There is actually widespread support in Scotland for replacing the Human Rights Act with a Bill of Rights, which has been borne out by all the YouGov polling.

Joanna Cherry: Nonsense!

Mr Raab: The hon. and learned Lady does not like the facts.

The truth is that the UK's history of respect for human rights predates the Human Rights Act in all parts of the United Kingdom. That protection will continue to be totally central to our human rights framework in the years ahead. I look forward to many more opportunities to discuss the substance and detail of the framework with hon. Members in due course.

Question put,

That this House has considered the future framework for human rights in Scotland.

The Chair's opinion as to the decision of the Question was challenged.

Question not decided (Standing Order No. 10(13)).

Written Statements

Wednesday 2 March 2016

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Correction

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): During oral questions to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on Thursday, 4 February (Hansard, col. 1061) I said in answer to a question from my hon. Friend, the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann);

Legal proceedings were brought and the decision was made by Truro Crown court, under the hon. Judge Carr, to instead impose an enforcement order.

I should of course have referred to an enforcement undertaking rather than an order and I wish to correct the record by means of this written statement.

[HCWS569]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

European Union

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): I have today laid before both Houses a paper, “Alternatives to membership: possible models for the United Kingdom outside the European Union”. This paper is the first part of the report that the Government will publish to meet the requirement of section 7(1) of the European Union Referendum Act 2015. The second part of this report, which will provide information about the rights and obligations that arise as a result of the UK’s membership of the EU, will be laid at a later date. Both parts of the report will be available to read together on the gov.uk website.

[HCWS570]

Ministerial Corrections

Wednesday 2 March 2016

DEFENCE Procurement

The following is an extract from Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence on 29 February 2016.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): Given that Ministry of Defence procurement operates under European law, what assessment has the Minister made of a potential exit from the European Union on UK SMEs that rely on MOD contracts?

Mr Dunne: As my hon. Friend knows, the UK defence and security industry is the largest in Europe. As the default position, we continue to place contracts on the basis of open competition. EU procurement directives apply to our procurement, which means that EU contractors are eligible to compete for our contracts in the same way as UK and other international companies, other than when we declare an article 346 exemption for warlike stores, which accounts for about 45% of our procurement.

[Official Report, 29 February 2016, Vol. 606, c. 662.]

Letter of correction from Mr Dunne:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) during Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence.

The correct response should have been:

Mr Dunne: As my hon. Friend knows, the UK defence and security industry is the largest in Europe. As the default position, we continue to place contracts on the basis of open competition. EU procurement directives apply to our procurement, **which means that EU contractors are eligible to compete for our contracts in the same way as UK and other international companies, other than when we declare an article 346 exemption for warlike stores.**

Mesothelioma

The following is an extract from Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence on 29 February 2016.

5. **Chris Heaton-Harris** (Daventry) (Con): What plans he has to reform compensation for armed forces veterans affected by mesothelioma. [903759]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): When I announced to the House on 16 December that veterans diagnosed on or after that date with diffuse mesothelioma as a result of their service would have the option of receiving a lump sum of £140,000, I also committed to looking at whether it could be extended to veterans diagnosed before that date. We have kept our word and I am delighted to confirm that the option of a lump sum payment will be extended to veterans in receipt of a war pension for mesothelioma diagnosed before 16 December 2015.

Chris Heaton-Harris: That is thoroughly good news. Following the campaigns of many in this House, including my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) and my friend the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), this announcement will be very, very welcome. How will people affected be able to claim the money?

Mark Lancaster: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's kind comments. I have instructed the Veterans Agency to contact all those we know of with immediate effect. I hope the payments will be made on or shortly after 11 April.

[Official Report, 29 February 2016, Vol. 606, c. 667.]

Letter of correction from Mr Lancaster:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) during questions to the Secretary of State for Defence.

The correct response should have been:

Mark Lancaster: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's kind comments. I have instructed **Veterans UK** to contact all those we know of with immediate effect. I hope the payments will be made on or shortly after 11 April.

Campaign against Daesh

The following is an extract from Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence on 29 February 2016.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): What discussions has the Secretary of State or other members of the Government had with our allies inside and outside the middle east about extending military action, including airstrikes, to Libya?

Michael Fallon: There have not been discussions about extending airstrikes to Libya because at the moment there is no Government in Libya. We have been working to assist the formation of a new Government in Libya, and it is then for that Government to make clear what assistance they require. We are party to the Libyan international assistance mission, and we will see exactly what kind of support the new Government want—whether it is assistance with advice or training, or any other kind of support.

[Official Report, 29 February 2016, Vol. 606, c. 658.]

Letter of correction from Michael Fallon:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) during Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence.

The correct response should have been:

Michael Fallon: There have not been discussions about extending airstrikes to Libya because at the moment **there is no Libyan Government Cabinet.** We have been working to assist the formation of a new Government in Libya, and it is then for that Government to make clear what assistance they require. We are party to the Libyan international assistance mission, and we will see exactly what kind of support the new Government want—whether it is assistance with advice or training, or any other kind of support.

ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 2 March 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
NORTHERN IRELAND	931	NORTHERN IRELAND—continued	
Disadvantaged Children.....	938	Organised Crime	934
Economic Development.....	936	Terrorism	939
Economy	940		
Executive: Sustainable Finances.....	937		
Exports	931	PRIME MINISTER	940
Organised Crime	933	Engagements.....	940

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 2 March 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL		FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	42WS
AFFAIRS	41WS	European Union	42WS
Correction.....	41WS		

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

Wednesday 2 March 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
DEFENCE	5MC	DEFENCE—continued	
Campaign against Daesh	6MC	Procurement.....	5MC
Mesothelioma	5MC		

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**not later than
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CONTENTS

Wednesday 2 March 2016

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 931] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Prime Minister

State Pension Age [Col. 953]

Answer to urgent question—(Mr Duncan Smith)

Humanitarian Crisis: Greece [Col. 967]

Answer to urgent question—(Justine Greening)

Estimates (2nd allotted day)

The Science Budget [Col. 985]

End of Life Care [Col. 1008]

Welfare Reform and Work Bill [Col. 1043]

Lords message considered

Estimates 2015-16 [Col. 1069]

Estimates agreed to

Supply and Appropriation (Anticipation and Adjustments) Bill [Col. 1074]

Bill presented, read the First, Second and Third time and passed

Dog Theft: Sentencing [Col. 1075]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Southeastern Train Services [Col. 279WH]

Student Volunteering [Col. 303WH]

Egypt: British Support [Col. 311WH]

School Provision: Christchurch [Col. 334WH]

Human Rights Framework: Scotland [Col. 341WH]

General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 41WS]

Ministerial Corrections [Col. 5MC]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
