

**Wednesday  
4 May 2016**

**Volume 609  
No. 153**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 4 May 2016**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 4 May 2016*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Cotonou Agreement**

1. **Mr Douglas Carswell** (Clacton) (UKIP): How many countries have had aid suspended for corruption or failure to implement good governance under the terms of the Cotonou agreement in the last five years. [904848]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening):** Six countries have faced action: Guinea-Bissau, Zimbabwe, Fiji, Madagascar, Guinea and Burundi.

**Mr Carswell:** Does UK overseas aid still include revenue support, and does the Secretary of State not agree that such direct Government-to-Government aid often inhibits good governance? Far from encouraging democracy, it actually encourages kleptocracy.

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear that we have curbed general budget support, which has been reduced by nearly 90% since 2010. There is now one remaining programme of general budget support, which will finish shortly.

I disagree that it is wrong to work with Governments. In the end, one way in which we can tackle corruption is by strengthening public finance management and tax revenue authorities. We need to find a balance and provide earmarked support that actually achieves an impact.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Every year, the Palestinian Authority gives £84 million to convicted terrorists serving time in Israeli jails, out of a general fund to which this country contributes part of its £72 million a year in aid to the Palestinians. Is that not corrupt practice? How is it an example of good governance? Will the Secretary of State consider following Canada's example and ensuring that our aid goes to specific projects in the Palestinian territories?

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend will be aware that the trust fund that we are part of is broadly supported by the international community. It is yet to become clear whether the new Canadian Government will change the country's approach and go back to working in the same way as countries such as the UK. I should also point out that that support sits alongside direct support on the ground, and I can assure the House that no UK aid funding goes to the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State recognise the important role that faith communities and civil society organisations play in holding Governments to account in developing countries? Will she assure the House that the Department for International Development remains committed to supporting civil society, capacity-building programmes and good governance programmes to help promote stability and tackle corruption?

**Justine Greening:** I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. Our work with civil society is not only important for the impact that it can have in driving accountability on the ground, as he mentions, but is one way in which we can tackle corruption. It is also vital in changing attitudes towards women and girls, a matter that I care about and that we must make progress on.

#### **Projects for Young People**

2. **Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): What support her Department provides for projects which involve working with young people in the developing world. [904849]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening):** With Africa experiencing unprecedented growth in its young population, DFID has prioritised job creation for young people. That is good not only for young Africans but for Britain, because in the end we are tackling a root cause of migration.

**Paul Scully:** Will my right hon. Friend outline what the impact might be on the number of Syrians trying to reach Europe if aid spending in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and other neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees were cut?

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend raises a pertinent question. If the refugee camps that we support in countries around Syria were not funded and were closed, do we think the people there would stay in Syria? They would not; they would almost certainly look to come to Europe. The irony is that parties such as the UK Independence party that want to cut back on aid have, in effect, a pro-migration policy.

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): Today the Select Committee on International Development publishes its report on the crisis in Yemen, and one issue that we highlight is the impact on children and young people, including the fact that 47% of school-age children are not at school. Will the Secretary of State inform the House of what plans the Government have to use the forthcoming world humanitarian summit in Istanbul to focus on education in emergencies such as the situation in Yemen?

**Justine Greening:** The crises in Syria and Yemen shine a spotlight on an issue that I feel has been missed out of humanitarian responses for too long—the fact that 37 million children around the world are out of school purely because they are in areas affected by either emergencies or conflict. The UK has led the way, with the “No Lost Generation” initiative, in working with countries to get children back into school. We would like to do the same in Yemen, but as the hon. Gentleman

will know, the situation in that country makes it extremely difficult to get even the most basic humanitarian support flowing.

**Mr Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): DFID funds the International Citizen Service, which helps young people from Britain to help their counterparts in developing countries. Will the Secretary of State join me in encouraging more young people from Havant and across Britain to get involved?

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend has asked a really sensible question. More than 20,000 young people have now benefited from the International Citizen Service. It gives them a fantastic experience at a really important stage in their lives. In our manifesto we committed to tripling the numbers of young people able to benefit from it.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Do the Government recognise the important role that young people play in combating global poverty? Will the Secretary of State welcome the commitment in the Scottish National party manifesto to continue funding Scotland's development education centres, and will she set out the steps that the UK Government are taking to promote global citizenship across the country?

**Justine Greening:** We recognise the Scottish Government's work in Malawi, which is also very much the focus of UK work. On young people's role, from my perspective, it is not simply that young people can be, and are, advocates for development but that they are many of the people on the ground delivering. If we look at the response to Ebola in Sierra Leone, young people in communities did the work to help those communities understand how to stay safe.

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): For young people in countries most affected by the trauma of war and displacement there can be as few as one psychiatrist or mental health worker per 2 million people. How will the Secretary of State ensure that the Department has adequate resources to fulfil its commitment to young people's mental health, as set out in the disability framework?

**Justine Greening:** We have brought in the disability framework over the past couple of years because we felt that we had not focused on that area in development in the way that we should have. Children's mental health is incredibly important. We have put in more money through great agencies such as UNICEF to fund psychosocial support. One of the biggest problems we face is making sure that we have Arabic speakers with the right kinds of skills in the right quantity to deal with the scale of the challenge.

### Tax Avoidance and Financial Transparency

3. **Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the effect of tax avoidance in developing countries involving institutions based in the Crown dependencies and British overseas territories on the economies of those developing countries. [904850]

5. **Jo Cox** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the effect of low levels of financial transparency in the Crown dependencies and British overseas territories on the economies of developing countries. [904852]

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne):** Through our presidency of the G8 in 2013 and through the G20 we have led on assisting developing countries in strengthening their tax regimes, and tackling avoidance and evasion. UK overseas territories have agreed to furnish our tax and law enforcement agencies with company beneficial ownership information.

**Rushanara Ali:** I thank the Minister for that answer, but the world's poorest countries are deprived of some \$1 trillion every year because of money laundering and tax avoidance. Will he call on the British overseas territories to establish a public register of beneficial ownership ahead of next week's anti-corruption summit in London?

**Mr Swayne:** We are light years ahead of where we were, and indeed of any ambition expressed by previous Administrations. Full automatic exchange of taxpayer account information will be available from September this year, and company beneficial ownership information will be available to our tax authorities by June next year.

**Jo Cox:** I acknowledge the progress made by previous Governments and this one on this issue, but is it not time, in advance of the anti-corruption summit, to require overseas territories and Crown dependencies to provide public registers of beneficial ownership?

**Mr Swayne:** We have advanced a huge amount by agreement and leadership, not by having recourse to compulsion. The overseas territories are now well in advance of many of our major trading partners. It is better to proceed by agreement. Much of the information will be available through the initiative for automatic exchange of beneficial ownership registers, to which 33 countries have now signed up.

**Sir Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to look very carefully at the purpose of this? Its purpose is not simply to deal with excessive avoidance and evasion schemes—they often mask deeply corrupt and criminal activities. What has been achieved is the ability for our law enforcement agencies to get in there and get that information, without tipping off the criminals we are seeking.

**Mr Swayne:** I pay tribute to the National Crime Agency, and the unit within it paid for by DFID, for tracing that international corruption. My right hon. Friend is right. Huge amounts of revenue are being denied to the poorest countries in the world, and we have to do something about that.

**Mark Field** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): The questions asked by the hon. Ladies are entirely legitimate, and the Minister has replied well. The added liquidity that comes as a result of moneys coming in—often from parts of the developing world—to places

such as the overseas territories and the Crown dependencies can lead to a range of project finance initiatives that benefit many people in the developing world. It is not as straightforward as suggesting that moneys in tax havens do not have a longer-term benefit, particularly in those parts of the world that the Department holds close to its heart.

**Mr Swayne:** My right hon. Friend is right. The common reporting standard is vital, together with the automatic exchange of taxpayer account information. Precisely because of that, we have a pilot running in Ghana to draw developing countries into that arrangement.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that tax avoidance in developing countries costs them three times what they get in aid. Why will the Department not put pressure on Government colleagues to insist that offshore centres such as the British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands set up registers of beneficial ownership that are open to the public?

**Mr Swayne:** We are vastly in advance of the situation left by previous Administrations, and we are advancing by agreement. That information will be available if countries sign up to the initiative for the automatic exchange of beneficial ownership registers, and next month the United Kingdom will be the first country to publish that information.

**Mr Robin Walker** (Worcester) (Con): Another way that the UK can increase transparency and help to lead the world towards more open communication and higher revenues for developing countries is to support strongly the extractive industries transparency initiative. The previous Government signed us up to that, after too many years in which we had stood aside from it. Will the Minister confirm that we will be leading other parts of the British overseas territories, and signing up to the EITI?

**Mr Swayne:** Those territories certainly have extractives, and we are pushing that agenda. I regularly meet representatives of the extractives industry to drive forward this initiative.

#### Access to Energy: Africa

4. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to improve access to energy for the poorest people in Africa. [904851]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Nick Hurd):** Some 600 million people in sub-Saharan Africa still do not have access to the electricity that we all take for granted, and progress towards the global goal of universal access by 2030 is too slow. We launched the Energy Africa campaign to accelerate the expansion of the household solar market and make it work for the poorest people in the world.

**Sir Henry Bellingham:** Does the Minister agree that solar power can make a real difference to economic development in places such as the Sahel? What is DFID

doing to assist the roll-out of off-grid solar power for countries coming out of conflict, such as South Sudan and Somalia?

**Mr Hurd:** My hon. Friend has a profound understanding of the region, and I assure him that Somalia is one of the first countries to have signed an agreement with us on the Energy Africa campaign. I hope that many others will follow.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): In many African countries oil is still king, and with that comes a lot of corruption that prevents benefits from going to the poorest people in those countries. What is DFID doing to eliminate corruption, which undermines the projects, such as Energy Africa, that the Minister is talking about?

**Mr Hurd:** The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point. DFID has an extensive range of programmes to combat the culture of corruption, particularly in oil-producing states such as Nigeria, and an anti-corruption summit will soon be convened in London to address those specific issues.

13. [904860] **Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): Will the Minister update the House on what role Britain can play in encouraging the private sector to invest in energy infrastructure in Africa?

**Mr Hurd:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, and the whole thrust of the Energy Africa campaign is about accelerating a market. It is not about dumping a huge amount of public money on the table or a traditional aid programme; it is about accelerating a market in which we fully expect British entrepreneurs and investors to play a leading role.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): A fundamental prerequisite to accessing energy in the poorest nations in Africa is access to clean water. What assistance do the Government give to the many charitable institutions that have proven that clean water can be delivered to millions of people in a cost-effective way?

**Mr Hurd:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the need to retain ambition in making it easier to access water, and I am delighted that the UK continues to play a leading role in fulfilling our manifesto commitment of connecting another 60 million people to water during this Parliament. As he rightly points out, non-governmental organisations are an important part of delivering on that commitment.

#### Fraud and Corruption

6. **Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle fraud and corruption in developing countries. [904853]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening):** Corruption is bad for development, it is bad for poor people and it is bad for business. All our country programmes have anti-corruption strategies. DFID funds units in the National Crime Agency that are dedicated to investigating the money laundering and bribery that affects developing countries.

**Mr Burrowes:** Corruption is also bad for taxpayers who have a natural concern if they see too much of their money going into the hands of corrupt Governments and other organisations, particularly in Africa. What are peer-to-peer lending and giving doing to tackle this issue?

**Justine Greening:** As my hon. Friend says, platforms are now emerging that allow charitable donations to be sent directly from an individual in the UK to, for example, a remote village in Uganda or an entrepreneur in Kenya seeking to raise money from the UK public directly. Strong regulation is key. DFID is now actively working with the industry to see how this approach can be made better.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the best ways we can help developing countries to tackle fraud is to make sure there is no fraud and corruption in the UK? Will she look at whether the murderers of Mr Magnitsky have hidden away something like \$20 million or \$30 million in the UK? Is that something she would like to investigate?

**Justine Greening:** I am sure I will look further at the case the right hon. Gentleman mentions, but DFID funds and helped to establish the international corruption unit that is now part of the National Crime Agency. It is there specifically to ensure we are able to investigate cases of corruption and fraud that affect the UK system, as well as developing countries.

**Mr Speaker:** That was very, very dedicated of the Secretary of State. It was, if I may say so, an elastic—one might almost say a liberal and possibly a democratic—interpretation of the question on the Order Paper.

9. [904856] **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): One of the best ways to reassure our constituents that our money is spent wisely is to release as much data as possible about where it goes. Sunlight is the best disinfectant, so can the Secretary of State reassure me that we will go further and release even more data than we already have to reassure our constituents?

**Justine Greening:** I assure my hon. Friend that we will continue to be a leader in global aid transparency. Taxpayers can already see on the web the Department's projects in every country. Indeed, last month the Department was again rated as "very good" in Publish What You Fund's aid transparency index.

14. [904861] **Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): Somalia was recently judged to be the most corrupt country in the world by the independent watchdog Transparency International, yet in 2014 it received £124 million in aid. Does the Secretary of State believe that the entirety of that sum went towards helping the country's poorest and most needy?

**Justine Greening:** I do. In fact, DFID has a series of controls to manage the inherent risks not just in Somalia but in many of the other countries where we work. We make extensive use of third-party monitoring so we can verify independently that every pound is spent effectively.

## Palestinian Territories

7. **Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of her Department's spending in the Palestinian territories in achieving its aims. [904854]

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne):** We are strengthening Palestinian institutions and supporting economic development. Last year, we supported 60,000 children in school and created thousands of jobs. Results are monitored quarterly.

**Ian Austin:** Just 0.2%—2 pence in every £10—of the £72 million the Department spends in the Palestinian territories goes to co-existence projects bringing Palestinians and Israelis together through the Conflict, Security and Stability fund. Why will the Department not support Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow—MEET—which does brilliant work with Israeli and Palestinian students, or, for example, Save a Child's Heart? Co-existence and humanitarian work are the two pillars on which peace and a two-state solution will be built.

**Mr Swayne:** We spent £349 million between 2011 and 2015, and last year we spent £72 million. There is, of course, a difficulty when managing any number of very small projects and initiatives. However, I appreciate the importance the hon. Gentleman draws to this particular need, and I am happy to accommodate him and discuss it with him.

**Sir Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): May I urge my right hon. Friend to not just maintain our spending on the Palestinian Authority but even increase it? Do we not have an obligation to make a stand against the moral outrage of the continuing annexation, by the Israelis, of Palestinian land?

**Mr Swayne:** The main effort of our interventions in the Palestinian territories remains to deliver an independent and stable Palestinian state. I cannot give any indication of finance now; an announcement will be made in due course.

## Topical Questions

T1. [904837] **Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening):** Three weeks ago at the World Bank spring meetings in Washington, we discussed the central role that development plays in tackling the root causes of migration, terrorism and conflict. I should inform the House that no representative I met thought it would be a good idea for the UK to leave Europe. Last week in Kenya, I saw at first hand how our support for refugees and for creating livelihoods for young people is not only the right thing to do for them, but firmly in our national interest, allowing people to stay in their home region.

**Andrea Jenkyns:** On my recent visit to India, I saw the fantastic work being done by the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and others to vaccinate children

against polio, which has now been eradicated in India. What is the Government's assessment of the shortfalls of the global vaccine action plan as set out in the 2015 assessment of the strategic advisory group?

**Justine Greening:** We have seen the group's report, and we think it addresses some key issues and is realistic. It is also worth pointing out that the number of cases of polio in the world this year is down to a handful. We are within touching distance of seeing this terrible disease eradicated from our planet for the first time in history.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Last month, I visited Somaliland in the horn of Africa to see for myself some of the effects of the drought that has swept southern and eastern Africa and some of the 36 million people facing hunger. I met desperate people who need food, water and shelter. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that this drought does not become a famine?

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Lady raises an important issue, which underlines the fragility of many countries in Africa which, while on the path to development, face challenges such as El Niño. Specifically in Somalia, we have made additional funding available to tackle this humanitarian crisis to try to do precisely what the hon. Lady suggests, which is so important.

T2. [904838] **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree with VSO that the generous amount of money that the British people give in overseas aid has transformed the lives of children throughout the world as well as, in particular, in developing countries?

**Justine Greening:** Yes, I do. We have supported 11 million children into school over the last five years and distributed 47 million bed nets, which has seen malaria deaths fall by two thirds over the last 15 years. We are helping 60 million people to get access to better water and sanitation. VSO, of course, is delivering a fantastic project for the International Citizen Service, too.

T3. [904839] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): People are fleeing war zones in developing countries across the globe. Will the Government now heed Lord Dubs and Sir Erich Reich, two prominent Kindertransport children, and think again about providing sanctuary for unaccompanied child refugees from Syria?

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Lady will be aware of all the work that DFID has done in Syria and in the region, and it has been particularly focused on supporting children affected by that crisis. We should be proud of the fact that no member state has done more financially to support refugees arriving in Europe. As she will be aware, we are looking at how to continue to work harder on ensuring that we support children who are in Europe and unaccompanied.

T5. [904841] **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that her commendable efforts to improve sexual equality across the world would be made easier if organisations such as the Blackburn Muslim Association were not putting out

information to people that women should not be allowed to travel more than 48 miles without a male chaperone?

**Justine Greening:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's question. I had a look at its website last night and, frankly, the view expressed on it is disgraceful and unacceptable. It has no place in Britain, and it is contrary to our British values. I think the Blackburn Muslim Association should very clearly and publicly withdraw those comments.

T4. [904840] **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Secretary of State may be aware of the brutal murder of LGBT activist Xulhaz Mannan in Bangladesh last month. He was hacked to death by Islamist activists. Is she aware that Amnesty International says that his was just one of four such murders last month? Will she tell me what we are doing to help the Government of Bangladesh to offer more protection to the LGBT community there?

**Justine Greening:** The right hon. Gentleman has been as concerned as I have been about some of the terrible murders that have taken place in Bangladesh. It is important that we continue to work with the Bangladeshi Government to ensure that there is freedom of speech combined with the rule of law, and that the perpetrators of the murders are brought to justice.

T6. [904842] **Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that our GDP would fall by more than 0.7% if we withdrew our investment from various stability projects around the world?

**Justine Greening:** Absolutely. We know that conflict costs tens of billions of pounds of global GDP every year. We also know that simply enabling women to be more economically empowered would add tens of billions to global GDP every year, so what we are doing is not just good for the poorest people on our planet; it is in our national interest as well.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [904862] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 4 May.

**The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron):** I know that the whole House will wish to join me in congratulating Leicester City on winning the premier league title. Having been 5,000:1 outsiders at the start of the season, they have shown superb ability, incredible resilience and a great team ethic.

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

**Martyn Day:** May I begin by associating myself with the Prime Minister's comments about Leicester City? That result is something on which he and I can agree.

On Monday, the Foreign Secretary said:

"There is a need for a new initiative in the Syria dialogue to keep it alive."

Will the Prime Minister withdraw his airstrikes, which have done nothing to bring about peace, and will he redouble his efforts to secure a political resolution to the war through a new dialogue, as recommended by his own Foreign Secretary?

**The Prime Minister:** I think that we should do both. I think that we should continue to hit Daesh terrorists because they threaten our country, but at the same time do everything that we can to support dialogue between the opposition and the Syrian regime, which is what the progress has been about. We will continue to take both those steps.

Q2. [904863] **Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that 33 Conservative candidates will stand in the Lincoln city elections tomorrow, along with our county's police and crime commissioner candidate—and Labour will lose some seats!

All of us in Lincoln are aware of the need for tolerance and the stamping out of racism and anti-Semitism, especially in view of my Labour predecessor's current role on the Board of Deputies. Will my right hon. Friend join me, and all our Conservative colleagues, in condemning the actions and propaganda of Hezbollah and Hamas?

**The Prime Minister:** I certainly wish my hon. Friend's candidates well. If people want to have well-run services at a good cost and keep taxes down, it is right for them to vote Conservative throughout the country.

My hon. Friend's point about Hamas is important. We should be clear about who they are. They are a terrorist group who believe in killing Jews, and that is why whatever the Leader of the Opposition says about combating anti-Semitism in the Labour party will mean nothing until he withdraws the remark that they were his friends. He needs to do that, and he should do it today.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in congratulating Leicester City on their amazing achievement. I hope that what he has said is not an indication that he is going to support another football team, rather than sticking with the two that he has already.

Later today, commemorations begin for Holocaust Memorial Day in Israel. I hope that it is agreed in all parts of the House that we should send our best wishes to those who are commemorating the occasion, and also send a very clear statement that anti-Semitism has no place in our society whatsoever and we all have a duty to oppose it.

Tomorrow people will go to the polls to vote in council elections in England. Nine of the 10 most deprived councils are set to see cuts higher than the national average, and eight face cuts more than three times the national average. That means less money for

youth services, for adult social care, and for those in the areas with the greatest need. The Prime Minister used to say, "We are all in it together." What happened to that?

**The Prime Minister:** First, I join the right hon. Gentleman in saying that we should always support Holocaust Memorial Day, whether here in the UK, where we have a number of commemorations, or in Israel. But I am going to press him on this point, because he said:

"it will be my pleasure and my honour to host an event in parliament where our friends from Hezbollah will be speaking... I've also invited friends from Hamas to come and speak as well."

Hamas and Hezbollah believe in killing Jews, not just in Israel but around the world. Will he take this opportunity? If he wants to clear up the problem of anti-Semitism in the Labour party, now is a good time to start: withdraw the remark that they are your friends.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I have made it very clear that Labour is an anti-racist party and that there is no place for anti-Semitism within it. We have suspended any members who have undertaken any anti-Semitic activities or work or made such statements, and have established an inquiry led by Shami Chakrabarti. The point the Prime Minister makes relates to a discussion I was hosting to try to promote a peace process. It was not an approval of those organisations. I absolutely do not approve of those organisations.

The reality is that vulnerable people are being abandoned in this country. The Prime Minister has said that social care and support for the elderly were a priority for him. If that is the case, why has he cut £4.5 billion since 2010 from the adult social care budget, leaving 300,000 older people without the care and support they need to live in dignity?

**The Prime Minister:** First, we are putting more money into social care and allowing councils to raise council tax to put that money in.

I am afraid the right hon. Gentleman will have to do this one more time. He referred to Hamas and Hezbollah as his friends. He needs to withdraw that remark. Let me give him another chance: are they your friends or are they not? Those organisations, in their constitutions, believe in persecuting and killing Jews. They are anti-Semitic and racist organisations, and he must stand up and say they are not his friends.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Obviously, anyone who commits racist attacks or who is anti-Semitic is not a friend of mine. I am very clear about that. I invite the Prime Minister to think for a moment about the conduct of his party and his candidate in the London mayoral elections and their systematic smearing of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), our candidate for Mayor. I wish him well, and I invite the Prime Minister to undertake to ensure that the Conservative party in London desists from its present activities in smearing my friend.

Last week, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's "Destitution" report found that 1.25 million people in Britain were unable to afford the essentials needed to eat and stay warm, clean and dry. The number of people using food banks rose again last year. The Prime



Minister usually lectures us about a stronger economy. When will that stronger economy mean that fewer people need to use food banks?

**The Prime Minister:** What the stronger economy means is that there are over 2 million more people in work than when I became Prime Minister, and that someone can now earn £11,000 before paying tax; and we have introduced a national living wage—something never done in 13 years of a Labour Government.

I completely reject the right hon. Gentleman's comments about Labour's candidate for the London mayoralty. As I have said before at the Dispatch Box, we are not responsible for everything someone says when they share a platform with us, and we cannot control everyone who appears in a picture, but there is a pattern of behaviour with the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan). He shared a platform with Sajid Shahid, the man who trained the ringleader of the 7/7 attacks and accused the United States of bringing 9/11 on itself. He shared a platform with an extremist who called for Jews to be drowned in the ocean. When this was put to the right hon. Member for Tooting, he described it as mere "flowery" language. If the leader of the Opposition wants to know why he has a problem with anti-Semitism, let me tell him: it is because his candidates share platform after platform with extremists and anti-Semites and then excuse their words. One more time: say you withdraw the remark about Hamas and Hezbollah being your friends.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Last week, the Prime Minister tried, as he often does, to smear my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting for his association with Sulaiman Ghani. It turns out that Mr Ghani is actually an active Conservative supporter who has shared platforms with the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith). The Prime Minister should also reflect on the words of Lord Lansley some years ago when he said that racism was "endemic" within his party. We have set up a commission of inquiry; I suggest that the Prime Minister might think about doing the same thing.

Lord Kerslake, the former Government housing chief, has said that the Housing and Planning Bill

"effectively removes the security that people need",

and that it is "fundamentally wrong". Homelessness is up by a third since the right hon. Gentleman became Prime Minister, and it is rising again this year. A voter, Malcolm, wrote to me this week to say that he and his family will lose their home if the Government's Housing Bill goes through. Why can the Prime Minister not follow the example set by the Welsh Labour Government by placing a legal duty and responsibility on councils to help people during a housing crisis? Why cannot he do that?

**The Prime Minister:** I will tell the right hon. Gentleman what this Government have done, not in Wales where Labour is in control but here in England: we have built twice as much council housing in the last six years as Labour did in the previous 13.

But I am not going to let the issue about the right hon. Member for Tooting rest. The Leader of the Opposition raised the case of Sulaiman Ghani, whom the right hon. Member for Tooting shared a platform with nine times. This is a man who says that it is wrong

to stop people going to fight in—[*Interruption.*] No, as long as it takes. Do you want to know the views of a person that your leader has just quoted? He has described women as—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) might be interested in this. He described women as "subservient" to men. He said that homosexuality was an "unnatural" act. He stood on a platform with people who wanted an Islamic state. That is why the Leader of the Opposition's attempts to deal with anti-Semitism are utterly condemned to failure. He will not even condemn people who sit on platforms with people like that.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I did point out to the Prime Minister—I was trying to help him—that the gentleman concerned is actually a Conservative. Maybe he would care to think about that. He might also consider that Shazia Awan, a former Conservative parliamentary candidate, has said this of the Tory mayoral campaign:

"I'll be voting Labour. A lifelong Tory voter and ex-candidate, I'm ashamed at the repulsive campaign of hate".

Homelessness has been reduced by 67% in Wales since the new regulations came in. Why can the Prime Minister not do the same in this country? Inequality is getting worse. Education ought to be a route out of poverty, but new figures show that the number of people participating in a level 2 adult education course in the first half of this year fell by a fifth compared with last year. How can we tackle inequality when the Prime Minister and his Government are taking away the opportunities for people to find a pathway out of poverty?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman talks about inequality, but inequality has gone down under this Government. There are 764,000 fewer workless households and 449,000 fewer children living in workless households. Why? Because we have a growing economy, a living wage, more jobs and people paying less tax. That is what is happening under this Government. Once again I say to him that we are investing in schools to give people opportunities and in schemes to allow people to own homes to give them opportunities. He opposes all those things because the truth is this: he may be a friend of the terrorist group Hamas but he is an enemy of aspiration.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Politics is about choices. The Prime Minister cut—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Let me gently say to the assiduous but slightly over-enthusiastic Government Whip, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), that his role is to be seen and not heard—no further noise, please, from the hon. Gentleman today or from the sidekick to his right. A cabal of Whips will not shout people down in this Chamber. Be quiet or leave; it is very simple.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The Prime Minister's Government cut income tax for the richest, cut capital gains tax, and cut corporation tax again and again. At every turn, they make the wrong choices. Tomorrow, people can make their own choices about the crisis of social care, the housing crisis in this country, the unprecedented cuts to local councils in the areas of greatest need, and the cuts to further education, taking opportunities away from young people. The choices have been made. The

Government cut taxes for the rich; we want proper taxation to ensure that there are decent services for the rest.

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman is right that tomorrow is about choices. People can choose a party that is on the side of security for hard-working people and that wants to ensure that there are more jobs, better pay, lower taxes, good schools for their children, and a seven-day NHS that is there for them when they need it. Their other choice is to back a party that puts extremists over working people and that is utterly incapable of providing the leadership that their local council or our country needs.

Q5. [904866] **Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in order to create a northern powerhouse that can produce innovation and prosperity, investment is needed in vital transport links in our northern cities? Of particular concern to my constituents is the junction of the A34 and the A560 at Gatley. Will the Prime Minister and his Ministers meet me to discuss how we can keep traffic moving into and out of the great city of Manchester and alleviate congestion in my constituency of Cheadle?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this issue. We established Transport for the North to look exactly at schemes such as the one that she proposes, so that we can speak with one voice. We are also investing £13 billion in transport across the north over this Parliament. Planning for the next road investment strategy for after 2020 is also now under way, so it is absolutely the right time for her to make that point.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray) (SNP): Last week, the Prime Minister took issue when I mentioned unaccompanied Syrian refugee children in Europe and the Kindertransport of the 1930s. Since then, he has been written to by Sir Erich Reich, the chairman of the Association of Jewish Refugees' Kindertransport special interest group, who said:

“The echoes of the past haunt many of my fellow Kinder and I whose fate similarly rested with members of the British parliament. I feel it is incumbent on us to once again demonstrate our compassion and human-kindness to provide sanctuary to those in need.”

Why has it taken so long, and the threat of a parliamentary defeat, for the Prime Minister to begin changing his mind?

**The Prime Minister:** First, let me pay tribute to the gentleman mentioned by the right hon. Gentleman. Let us be clear that no country has done more than Britain to help when it comes to Syrian refugees. No country has raised more money, and only the United States has spent more money. I want us to proceed with as much support from across the House as we can. I think it is right to stick to the principle that we should not be encouraging people to make this dangerous journey. I think it is right to stick to the idea that we keep investing in the refugee camps and in neighbouring countries. I also think it is right not to take part in the EU relocation and resettlement schemes, which have been, in my view, a failure.

We are already taking child migrants in Europe with a direct family connection to the UK, and we will speed that up. I am also talking to Save the Children to see what more we can do, particularly with children who came here before the EU-Turkey deal was signed, because I say again that I do not want us to take steps that will encourage people to make this dangerous journey. Otherwise, our actions, however well-meaning they will be, could result in more people dying, rather than more people getting a good life.

**Angus Robertson:** Last week, I accused the Prime Minister of walking by on the other side when he stoutly defended his then policy, opposing further help for unaccompanied refugee children in Europe. If what we are hearing now is the beginnings of a U-turn, I very much welcome it, as I am sure do Members from all parts of the House. May I encourage him to think more about what can be done, given that the Kindertransport helped 10,000 children from Europe? Finally, may I ask him to take the opportunity to thank Lord Alf Dubs and all campaigners who have worked so hard for the UK to live up to the example and the spirit of the Kindertransport?

**The Prime Minister:** I certainly think that all those people deserve recognition for the work they have done to put this issue so squarely on the agenda, but let me say again that I reject the comparison with the Kindertransport. I do so for this reason: I would argue that what we are doing primarily—taking children from the region, taking vulnerable people from the camps, going to the neighbouring countries and taking people into our country, housing them, clothing them, feeding them and making sure they can have a good life here—is like the Kindertransport.

I think that to say that the Kindertransport is like taking children today from France, Germany or Italy—safe countries that are democracies—is an insult to those countries. But, as I have said, because of the steps we are taking, it will not be necessary to send the Dubs amendment back to the other place; the amendment does not now mention a number of people. We are going to go around the local authorities and see what more we can do, but let us stick to the principle that we should not be taking new arrivals to Europe.

Q7. [904868] **Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): The Department of Health is looking to introduce a cell-free DNA test for pregnant women in order to reduce the number of miscarriages, but this will have the unintended consequence of increasing the number of abortions for those with Down's syndrome. I know that nobody in this House cares more about the protection and safety of those with special needs, so will the Prime Minister meet me and representatives of the East Lancashire Down's Syndrome Support Group so that we can look at ways of protecting those with Down's syndrome and ensuring that they will not be simply screened out?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises a very important issue. A local group of Down's syndrome parents came to my constituency surgery on Friday and made all these arguments to me. As a constituency MP, I am taking this up with the Department of Health to make sure that all the right processes are followed. There are moral and ethical issues that need to be

considered in these cases, but on the other hand we also have to respect the view that women want to have screening and testing about the health of their children, and we should be in favour of maximum transparency, on the basis that this is optional rather than mandatory, but it is part of routine care. So the Health Secretary is going to have to find a way through this, but, above all, we must make sure we go about it in the right way.

Q4. [904865] **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): Nifco UK manufactures components for Ford and Nissan cars and employs hundreds of people, including many from my constituency. I am sure the Prime Minister knows of the need for us all to get behind our manufacturing industry, but does he agree with Nifco's managing director, Mike Matthews, that it would be "business suicide" for the UK to leave the European Union?

**The Prime Minister:** I think we should listen to all the business voices, particularly those in manufacturing, so many of whom say that we are better off in a reformed European Union. We get an enormous amount of investment, particularly from Japanese motor industries. I will be welcoming the Japanese Prime Minister here to the UK tomorrow, when I am sure this will be on the agenda.

#### Peace in Europe: Assessment of EU's Contribution

Q12. [904874] **Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the extent of the contribution of the EU to the maintenance of peace in Europe.

**The Prime Minister:** NATO is the cornerstone of Britain's defence, but our place in the EU is, in my view, a vital part of protecting our national security. I would argue that it helps in two ways: first, by ensuring that issues are settled by dialogue; and secondly, by helping to provide assistance in particular circumstances—for example, the Balkans.

**Dr Lewis:** I entirely agree with the Prime Minister's remarks about NATO, but does he accept that although dictatorships often attack democracies or other dictatorships, democracies seldom, if ever, go to war with each other? If an aim of the EU is, as we are constantly told, to prevent conflict between its own members, as in world war one and world war two, is it not heading in precisely the wrong direction by trying to create an unelected, supranational Government of Europe that is accountable to nobody?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend has long-standing and passionate views on this issue. Let me make a couple of points in response. First, we should not forget that, until very recently, some countries now in the European Union were not democracies, but forms of dictatorship. Secondly, those countries that have worked towards membership of the EU have had to put in place all sorts of democratic and other norms to help them on their way. Finally, we have had an unparalleled period of peace and prosperity in Europe. My argument is that whether we attribute all of that to NATO or some of that to the EU, why would we want to put it at risk?

#### Engagements

Q6. [904867] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The findings of the NHS England report on the sudden closure of Bootham Park mental health hospital in York have confirmed that the relationships between the NHS bodies, as defined under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, are dysfunctional and have failed patient safety. A Healthwatch report showed that harm has occurred because life has been lost. Will the Prime Minister now accept that, because of the serious risk that has been created, the 2012 Act has to change in line with NHS England's recommendations?

**The Prime Minister:** I will look very carefully at what the hon. Lady has said. My understanding is that she called for action on an outdated and dangerous facility back in July last year, and that is exactly what happened. I am pleased that action was taken. Bootham Park was not fit for purpose. The Care Quality Commission identified serious and life-threatening issues on patient safety, which were not put right. As a result, there was a decision to close and then subsequently reopen the facility after changes. Of course there will be incidences of poor practice; what matters is whether we intervene fast enough and put them right. In this case, I will look again at what she says, but it does look as if action was taken.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): The Christian Yazidi and Shi'a children in Syria are suffering from genocide carried out by Daesh, and we should recognise it as such. May I urge the Prime Minister to do more to replicate the Kindertransport of the 1930s? That is what we are doing in taking children directly from the camps in Syria. If we were to take 16-year-olds from a safe environment in Europe, we would simply be causing more misery and encouraging the people traffickers.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend has asked me two questions. One is whether there is more we can do to label what has happened as genocide. That has always been done under a legal definition, but there is a very strong case here for saying that it is genocide, and I hope that it will be portrayed and spoken of as such.

On the issue of the Kindertransport, I agree with my hon. Friend. We have an enormous amount of which we can be proud—the money that we have put into the camps, and the fact that we raised more in London on one day than any humanitarian conference has ever raised in the history of the world. We have a very strong record. We will do more for children who were already registered in Europe before the EU-Turkey deal, but the principle that we should try to cling to is that we should not do anything that encourages people to make the perilous journey. That has been the cornerstone of our policy and it should remain the case.

Q8. [904869] **Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): For the benefit of the House and for 10 and 11-year-olds up and down the country, will the Prime Minister explain what the past progressive tense is? Will he differentiate between a subordinating conjunctive and a co-ordinating conjunctive? Finally, will he set out his definition of a modal verb?

**The Prime Minister:** The whole point of these changes is to make sure that our children are better educated than we are. That is why I am absolutely delighted that my three children at state schools are going off to do these tests.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Three years ago—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I want to hear Mr Vickers's inquiry.

**Martin Vickers:** Three years ago, five members of the Cockburn family from County Durham were killed in a tragic accident on the A18 in my constituency. At the recently concluded inquest, the coroner said that he had no confidence that the proposed work by the highway authority would remedy the situation. Obviously the council wants to do all it can, and has committed to carry out the work in full. However, resources are very limited. Will my right hon. Friend give serious consideration to an application from the council for additional resources to avoid a future tragedy?

**The Prime Minister:** I will certainly have a very close look at the issue that my hon. Friend raises. I know the A18 and its importance for his constituency, and I will look at what the Highways Agency has made available and at whether there is real evidence that more could be done to make the road safe.

Q9. [904870] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Eritrea was described as the North Korea of Africa at the recent inaugural all-party group meeting, which heard reports of Government-enforced indefinite conscription. The UK FCO advises against travel to areas within 25 km of the Ethiopian border. Will the Prime Minister personally and urgently review Home Office guidance that says that it is safe to transport asylum seekers back to Eritrea?

**The Prime Minister:** I will certainly consider what the hon. Gentleman says. We know that Eritrea is a deeply undemocratic and autocratic country that has done appalling things to its people and that is one reason why so many of those seeking to cross the Mediterranean, normally through the Libyan route, have come from that country. When I had the opportunity to meet the Eritrean leadership, as I did at the conference in Valletta in Malta, I made those points very strongly.

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Four years ago, I asked my right hon. Friend on behalf of my mother, Maud, whether the EU referendum vote could be brought forward because of her age. She was then 100. She now wishes to know whether she needs to set a world record for longevity before the Chilcot report is published.

**The Prime Minister:** I think that I can reassure Maud that this summer she will have a double opportunity to deal with these things, with a referendum on 23 June and the Chilcot report, which, I am sure, will come not too much longer after that.

**Mr Speaker:** I rather imagine that she will then want a Backbench Business Committee debate on the matter.

Q10. [904872] **Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): Tata Steel has indicated that it wishes to complete the sale of its UK assets by the middle of June and that it wants a preferred bidder in place by the end of this month. Does the Prime Minister really think that that is a realistic timeframe and that there will be a credible process of due diligence? What steps is the Prime Minister taking to ensure that Tata Steel delivers on its promise to be a responsible seller?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about this. The positive news is that the deadline yesterday was met by a number of serious inquiries of interest into buying all of Tata, and that is good news. Obviously, we now need to work intensively with Tata and those buyers to get that list down to those who seriously intend to bid for the business. The hon. Gentleman is right that it is a very short timetable. He asks what we are doing, and what we are doing is talking intensively with Tata to ensure that it does everything it can to make sure that this is a serious sales process.

**Sir Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): The Prime Minister just made a very important announcement about refugee children, but obviously time is of the essence because of the peculiar vulnerability of children without the guidance and protection of their families. Will the Prime Minister indicate to the House how quickly he expects to have those arrangements in place?

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who has spoken powerfully and passionately about this issue. I do not see any reason why there needs to be a long delay. We need to carry out conversations with local councils, because many of them, particularly in the south of England, are already under pressure owing to the number of child refugees who have already come. We need to carry out those conversations, but hopefully we can then make progress during this year.

Q11. [904873] **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Documents leaked earlier this week appear to confirm what most have feared: that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership makes unacceptable concessions in respect of public health and safety regulations, opening the doors for US investors to sue for loss of profits. Will the Prime Minister recognise the concern raised by the French President and tell this House what protections his Government are seeking for the national health service and public services?

**The Prime Minister:** This is the reddest of red herrings, I have to say. The health service is completely protected under this agreement, as it is under others. There are all sorts of reasons why people might be against free trade and wanting to see an expansion of trade, investment and jobs, but I think people ought to be honest about it and say that they do not want to see those things happen, rather than finding total red herrings to get in the way of something that could add tens of billion pounds to our economy and bring jobs and investment to our country—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Calm yourself, Mr Campbell. You are supposed to be a senior statesman in the House. Calm down. Take up yoga, as I have told you before.

**Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): Looe Lifeboats in my constituency celebrates its 150th anniversary this year. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating and thanking not only the Looe lifeboat men, but all the lifeboat men who keep us safe at sea?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very happy to do that in conjunction with my hon. Friend. Lifeboat men are incredibly brave people. Having met some of them, particularly during the flood episodes that we have had in recent years, I know the immense professionalism and dedication that they bring to the task, and they put their lives at risk all the time to save others. They really are the bravest of the brave.

### Fixed-term Parliaments

Q13. [904875] **Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect on the performance of Government of the introduction of five-year fixed-term Parliaments; and if he will make a statement.

**The Prime Minister:** What matters is what works and allows the Government to make long-term decisions in the long-term interests of the country. In my view, five-year fixed-term Parliaments are an important part of that.

**Mr Allen:** Will the Prime Minister ensure that his Government's performance includes the long-overdue creation of a centre of evidence on sexual abuse of children—something that I first raised in Prime Minister's questions with Margaret Thatcher in 1989? We can deal with the awful consequences of child sex abuse for victims and perpetrators, but we must also use early intervention expertise to stop it happening in the first place. Will the Prime Minister back the excellent work of Ministers and Members from all parties and get this much-needed What Works centre up and running without delay, within the five-year term of this Government?

**Mr Speaker:** I am glad the hon. Gentleman rescued his own question with those last words. We are grateful to him, constitutionally at least.

**The Prime Minister:** I am sorry that it has taken so long for a question in 1989 to get an answer, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that setting up a centre of expertise on sexual abuse is exactly what the Home Office is doing. It will play a significant role in identifying and sharing high-quality evidence on what works to prevent and deal with sexual abuse and exploitation. Alongside this, the Department for Education's existing What Works centre will ensure that social workers across the country are able to learn from the best examples. It is a good example of Government reform, which I know the hon. Gentleman supports.

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): The Prime Minister and we on the Government Benches can be very proud of the fact that in recent years we have reduced both relative poverty and income inequality.

We are a one nation party or we are nothing. Does the Prime Minister agree with Lord Rose, the leader of the Remain campaign, that if we were to leave the EU and exercise greater control over immigration for the sake of public services, wages would rise even faster?

**The Prime Minister:** If we were to leave the EU, I think we would see an impact on our economy that would be largely negative. That is not just my view; that is the view now of the Bank of England, the International Monetary Fund, the OECD and a growing number of international bodies. I would say to anybody who wants to make that choice that obviously it is a choice for the British people to make, but we have to be clear about the economic consequences.

### Engagements

Q14. [904876] **Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): In 1972, my constituent Susan Lee, aged just 19, having been married for nine months, and six months pregnant with their first child, received a knock on the door to say that her husband Private James Lee had been killed in action in Northern Ireland. When Susan, now Rimmer, married and found love again, she lost all compensation for her and her daughter Donna-Marie, and she still has no compensation for having made that huge sacrifice. That is a disgraceful way to treat those who have lost loved ones who were serving our country. Will the Prime Minister meet me and Mrs Rimmer to discuss this case and the injustice that still faces several hundred more widows in this country?

**The Prime Minister:** I will make sure that Susan Rimmer gets the meeting and the attention that she deserves. I know that the Minister with responsibility for defence personnel and veterans, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster), met the War Widows Association earlier this year so that it could put forward its case. Of course, it was this Government who made a historic change so that war widows who remarried, from 1 April 2015, would retain their war widow's pension. That was a change long asked for and only delivered under this Government. We will continue to look at this issue, but at present we are of the view—this is the long-standing policy of successive Governments—that we should not make these changes and apply them retrospectively.

**Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): Yesterday the Foreign Affairs Committee started our inquiry on Anglo-Russian relations. This afternoon I have a Westminster Hall debate on Anglo-Russian relations. Despite all the tensions between our two countries, will the Prime Minister give us an assurance that he will redouble his efforts to try to lower tensions with that fellow permanent member of the UN Security Council?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course we want to keep tensions low, and of course we want to have good relations, but we cannot ignore the fact that Russian-backed and directed separatists have effectively tried to redraw the boundaries of Europe. When we consider how dangerous such exercises have been in the past, we have to take them extremely seriously in the present.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): May I thank the Prime Minister for joining Leicestershire MPs and the rest of the planet in congratulating Leicester City football club on their brilliant and historic success in the premier league? During this amazing season, local Leicester hero, Gary Lineker, thought the idea of Leicester winning the league was so far-fetched that he said he would present “Match of the Day” in his underwear if they won. Does the Prime Minister, as an Aston Villa

supporter—my commiserations to him on their season—agree that, in politics as well as in football, when people make a promise, they should keep it?

**The Prime Minister:** I absolutely agree. I have been watching everything Gary Lineker has said since, and he is not quite answering the question—something that, of course, no one ever gets away with in this House. I welcome what the right hon. Gentleman has said; obviously, I hope it is just the start of him joining the blue team.

## Dublin System: Asylum

12.41 pm

**Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con) (Urgent Question):** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make a statement on reforms to the Dublin agreement and the effects on asylum.

**The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire):** This morning the European Commission published its proposals for reform of the Dublin protocol and emergency relocation in response to the migration crisis in the Mediterranean. The proposals were first announced under the EU-Turkey deal, and agreement is critical to finding a solution for Europe's asylum systems ahead of the summer. The Government will now scrutinise the proposals carefully.

As the House will be aware, the UK has an opt-in to any EU proposals on justice and home affairs issues. It is not bound to sign up to the proposals the Commission has published today; we will have three months to consider whether to do so. The proposals will be laid before Parliament, and an explanatory memorandum will be provided. Scrutiny Committees in both Houses will look at the issue in detail, and Parliament will be able to consider the proposals in the usual way.

The Government strongly support the principles behind the Dublin regulation. We believe that an asylum claim made in the EU should be dealt with by the member state most responsible for the applicant's presence in the EU. This provides certainty for the applicant and protects other member states' asylum systems from abuse. But our starting position is clear: we will not opt into any legislative proposal that replaces the existing Dublin principles with a redistribution mechanism, and we do not support relocation. Those in need of protection should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach. We support the existing Dublin regulations and the principles underpinning them.

In this context, it is worth noting that the Commission has been very clear today that, should we not opt into the revised Dublin regulations, the existing regulations will continue to apply between the UK and other member states, and this is at least partly a direct result of the Government's engagement with the Commission and other member states. As such, there is no risk that we would lose our existing powers to return people to other EU member states—powers that we have used nearly 12,000 times since 2005.

Where an individual is the responsibility of another EU member state under EU law, the Government seek to return them under the Dublin regulations—and we will continue to do so. We have been engaged in regular constructive conversations with our European counterparts and the European Commission, and will participate fully in the negotiations on this draft proposal at European level. I commend this statement to the House.

**Mrs Main:** I thank the Minister for his statement, although I am somewhat concerned that it will be three months before we know what this will look like in reality, given that we have a very important referendum coming up in that time.

The Minister said in February that the Dublin agreement "should be upheld, not undermined."—[*Official Report*, 29 February 2016; Vol. 606, c. 689.]

In theory, the Dublin asylum regulations ensure that EU countries can deport refugees to their first port of entry, as he just re-confirmed. The Secretary of State recently restated her view

"that amending the Dublin regulation is unnecessary and risks undermining a vital tool in managing asylum claims within the EU."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 2015; Vol. 603, c. 21WS.]

However, the EU Commission is pressing ahead with reforms despite her views, and despite many European countries expressing their extreme disquiet. Under the existing rules, Britain ostensibly, as the Minister said, has the right to deport asylum seekers to their first port of entry. However, in practice that means—he gave a figure—that only 1% of asylum seekers from the UK each year have been relocated to the first port of entry, according to Eurostat. Does he accept that this very low figure of only 1% for relocations is accurate? If so, will he explain why the UK is performing so badly under the current regulations?

In practice, the Dublin agreement is very far from perfect, and the EU is desperate to find ways of evening out the strains from the large numbers of asylum seekers, as well as of not rocking the British boat before our referendum. Even the European Commission has acknowledged that the current Dublin system does not work. Germany has all but abandoned it, and Greece has apparently not abided by it since 2011. The Commission has stated:

"Even where Member States accept transfer requests, only about a quarter of such cases result in effective transfers, and, after completion of a transfer, there are frequent cases of secondary movements back to the transferring Member State".

Does the Minister accept that even with relocations as low as 1%, we are often obliged to re-admit individuals under the secondary transfer process? Does he have figures for the House on how many are relocated back to the United Kingdom? Given the low numbers sent back to the first port of entry under this system, and the fact that many of them return, does he still believe that this is a good deal for Britain? Despite the haggling and horse-trading going on behind closed doors as we speak, has the Secretary of State secured a permanent and favourable opt-out from any form of quota sharing—an opt-out that cannot be overruled at any point in future by other member countries? It is important to know that at this moment.

These proposals are part of a package to try to manage the surge in migrants and refugees flooding into Europe. The Commission is in the process of proposing measures revising the terms of the Dublin regulation—namely, imposing a financial penalty of €250,000 for every refugee not taken by a country if another member state experiences a sudden influx. How will this new quota/penalty system proposal sit with the current Dublin III proposal that the Minister says he wishes to stay within? Has he secured a permanent and favourable opt-out from any form of penalty payment that might be negotiated in future for non-acceptance of quotas—one that could not be overruled at any point in future by other member countries?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before the Minister responds, two points should be made. First, I say in all courtesy and gently to the hon. Lady that she modestly exceeded her time allocation, but I am sure that that was inadvertent and will not be repeated on subsequent occasions.

[Mr Speaker]

Secondly, equally courteously and gently, I say to the Minister, with reference to his final sentence commending his statement to the House, that he did not make a statement to the House. The Government could perfectly well have volunteered a statement to the House, but the reason the right hon. Gentleman is in the Chamber is that I required a Minister to attend the Chamber to answer the urgent question—capital U, capital Q—from the hon. Lady. It may seem a fine distinction to those attending our proceedings, but it is quite an important one. The right hon. Gentleman is here involuntarily and not voluntarily. I hope the position is now clear.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Deport him!

**Mr Speaker:** No, he does not need to be deported—we want him to answer the question.

**James Brokenshire:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am always the servant of the House in this regard.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) has raised various points. The UK has a very clear opt-in arrangement in relation to justice and home affairs matters and we retain firm control over the ability to decide which matters to opt into, as I explained clearly in my opening comments.

The existing Dublin regulations provide a significant benefit. As I have said, we have used the process to remove nearly 12,000 people from the UK to other EU member states over the past 10 years.

My hon. Friend asked whether we may subsequently be bound by, or be required to be participants in, the new arrangements. I point her to a specific statement in the European Commission's press release:

"The UK and Ireland are not required but instead determine themselves the extent to which they want to participate in these measures, in accordance with the relevant Protocols attached to the Treaties. If they do not opt in, the current rules as they operate today will continue to apply to them, in line with the Treaties."

That provides the important clarification and certainty sought by my hon. Friend. Clearly, that provides protection in relation to whether or not we decide to opt into certain matters, including the quota penalty, to which she referred.

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Let us be clear from the start: through our opt-out on home affairs and justice, Britain would not be required to take part in any asylum relocation system, nor would we be required to pay any financial levy to avoid it. Let us also be clear, however, that we have a keen national interest and a moral responsibility to ensure that effective systems are in place to tackle the worst humanitarian crisis in Europe in a decade. A humanitarian crisis on this scale clearly needs a concerted EU-wide response.

It is clear that the Dublin arrangements are not working on the ground. They are not able to cope with the numbers or process the claims. For those precise reasons, Labour has been calling for many months for a reconsideration of how the Dublin arrangements work in practice. The Government, as ever, have been slow and reluctant to act, as characterised by the Minister's involuntary appearance here today.

Labour is also clear that the key Dublin principles preventing first country states from refusing to process asylum seekers and allowing return to first country are important. We welcome the Government's update on that, but what reform proposals have they made to the Commission?

There is also the wider and key question of unaccompanied children in Europe. Today the chair of the Association of Jewish Refugees called on the Prime Minister to do more to help what he called "the most vulnerable victims" of the Syrian conflict. We cannot continue to sit on our hands or to be subject to the repugnant rhetoric that these children in Europe are safe—they are not. There is a groundswell of support. When will the Government finally listen? If there is to be a U-turn, the sooner it happens, the better.

**James Brokenshire:** The hon. and learned Gentleman clearly did not hear what the Prime Minister said at Prime Minister's Question Time just a few moments ago. He said that we are in discussions with Save the Children and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees about what further assistance can be provided to those who had already registered in Europe before the EU-Turkey deal came into force. He also mentioned the discussions that we will have with local authorities.

I reject entirely the hon. and learned Gentleman's claim that the Government have been slow to act on the Dublin regulations. We have sent experts to France and other European countries to support that process, to enable its practical implementation on the ground, and to ensure that it bears fruit and speeds up.

The hon. and learned Gentleman highlighted issues relating to the Dublin regulations. The Government believe that the long-standing principles at the heart of the Dublin system are the right ones, and it would be a major error to tear them up and replace them with something completely different. Dublin may not be operating as it should be, but that does not mean that its principles are fundamentally flawed. That is the approach that this Government will take to further negotiation.

Right hon. and hon. Members will not have seen the proposals in detail, because they have only just been published. It is right, therefore, that we reflect on them in detail and continue our discussions in order to ensure a reformed Dublin system that benefits the UK, while acknowledging the protections we have to maintain the existing Dublin arrangements.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) not only on securing the urgent question, but on the manner in which she conducted her analysis. She was, of course, completely right. The European Scrutiny Committee is looking at this very matter and we will be talking about it this afternoon. Would the Minister be good enough to give us an assurance that, if we so decide, which I feel we will, that there should be a debate on the Floor of the House, he would encourage that with the Whips? Will he also make sure that the matter is not left hanging around for as long as three months? We need urgent answers to these questions.

**James Brokenshire:** The three-month period is the time the UK has to consider whether to opt into measures at the outset. As my hon. Friend will know, that is one of our protections in our relationship with the EU with



regard to justice and home affairs matters. The Commission has published its papers this morning and I am sure that they will be scrutinised in detail by the European Scrutiny Committee. The Government will provide information and support that process in order to ensure that the measure is properly scrutinised by the House. There is no delay on the Government's part: the three-month period is our safeguard in deciding whether to opt in, and it certainly does not defer scrutiny.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Dublin rules were not fit for purpose, even before the current crisis in Europe developed, and that crisis has pushed the system way beyond breaking point. Even a child would understand that front-line countries such as Greece and Italy cannot be expected to deal alone with all the asylum seekers who arrive there. The proposed system of financial penalties would be an improvement, but it is a distant second best to the proper sharing of responsibility throughout the European Union. If the United Kingdom is not prepared to sign up to the new EU asylum system, exactly what steps will the Government take in order for the UK to do its bit for those already in Europe, particularly the child refugees?

When I was in Calais with other Scottish National party MPs at Easter, we met many refugees with family in the UK, and we met men who had acted as interpreters for the UK armed forces, including men who had been at Camp Bastion at the same time as Prince Harry and when the Prime Minister visited. The Government keep assuring us that they are taking action to speed up the processing of take charge requests, once they receive them. Will the Minister now provide us with the figures on processing times that we have repeatedly asked for, so that we can have some evidence that those take charge requests are being dealt with more speedily?

More fundamentally, there is a real problem with the French side of things being handled slowly and the fact that many of the refugees in Calais and Dunkirk are afraid to claim asylum in France because of the very bad experiences they have had there already, including being tear-gassed by French authorities. Will the British Government consider providing a route to bypass the French system and allow direct claims to the UK based on family ties?

**James Brokenshire:** The relevant requests under the existing Dublin arrangements are being processed in a matter of weeks, as I have indicated to the hon. and learned Lady on previous occasions. Direct contact between officials on both sides means that they are able to make speedy decisions and ensure that those who have links to the UK can be reunited. The Government believe in that principle very strongly. We are also providing additional funding to and investment in other parts of Europe, and that work is absolutely intended to support that principle.

The hon. and learned Lady mentioned the French Government's actions. They have engaged a specific non-governmental organisation, France Terre d'Asile, to identify people in the camps and ensure that they are protected speedily. We support that work and we will continue to support the French Government and play our part in ensuring that those who have a connection to the UK are established, identified and come to the UK quickly.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the migrant crisis that we face is our part of a crisis that affects every European Union member state and requires a European Union solution? It is a complete absurdity, first promulgated by the UK Independence party, that if we left the EU these people would somehow no longer be a problem for us.

As the Government have played a full part in the limited progress so far on closing the outer border of Europe and making arrangements with Turkey for the return of asylum seekers, does the Minister accept that although we are legally quite entitled to insist on the Dublin convention, and of course must exercise our opt-out when it is in our interests, we must have regard to the problems of Greece, Italy and other countries? Those countries have not encouraged these vast numbers of people to come to them, and we will need the co-operation of their Governments if we are eventually to restore order in every member state, including the United Kingdom.

**James Brokenshire:** My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right that this is an EU-wide problem which we will need to continue to address at that level, and that it is clearly not the case that the UK leaving the EU in the referendum would suddenly make the migration crisis go away.

My right hon. and learned Friend mentions Greece and Italy, and he will equally know that the EU-Turkey deal is intended to support efforts on the frontline. From next week we will be sending out about 75 experts to support front-line activity in Greece.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): I think that in his heart, the Minister probably accepts everything that the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) said today, including that the Dublin agreement is in crisis not because of the United Kingdom but because other EU countries are flouting the way it operates. The Home Affairs Committee saw that for itself when it visited Greece and Italy. Other partners need to fulfil their obligations under Dublin and deal with matters in their countries so that people do not end up coming to Calais seeking to come over to the United Kingdom. To do that, they need just 10% of the money that has gone to Turkey. The EU-Turkey deal was the most generous in history, but Greece and Italy are the countries that need our support.

**James Brokenshire:** The right hon. Gentleman will know about the practical support that we are providing through the European Asylum Support Office to front-line states that have seen significant numbers of people arriving on their shores. We have provided £70 million of funding for the Europe-wide response, which is a significant contribution to the activities needed to support vulnerable migrants. He is right that we need to continue the work with Greece and Italy, which is precisely what the Government will do, as we recognise the pressures that those Governments are under.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): The EU documents about the EU-Turkey agreement, including the creation of a visa-free area for most of the EU and Turkey, make it clear that strengthening the Turkish frontier with Syria, Iraq and Iran must be part of the revised asylum

[John Redwood]

and migration policy. Quite remarkably, and rather strangely, the documents say that the EU will help build walls, fences and ditches along what is an extremely long border. Can the Minister tell us how many miles of those impediments to migration the EU has in mind, and what the costs might be?

**James Brokenshire:** The clear focus is on seeing that refugees do not make the journey across the Mediterranean sea to the shores of Europe, which is consistent with the approach that the Government have taken. It is why we have pledged £2.3 billion to tackling the humanitarian crisis, which is giving people a sense of hope and opportunity through work and education. That is the right approach to show people why they should not be making the journey, and the EU-Turkey deal supports that.

**Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP):** I know that the Minister is proud of his opt-in, but in reply to the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) he seemed to agree in principle that the refugee crisis is a European crisis that requires collective action. If we had the Brokenshire regulations instead of the Dublin regulations, what exactly would they be?

**James Brokenshire:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for framing the question in that way. It underlines the need for each EU member state to play a part, which is precisely what the UK Government are doing. We are providing expert support, funding and a significant contribution to resettlement through the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme and the new children at risk resettlement scheme. The basic principles of Dublin are right and need to be upheld, but the question is how we can improve the practical aspects of it.

**Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con):** If the Dublin convention is to work optimally, it requires the collection of biometric data from migrants. Perfectly understandably, the more savvy migrant declines to co-operate with that process, probably with the connivance of Italian and Greek officials. What can be done to strengthen that part of the Dublin arrangements?

**James Brokenshire:** It is about practical implementation, and that is why I made the point about the 75 experts we are sending out to Greece. Other European countries are doing the same, to see that the practical measure of taking fingerprints is upheld at the frontline. I think that practical support will make the difference.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD):** Does the Minister accept that the Dublin regulation should put a floor on what we do, not a ceiling? With that in mind, will he look again at the treatment of those who claim asylum having previously helped our armed forces in Afghanistan as interpreters? If they had treated us as we now treat them, the lives of many of our servicemen would have been put at risk or lost.

**James Brokenshire:** I will look carefully at what the right hon. Gentleman says about how those who have supported the British armed forces in Afghanistan are

analysed and treated in our asylum system. Many right hon. and hon. Members have raised that issue, and I can assure him that I am giving it close attention.

**Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):** Does the Minister agree that EU reform in this area should take into account a member state's efforts to resettle refugees from third countries outside the EU and to fund those countries? With the UK having delivered more than £1 billion of aid to try to prevent perilous journeys at sea, it would be right for the EU to endorse our approach if reduced migration is the aim.

**James Brokenshire:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the steps that the Government have taken through the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme. Our focus remains on providing safe routes for the most vulnerable in the region. The UK has made an important contribution, which plays a part in the overall work across the EU of providing stability and preventing people from making the journey.

**Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op):** The Minister will know that there is a huge amount of concern about the issue in this country, and especially about unaccompanied children in the camps in Calais. It is welcome to hear that the Government now agree with Alf Dubs, but given what the Minister has said today and the problems that we have seen to date with people claiming asylum through the current Dublin arrangements, will he give us some numbers? How many young people does he think the UK will now be able to offer sanctuary to as a result of the decision that the Government have made today?

**James Brokenshire:** The Prime Minister said earlier that we will discuss the matter with local authorities, and we will also continue discussions with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Save the Children and others. It is right that we assess the issue carefully in that way and come to the right conclusion.

**James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the UK has the double protection of being outside the automatic opt-in and outside Schengen, so that when asylum seekers choose not to claim asylum at the first port of call, they cannot travel across Europe and come to the UK through a no-border zone?

**James Brokenshire:** We have the best of both worlds in being outside the borderless area of Schengen, which gives us the protection of being able to uphold our own border and carry out the necessary checks, and having legal rights through the opt-ins and the enhanced mechanisms that the Prime Minister achieved through his renegotiation, which will add to that protection.

**Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab):** It would be helpful if the Minister made it clear, given that the Government are now going to accept the Dubs amendment, that many of the justice and home affairs opt-outs are designed, as he has just said, to control Britain's borders. He will be aware of the very good journalism by Ben Riley-Smith of *The Telegraph* showing that the Semaphore system, which controls those coming into the country, went down for several days last summer, leading to the

Minister and the Home Secretary being roused from their beds. Yesterday, his permanent secretary admitted that that had happened many times but would not say when and for how long. Do we not deserve that information? Will the Minister publish it?

**James Brokenshire:** We provide clear assurance and protections for the UK border. We take a multi-layered approach. We ensure that the primary control points have 100% checks for scheduled arrivals, which the last Labour Government did not do. This Government will continue to maintain that focus on our border and security.

**Mr Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know from the conference on the migrant crisis at which both he and I spoke last week of the anger and despair of the Hungarian Government at what is now being proposed by the European Union. Will he explain what our Government are doing to criticise, or to try to take enforcement action against, Germany for its unilateral rejection of the current regulations?

**James Brokenshire:** As I have indicated to the House, the Government have opt-outs and opt-ins for certain measures. There are aspects of Schengen that we are not party to, and we will not be party to the Schengen area. It is for those member states bound by those regulations to enforce compliance, with the Commission. That is rightly a matter for them and not for the UK.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I hope that the Minister will find a way to provide more support for unaccompanied children. Compassion demands it. Will he outline how the UK front-line support that is going to be provided to Greece and Italy will help to ensure that unaccompanied children already in the European Union do not go missing?

**James Brokenshire:** The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point about issues such as trafficking and exploitation. Kevin Hyland, the independent anti-slavery commissioner, will be travelling out to Greece and Italy shortly. The experts we are sending out will include people with knowledge and understanding of those issues in relation to children, so as to seek to provide greater assurance on the very matter he raised.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): Through their recent renegotiation the Government have demonstrated that an axiom of our EU membership is our common European citizenship, which implies the common treatment of people right across the EU. Will the Minister not concede that if the public vote to remain in the EU, he will not long be able to resist pressure in the Council of Ministers to concede our opt-out and to join the arrangements, whatever those are, in a process of bargaining away to achieve whatever happen to be the objectives of the Government of the day?

**James Brokenshire:** I do not concede that. The UK has very clear legal protections; indeed the way in which we opted out of a number of pre-existing justice and home affairs measures shows the clear approach of this Government in upholding what is in the UK's best interests. I have been very explicit this afternoon in highlighting that we judge that being part of the relocation mechanism is not in the interests of the UK.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): Given that the Minister has said that the asylum regime may well change after the EU referendum, will he concede that there is no status quo on the ballot paper for the referendum, just as those who voted to stay in the Common Market in 1975 did not get the status quo? Given that Opposition parties seem to be working on the basis that other EU countries are incapable of providing decent and humane refuge to asylum seekers, does he agree that we should not want to be part of a political union that cannot treat asylum seekers properly and with decency?

**James Brokenshire:** On the status quo, the Commission has said explicitly that we can continue to uphold and operate the existing Dublin arrangements if we decide not to opt in to the new measures published today. That assurance is important. Clearly, we will continue to work to support other EU partners, to ensure that those who claim asylum on their shores are able to do so effectively. Our expert support is precisely in tune with that.

**Chris Heaton-Harris** (Daventry) (Con): Part of the plan announced today is a proposal that European countries that refuse to give shelter to refugees could be forced to pay into the coffers of countries that do take them. We have the temporary opt-out on this at present, but will the Minister state that that opt-out is absolutely guaranteed and is one that we will not consider renegeing on? Will he also publish the legal advice he has been given on the legal basis for that proposal?

**James Brokenshire:** I say to my hon. Friend that I am not referring to some temporary opt-out. Our ability to opt-in to measures on justice and home affairs matters is one of the basic principles of the treaty. I know he understands and recognises that. It is the basis upon which I have made my points to the House this afternoon.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): The Minister has been involved on the issue of human trafficking for many years and so knows about the problem. One problem with continental Europe is its open borders. Whatever the other advantages of those open borders, they are a human trafficker's charter. It seems to me that the new proposals will add to that problem. We want more checking, to stop the evil crime of trafficking.

**James Brokenshire:** I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend, who has done so much to highlight the issue and has assisted in the reforms that have taken place. We need to step up our response to organised immigration crime, which is why we have established the taskforce and will continue to work with European partners to highlight these important issues and see that children are protected and do not fall into the hands of traffickers. I hope that the work on the frontline and the further inputs from Kevin Hyland will assist us not just as a country but in supporting other member EU states.

## ROYAL ASSENT

**Mr Speaker:** I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Enterprise Act 2016

[Mr Speaker]

Northern Ireland (Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan) Act 2016  
 Bank of England and Financial Services Act 2016  
 Trade Union Act 2016  
 Transport for London Act 2016.

## Town and Country Planning (Electricity Generating Consent)

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

1.17 pm

**Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the disclosure, consideration and approval of proposals for onshore electricity power stations of 50MW or less; to require the application of Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI) terms and conditions in certain circumstances; to require sector-specific collective national workforce agreements in other circumstances; and for connected purposes.

Any solid biomass or combined heat and power plant producing 50 MW or below—indeed, any power project producing 50 MW or below—does not come under the terms of national planning consent. Ostensibly that sounds fine, as it supposedly gives more control to local people about developments in their locality. Projects with a generating capacity of 50 MW and less are considered under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and can therefore be dealt with by local authorities.

That is where, for workers in the construction industry, the problems begin. Civil engineering and engineering construction are lifestyle choices that demand commitment, loyalty and hard graft. Workers more often than not work long hours under arduous and sometimes dangerous conditions to produce the end-product. However, all those great virtues count for nothing when the dice are loaded. From Teesside to south Yorkshire, from Scotland to Wales, there has been a recent epidemic of deliberate subterfuge to avoid and evade the industry standard for terms and conditions for construction workers in the power generation sector.

Locally, I and fellow Teesside Labour MPs, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Redcar (Anna Turley), for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) and for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), have been trying to unravel a complex knot of potential exploitation and undercutting. We have been working alongside the GMB and Unite the union at both regional and national level.

The sleight of hand employed and the deliberate use of opaque contractual arrangements via umbrella companies, which has seen workers paying their own national insurance twice, are known universally. Put together with potential undercutting and exploitation of migrant workers, they only frustrate an area and its people, who have seen massive privation in the light of closures at SSI Steel, Caparo Hartlepool, Air Products and Boulby potash mine, to mention just a few of the sites undergoing closure or job losses. That frustration has culminated in a year-long escalation of unrest in the construction industry fraternity, with mass protests outside the Wilton International site about the fact that the Wilton 11 energy from waste plant is being built on Teesside with a predominantly non-UK labour force.

Any MP considering the upcoming construction of energy from waste, biomass, or combined heat and power plant, must be aware that any individual project in or near their constituency that is under 50 MW will have achieved planning consent from a local authority. That consent will almost certainly not carry the necessary

requirements of collective agreements, such as NAECI terms and conditions for workers in the construction of the project, which would also instil a level playing field for all at the tendering stages of the project.

Until now, the assumption has been that NAECI terms would carry over, but sadly that has not been the case. Owing to unscrupulous practices by certain construction companies, the lack of a voice in this growing market of power generation has led many who have been shut out of employment to take on board tactics that are born out of pure frustration and can develop into demonstrable anger. On 1 March and 7 April 2015, large numbers of construction workers took part in co-ordinated protests outside new biomass power stations in Rotherham, south Yorkshire, Port Talbot and Dunbar, and with the support of GMB, Unite and UCATT trade union members, they blockaded and disrupted work on those sites.

As a comparator for the injustice and undercutting of those unscrupulous construction companies, the rate under the national industry agreement should be between £16 and £64 an hour, depending on the skill of the role. However, the largely migrant workforce on those projects is being paid just €9 to €13 an hour—approximately between £7 and £10. With current levels of unemployment above the national average in the industry, it is no wonder that those workers are angry at the exploitation of migrant labour at the expense of local employment.

How can developers and employers get away with this race to the bottom? In Rotherham, for example, the local council gave planning consent in 2011, but sites producing under 50 MW have no legal provision for adherence to collective agreements.

The venture capitalists Brite Partnerships bought the site and then sold it on at a big profit to a Danish company, Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners. CI then contracted Babcock & Wilcox Vølund and Interserve to design, construct and operate the plant. In talks at its Birmingham office with GMB and Unite, BWV refused to allow the project to be included under the terms of the “blue book” NAECI national agreement. Subsequently, BWV sub-contracted the construction of the boiler to a Croatian firm called Đuro Đakovic TEP, which tendered to a lowest bid based on Croatian economic wage levels.

Đuro Đakovic TEP has form—very bad form. It is the same company that GMB and Unite caught underpaying its largely migrant workforce last year on the Ferrybridge Multifuels power station in Yorkshire. Because that job came under the NAECI independent audit facility, the unions were able to force the company to repay every euro that it owed its workers. However—sadly—the unions discovered only later from a worker via email, that when those workers got back to Croatia, the money was retaken from their wages under duress. Because the Rotherham biomass project and similar new waste-to-energy plants are not covered by collective agreements, and because they are under 50 MW, the employer can pay below the rate, and legally get away with it.

Well-meaning legislation from the European Union to try to combat such malpractice does not go far enough. Currently, it only gives workers who have been posted to work temporarily in another EU country the protection of the host country’s minimum standards, namely the minimum wage, not the industry rate such as NAECI. That is not the EU’s fault; it is our fault for not protecting the pay, terms and conditions of all workers at the trade union NAECI national agreed rate.

Without blanket collective bargaining for all workers, firms will use caveats to exploit them. Support of collective bargaining and of collectively bargained nationally achieved terms is the only solution to prevent the exploitation of immigrant labour, and a real tangible means by which we as a nation can prevent the deliberate social discord that is created among our own communities by effectively excluding workers in our towns from seeking and achieving meaningful employment.

We can achieve such collective bargaining, and also help local authorities that are under severe financial and logistical pressure, by ensuring at the start of the planning process—whether a power generation site is above or below 50 MW—that collective agreements such as NAECI “blue book” terms, and nationally agreed minimum terms, are adhered to by any company that is constructing on British soil. That must be clearly written within the contract.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered.*

That Tom Blenkinsop, Kevin Barron, Sarah Champion, John Healey, Andy McDonald, Anna Turley, Alex Cunningham and Mr Iain Wright present the Bill.

Tom Blenkinsop accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 May, and to be printed (Bill 173).*

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Have you received immediate notification of a statement by the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on the admission by the chairman of Arriva in France that 400 dossiers relating to parts of reactors meeting required standards have been falsified, and on the extent to which those falsifications were present in the generic design assessment process for the operation of Arriva reactors in the UK?

**Mr Speaker:** I have received no indication that the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change has any plans to make a statement to the House on that extremely important matter. The hon. Gentleman may be dissatisfied by that news. If he is, he has manifold ways in which to pursue the matter through the use of the Order Paper and the facility of this Chamber. Knowing his experience and dexterity, I feel sure that he will use all the instruments available to him.

## Opposition Day

[UN-ALLOTTED HALF DAY]

### NHS Bursaries

[*Relevant document: e-petition, entitled Keep the NHS Bursary (113491).*]

1.26 pm

**Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the contribution of student nurses, midwives, allied health professionals and other healthcare staff; has serious concerns about the potential impact of removing NHS bursaries on the recruitment and retention of staff; and calls on the Government to drop their plans to remove NHS bursaries and instead to consult on how they can best fund and support the future healthcare workforce.

I have been told that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer), will be opening this debate for the Government. Given that the Health Secretary is sitting next to him, may I ask the Minister why we will not be hearing from his boss today? If he would like to give a genuine reason I would be happy to take an intervention, but if not I will take it that the Health Secretary simply does not want to defend his policy to the House. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There is a certain amount of chirruping from the Treasury Bench and elsewhere on this matter, and I simply make two points. It is entirely for the Government to decide which Minister to field, but I say gently to the Secretary of State, and to the Deputy Leader of the House, that to sit on the Bench rather than to participate while these matters are debated, is one thing—particularly in the case of the Secretary of State—but to sit there fiddling ostentatiously with an electronic device defies the established convention of the House that such devices should be used without impairing parliamentary decorum. They are impairing parliamentary decorum, and in very simple terms the Secretary of State and the Deputy Leader of the House are being rank discourteous to the shadow Secretary of State and to the House. It is a point so blindingly obvious that only an extraordinarily clever and sophisticated person could fail to grasp it.

**Heidi Alexander:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. This is not the first time that the Health Secretary has chosen not to respond to debates that I have secured or questions that I have put. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I say to the Deputy Leader of the House: put the device away. If you do not want to put it away, get out of the Chamber. It is rude for the— [*Interruption.*] Order! I am not inviting a response from the hon. Lady. [*Interruption.*] Order! I am simply telling her that it is discourteous to behave like that—a point that most people would readily understand.

**Heidi Alexander:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will leave my comments on that matter there.

In the past few months, Ministers and I have had a number of exchanges across the Dispatch Box about the unnecessary and dangerous fight the Government

are picking with junior doctors. You might think that having totally alienated one section of the NHS workforce, Ministers would think twice about doing it again, but you would be wrong. Not content with junior doctors, the Government are now targeting the next generation of nurses, midwives and other allied health professionals: podiatrists, physiotherapists, radiographers and many more. Instead of investing in healthcare students, and instead of valuing them and protecting their bursaries, which help with living costs and cover all their tuition fees, the Government are asking them to pay for the privilege of training to work in the NHS: scrap the bursary, ask tomorrow's NHS workforce to rack up enormous debts, and claim that this is the answer to current staff shortages.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a spending commitment. Why then, only a few months ago, did she stand on a manifesto that opposed the Government's £10 billion investment in the NHS?

**Heidi Alexander:** The Labour party has always made it clear that it would have given the NHS every penny it needs.

Given the approach to healthcare students I have outlined, most people would think the Government had taken leave of their senses. They would be right.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): My constituents in Hull are baffled by the Government's approach. At a time when our local hospitals have to recruit nurses from Spain and other European countries, stopping bursaries that enable more people to get training seems absolutely ridiculous.

**Heidi Alexander:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, the bursary acts as an incentive to get those students into training and into the NHS.

A few weeks ago, the Government launched their consultation on the technical detail of the changes—not the principle, just the detail. In his foreword, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Ipswich, claimed that the proposals were “good for students, good for patients and good for the NHS.” The opposite is the case.

Before I set out why the plans are so bad, it is important to remind ourselves of why our country has a nursing shortage in the first place. Shortly after the 2010 election, the coalition Government cut the number of nurse training commissions in an attempt to make short-term savings. The cuts saw nurse training places reduced from more than 20,000 a year to just 17,000, the lowest level since the 1990s. As a result, we trained 8,000 fewer nurses in the previous Parliament than we would have done had we maintained commissions at 2010 levels. At the time, experts such as the Royal College of Nursing warned that the cuts would cause “serious issues in undersupply for years to come.”

It was right, but it was ignored by Ministers who were too focused on the short term and no doubt too distracted by their plans to launch a massive reorganisation of the NHS.

Our health service is now suffering the consequences of those decisions. New analysis by the House of Commons Library released today shows that the number of nurses per head of population fell from 6,786 per million

people in 2009 to 6,645 per million people in 2015. A Unison survey published just last week found that more than two-thirds of respondents felt that staffing levels had got worse in the past year, with a further 63% saying they felt there were inadequate numbers of staff on the wards to ensure safe, dignified and compassionate care. Because of these shortages, hospitals are forced to recruit from overseas or spend vast amounts on expensive agency staff.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): In the years 2014 to 2015, the NHS spent £3.3 billion on agency staff. Does the short-sighted step of removing the bursary mean that beleaguered trusts may actually be more reliant on agency staff?

**Heidi Alexander:** My hon. Friend is completely right to point out that the problem of staff shortages leads to more agency staff having to be used, and that creates an enormous black hole in hospital finances. My fear is that the proposals will put off the next generation of nurses.

It now appears that the Government are making some of the same mistakes all over again. A report sneaked out on the day the House rose for the Easter recess revealed that the Government had commissioned only one-tenth of the extra nurse training places that experts said were needed this year. The report, from the Migration Advisory Committee, states:

“We were told that HEE—

Health Education England—

“has acknowledged that, on the basis of workforce modelling alone, they would have liked to commission an additional 3,000 places in 2016-2017. Funding constraints meant that they had only commissioned an additional 331 places; one tenth of what was actually needed”.

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Does the hon. Lady not agree that by changing the way we run the NHS, especially in relation to bursaries and opening it up to more competition, we will get more nurses coming into the NHS, thus plugging the gap she describes?

**Heidi Alexander:** I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, and later in my speech I shall explain why in some detail.

I would like to return to the Migration Advisory Committee report, because it does not make happy reading for Ministers. It goes on to say:

“It seems self-evident to us that the reduction in the number of commissioned training places between 2010 and 2013 across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, was a significant contributing factor towards the current national shortage of nurses.”

Finally, there is the crucial sentence that sums up why we are experiencing across-the-board nursing shortages:

“Almost all of these issues relate to, and are caused by, a desire to save money. But this is a choice, not a fixed fact. The Government could invest more resource if it wanted to.”

Those are the words of the Migration Advisory Committee. Hospitals are short of nurses; mental health services are short of nurses—so, too, are care homes, hospices and primary care. We therefore have a big problem. No one in this House disputes that, but no one in this House should be under any illusion as to the cause. The

question, when faced with this problem, is this: what is the right thing to do? How best can the Government work with experts to ensure that we are training enough staff and supporting those staff so that they stay motivated and stay working in the NHS?

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Of course we all agree that there is a significant shortage of nurses, and the hon. Lady is absolutely right to ask what should be done. Does she therefore support the Government's concept of associate nurses, which I believe will make a huge difference in places like my constituency where we need new nurses of this kind to increase the numbers of home-trained nursing staff?

**Heidi Alexander:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. The key question we need answered with regard to nursing associates is whether the Government intend them to replace registered nurses. If that is the case, I fear the proposals would be bad for patient care.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you might think a sensible approach to trying to resolve this problem would be to sit down with the Royal College of Nursing, other trade unions, universities and healthcare providers to work out a way forward. But no, this Government seem incapable of that. Instead, in just two lines in the Chancellor's autumn statement, they announced that they would be scrapping NHS bursaries and asking student nurses to pay tuition fees. The Minister will argue that this will allow universities to train more students, but his problem is this.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should listen to the Royal College, which said that these proposals were “high risk”, potentially

“detering prospective students from entering the nursing profession”, and that they risked “worsening the nursing shortage”?

**Heidi Alexander:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I think the Government's problem is this: they have failed to back up their claim with any evidence and they are now faced with a breadth of opposition to this proposal, not just from Members but from the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Midwives and Unison, while organisations such as MillionPlus, the association for modern universities, are also questioning the assumptions on which the Government base this policy.

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree with my constituent Zoe, who is training to be a nurse and is particularly concerned about mature students? She feels that about 50% of their time is spent in unpaid clinical placements in hospitals in the community, so they do not have the opportunity to do part-time work to support themselves as many others do. Will they not be disproportionately affected?

**Heidi Alexander:** I agree with my hon. Friend, and I shall make some remarks on that precise point later.

The Opposition's purpose in calling today's debate is that we hope the House can rally round what many would view as a straightforward and reasonable proposal—

[Heidi Alexander]

that the Government drop these plans and instead consult on how properly to fund and support the future healthcare workforce.

Let me set out why these plans are bad for students, bad for patients and bad for the NHS. The Government claim that these plans will leave healthcare students 25% better off. What they will not say is that, according to their own consultation, in order to be 25% better off, a student will have to take out a maximum maintenance and tuition fee loan for three years and would graduate with debts of between £48,000 and £59,000.

**Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Many Members will know that I had a son born at 23 weeks' gestation who spent six months in intensive care with a neonatal nurse, Nicola Probert, who sadly died not long after my son came out of hospital. I am frightened, as many people watching this debate will be, that people like Nicola will no longer go into the profession because of the astronomical debts that they will have to take on. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is a regressive step, and that the Government should think again about it?

**Heidi Alexander:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. It seems that the Government's argument is that students will be better off because they can borrow more. The simple truth is that loan repayments will hit nurses' take-home pay—there are no two ways about it. The current starting salary for a nurse is £21,692—just above the student loan repayment threshold which, of course, has been frozen. This means that nurses will start paying off their loans as soon as they graduate. According to Unison, based on current salary levels nurses will be faced with an average pay cut of over £900 a year to meet their debt repayments. How can that possibly be justified? Even worse, the average age of a student nurse is 28, so the current 30-year repayment period means that many nurses will be paying off loans to within years of retirement. We Labour Members say it is wrong to burden the next generation of NHS staff with a lifetime of debt and wrong to expect tomorrow's nurses to pay the price for this Government's mismanagement of the NHS.

Does the Minister not understand that student nurses, midwives and other allied health professionals are different from other students? Can he not see that it is dangerous to assume that just because application rates remain stable after the trebling of tuition fees in the last Parliament, the same will happen with his proposals? Assuming healthcare students will respond in the same way as other students to a tuition fees hike is one hell of an assumption and one hell of a risk.

Courses for nursing, midwifery and other allied health professions are substantially different from most other arts and science degrees. Courses are more onerous—there are fewer holidays, longer days and longer term times—while students are also required to spend about half their time in clinical practice. This means 2,300 hours in the case of a student nurse, including night and weekend shifts as a normal part of their studies.

**David Morris:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Heidi Alexander:** I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, and I want to make some progress.

These changes will effectively charge students for working in the NHS. Of course, longer term times and clinical placements also make it harder for these students to get a part-time job to supplement their income in the way many other students do. It is not just the course that makes healthcare students unique; they are much more likely to be women, much more likely to be mature students, much more likely to have children and more likely to be from BME backgrounds.

Many nursing students have already completed one degree and turn to nursing in their late 20s or early 30s—indeed, the average age of a student nurse is 28. When I think of my own friends who are nurses and midwives, I find that three out of four took the decision to re-train, having done a different first degree.

The Minister probably moves in different circles from me, but I can tell him that if he wants a dose of reality, my friends would, I am sure, be more than happy to oblige. I understand that he may not have experienced the conversations that I had in my working-class family about the pluses and minuses of racking up debts to get a degree, but I can tell him that for many nurses, under his proposals, that consideration will be all too real. Does he not realise that for the one in five healthcare students with children, the fear of debt is greater than it is for carefree, privately educated history students bound for Cambridge? My concern about these proposals is that we ultimately end up with those best placed to pay becoming nurses and midwives rather than those best placed to care. That brings me on to why these proposals are bad for patients.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I think we are all agreed on the need for more nurses; the question is how we fund them. Will the hon. Lady tell us how much money she would take away from front-line NHS care in order to fund the expansion of nursing places that the country needs?

**Heidi Alexander:** We set out at the last election our clearly costed plans for how to recruit additional nurses, doctors and care staff to the NHS.

The NHS should have a workforce that reflects the population it serves—just as this place should, too. The mental health sector in particular relies on mature students and the additional life experience they bring to what is a very demanding environment.

A few months ago, I met Marina, a young woman who has not had an easy life, but who is now on a mission to become a mental health nurse. When Marina says that she thinks some of the people best placed to care for others are those who have experienced hardships themselves, I think she has a point; and when she says she would not have been able to start her training without the bursary, I believe her. Why is the Minister so convinced that the NHS can do without people like Marina in the future? Why does he think they should pay to train, and why will he not consider other options for increasing student numbers?

The quality of training that student nurses, midwives and other allied health professionals receive will also depend on the quality of their clinical placements. Government Ministers claim these changes could deliver



up to 10,000 extra places over the course of this Parliament, so can they set out what capacity hospitals and other providers have to accommodate these extra students, and confirm whether Health Education England has sufficient funds set aside to fund these placements? Will the Minister be clear about how this 10,000 figure was arrived at? Is it the Government's assessment of what the system needs, what Health Education England can afford to fund or simply a big-sounding number plucked out of the air at random?

An extra 10,000 compared with when? What is the baseline year on which we should judge the Minister's policy? I have asked him that three times in written parliamentary questions, and each time I have not received an answer. Does he not understand that if his Department cannot even answer a simple question relating to one of its key claims about the policy, that does not exactly inspire confidence? There are so many questions that the Minister needs to answer that it is impossible to do all of them justice in a single speech.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): As has been indicated, it is agreed that we need to expand the number of places. Thanks to this Government, however, an extra £10 billion has been put into GP services, acute services, cancer treatment and hospital care. Which of those services would the hon. Lady cut to fund the alternative bursary scheme that she has in mind?

**Heidi Alexander:** The hon. Gentleman does not seem to realise that that money is plugging a very big black hole in NHS finances. I am sure that when the Minister responds to my speech, he will note that many people who apply to study for nursing and other healthcare degrees are turned away, but what proportion of those unsuccessful applicants actually meet the entry criteria? How can he be sure that his new system will deliver the required numbers of different types of nurses and other healthcare professionals in the right geographical areas? What guarantees has he given to higher education institutions that the new arrangements will fully cover the costs of delivering degrees, and what assessment has he made of the amount of un-repaid student debt that will accumulate, given that, over a lifetime, some nurses will not earn enough to repay the totality of their loans plus interest?

The proposal to scrap NHS bursaries is a massive gamble at a time when the NHS needs certainty. Put simply, it will shift the costs of training nurses, midwives and other allied health professionals from the state to the individual. If we are all happy to enjoy the benefits of the NHS, why should we not all contribute to the training of those who work in it?

I was the first member of my family to go to university. My tuition fees were paid in full, and I received a full maintenance grant. What really worries me is that people like me, and people like my friends, will be put off what could be a fulfilling and important career. We should be doing all we can to inspire today's schoolchildren to become the nurses and healthcare professionals of the future, but, sadly, the Government are making a very good job of doing the very opposite. If Ministers want to continue to import staff from overseas, they are going the right way about it. We owe a debt of gratitude to those staff, but we want home-grown staff too.

Finally, let me return to the Government's consultation paper. One section is entitled

"Nursing, midwifery and allied health professional students deserve the same opportunities as other students".

Labour Members say, "No, they deserve better." Those people should be treated differently from other students, because they are the people who will look after us when we are older, care for our relatives when they are sick and staff the NHS when this shambolic Government are long gone.

The Government should drop these proposals and think again. I commend the motion to the House.

1.54 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer):** It is a great pleasure to respond to the motion, not least because I think that this is potentially one of the most exciting things that we will do in the NHS in the next five years to increase opportunity and quality, and the presence of nursing staff on wards. We will be able to do that because of the reform that has helped so many other students throughout the country in the last five years.

The hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) entered the House at the same time as I did. In November 2010, we sat on opposite sides of the House and contributed to a debate; many of us expressed anxiety about the outcome, not least because of the enormous pressures that we were experiencing from our constituents. Members who have been here for many years will know that that was the first occasion on which a riot taking place outside the House could be heard from the Chamber. The rioters were complaining that we were going to destroy people's ability to go to university. We were going to make it impossible for people from disadvantaged backgrounds to go there, and we were going to set back years of progress in the closing of the inequality gap in this country.

Members on both sides of the House who spoke in that debate felt very passionately about the issue. We believed that it could be resolved by different means, but over the last five years we have been able to see the effect—and, as posited by the hon. Member for Lewisham East, the evidence—of the changes that were made. That evidence is quite clear. This year, 394,380 people were given university places in this country, 35,000 more than were given places in 2010, the year of the debate. If those 35,000 were to make up a single university, it would be the fourth largest in the country: one university, the fourth largest in one year, following the expansion of opportunity that resulted from the reforms that the House passed in 2010.

The hon. Lady made the most important point, however, when she asked how the reforms extended opportunity to the people who most needed to go to university. I regret the tone that she adopted in that portion of her speech; it was, I am afraid, beneath her. It was indeed wrong that when I was at university my fees were paid for in part by nurses paying tax on low wages. That was wrong, and we accepted that it was wrong. We also accepted that the system was not helping the people who most needed to go to university in order to escape their backgrounds.

The result that we should be looking for now is the number of people from disadvantaged backgrounds who have been helped to get into university in the last

[Ben Gummer]

five years, and I can tell the hon. Lady that it has increased by 10,150. That is a massive increase. Had someone said back in 2010 that that would be possible, I doubt whether anyone would have given 5,000:1 odds on it, but I can also tell the hon. Lady that 10,150 is the number of people at the University of Leicester. That is the number of people whom we have brought into the university sector as a result of the changes that we have made. We have the equivalent of one more university, full of people from disadvantaged backgrounds, as a result of the reforms that we enacted in 2010.

I know that the hon. Lady's motivations back then were entirely honest and commendable. I also know that many Conservative Members felt likewise. But we have to accept when we get things wrong, and it is in that regard, I am afraid, that the hon. Lady, rather than us, is failing to learn from history. During the 2010 debate, in an intervention on one of my hon. Friends, she said that the proposed changes would force on students a "huge debt", and that

"the huge debt that they could now face will act as a greater disincentive to go to university than it will for students from more affluent backgrounds".—[*Official Report*, 9 December 2010; Vol. 520, c. 579.]

The hon. Lady has made exactly the same point in today's debate. She was wrong then, and I humbly suggest that she is wrong on this occasion. She should listen very carefully to the evidence that has been presented, not by me but by so many institutions, about the progress that has been made in reducing inequalities, and the reasons why we need to press ahead. In this instance, for one reason alone—and I will come on to others—we need to bring about the reforms to nursing bursaries.

**Heidi Alexander:** Does the Minister not accept, though, that healthcare students have very different characteristics from other students, and that their behaviour will not necessarily be same as that of students affected by the reforms in the last Parliament?

**Ben Gummer:** I accept that there are differences—I will come to them in a second—but implied in the hon. Lady's point is an acceptance that she was wrong in 2010, and she should therefore be more measured in her proposals, or lack of them.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): It has not all been plain sailing since the reforms, not least as regards the impact on applications from mature students, who make up a significant proportion of the nursing cohort. Does the Minister not accept that there is no proposal in the consultation on how to mitigate the risk to good recruits from mature student backgrounds, who make up a significant proportion of the nursing workforce?

**Ben Gummer:** I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is wrong on both points: more mature students are applying now than in 2010; and there are specific recommendations in the consultation to deal with mature students.

**Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): Does this not demonstrate the Minister's point? We have a choice: we either inspire people to aspire and give them the opportunity

to enter the NHS by talking it up, or we take the opposite view, talk the NHS down by being negative, and put people off.

**Ben Gummer:** I do believe that. The Opposition were wrong back in 2010, and had we followed their advice, fewer people from disadvantaged backgrounds—precisely the people Labour was elected to represent and support—would be going to university. As a result of our taking forward brave proposals, in the teeth of much opposition, we have done more for the prospects of people from disadvantaged backgrounds than any Government dealing with this matter since higher education was reformed after the second world war.

I come now, I am afraid, to the motion tabled by the hon. Member for Lewisham East. It implicitly accepts that we have made progress. The fact that it is so anaemic in offering an alternative makes it clear that there is no alternative suggestion that she thinks would achieve the aims that she and I want: an increase in the number of students going into nursing and training, and of those coming from a diverse background. It also implies that she accepts, like me, that workforce planning over the last 10, 15, 20, 30 or 40 years has failed. I can say that, whereas she is not willing to, because everything we are doing now to correct workforce numbers—for example, the 5,000 additional GPs my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary fought the last election campaign on and will be delivering in the next few years—is the result of poor commissioning decisions made not under the coalition Government, or even in the latter years of the Labour Government, but under Governments 20 and 30 years ago.

The failure to predict the number of GPs needed, and the number and types of other professionals needed, lands us perpetually in this perverse situation where we are not accepting British students on to training courses at British universities and, as a result, are not creating the numbers of domestically trained nurses we need. In response to the inadequacies in care uncovered as a result of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust scandal and the failure of the Labour Government to provide the number of nurses needed in hospitals across the country, we are having to import nurses from abroad and to fill nurse places with expensive agency posts. That is something we are putting right now.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): One of the main pieces of feedback I have had from Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust is its frustration at the reliance on agency nurses, so I welcome the Government's moves, because they will open up supply and reduce that reliance and the significant additional costs we have seen over the last few years.

**Ben Gummer:** It is precisely to help my hon. Friend's hospital that we are introducing these reforms.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The Minister said there was no alternative to these proposals. Which of the royal colleges did he consult before coming to that decision?

**Ben Gummer:** Contrary to what the hon. Member for Lewisham East said, I did consult the royal colleges. I have spoken at length with the Royal College of Nursing

and with Unison. As I would expect, we differ on key parts—though not every part—of the plan, but the royal college’s initial response accepted that the premise on which we were proceeding was, in significant part, correct. In the consultation, I want to find areas we can agree on and improve the proposals we have put before the public. We were open about the consultation and offered the full 12 weeks—many people said we would not do so, but we did—precisely so that we could listen to the concerns, proposals and exciting challenges from people across the sectors, and thereby improve the proposals we have put before the NHS.

The motion suggests a series of things, but not a proposal from the Opposition to do anything different. They are not offering the NHS any new money—they offered £4.5 billion less than we did at the last election—so I can only presume that the money would have to be found from cuts elsewhere in the service. The hon. Lady will have no credibility unless she tells the House that she will pay for the 10,000 additional training places out of taxpayers’ money, rather than by finding an alternative funding mechanism. I will not offer the House a series of suggestions that might or might not be better, or merely criticise proposals, rather than offering constructive improvements.

**Heidi Alexander:** Whenever I make suggestions, they’re just ignored.

**Ben Gummer:** The hon. Lady is welcome to contribute to the consultation. She is doing so now, although sadly we heard no solutions or alternative proposals. I intend to set out not suggestions, but a clear announcement of our plans, the reasons for them, and how we will enact them over the year to come.

**Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab):** The Opposition have proffered many solutions to the Government. Just last week, we suggested a cross-party solution to the doctors crisis, but it was thrown back in our Front-Bench team’s face. Here is another solution: will the Minister speak to colleagues in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to see whether the apprenticeship levy, which the Government are taking from all large employers, could be spent on subsidising nurses to tackle the funding challenges?

**Ben Gummer:** The hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), who has concerns about the proposals, has discussed the matter with me several times and offered some useful suggestions about the detail. I have accepted his points and incorporated them into our thinking. I am very willing to listen to people from across the House when they come with helpful suggestions, and I am sure that the Minister for Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), would be interested in the hon. Gentleman’s contribution about the apprenticeship levy. The way not to do it, however, is to come to the House with a series of criticisms but not one suggestion, nor any money to provide for the increased number of training places in the plan.

We should make these changes not only for reasons of social equity, though that is the foremost reason; not only to produce 10,000 additional training places in our university system; and not only because we have a

broken planning system, which otherwise would remain broken—even people as intelligent as the hon. Member for Lewisham East cannot predict how many nurses, doctors and allied health professionals we will need in 20 or 30 years, or the skills they will need. Even were it not for all those things, it would still be important to do this, because of the changes it will make to the quality of training we can provide to nursing graduates. Across the rest of undergraduate training, universities have been released to innovate and improve their courses. Satisfaction levels have gone up and drop-out rates have fallen; consequently, people are getting a better experience.

We have not, however, been able to spread those advantages to nurses, who, I am afraid, remain trapped in a system that is prescriptive and does not take account of the skills that they and their future employers will need. By releasing universities from their straitjacket, we can make significant improvements to the quality of the training they provide.

**Heidi Alexander:** That’s just an assertion.

**Ben Gummer:** It is an assertion that is backed up by the evidence of the past five years, and which has received the recommendation of Professor Dame Jessica Corner, the chancellor of the Council of Deans of Health. I can tell the hon. Member for Lewisham East, in answer to her barracking, that Professor Dame Jessica Corner said:

“We recognise that this has been a difficult decision for the government but are pleased that the government has found a way forward. Carefully implemented, this should allow universities in partnership with the NHS to increase the number of training places and also improve day to day financial support for students while they are studying. The plan means that students will have access to more day to day maintenance support through the loans system and recognises that these disciplines are higher cost, science-based subjects.”

Likewise, Universities UK has said:

“We support increasing health professional student numbers and will work with Government and the NHS to secure the sustainable funding system”

that the Government have provided. It is particularly pleased about the impact that this will have on placement training. These are the people who are providing training in our NHS, and they support our proposals because they will release the same kind of innovation that we have seen elsewhere in the university sector.

**Richard Graham:** I want to reinforce a point that the Minister has made. I think—he will know this—the evidence shows that far more people from deprived backgrounds have gone to university since the changes we made five years ago, at a time when Opposition Members were saying that they would have precisely the opposite effect. So the evidence is even more conclusive than my hon. Friend suggests. Can he confirm that the maintenance grants will go up by about 25%, which will help in regard to the specific point being made by Universities UK and the other lady?

**Ben Gummer:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. It brings me neatly on to my next point, which is that the great virtue of these reforms to student finance is that we will be able to increase student finance support—maintenance support—by 25%.

[Ben Gummer]

The hon. Member for Lewisham East made some clear and sensible points. She suggested that training as a student nurse was different from being a history undergraduate, because student nurses have less time to take on a second job. There is therefore even more reason to provide better maintenance support for them. However, she has not come to tell the House that she will provide 25% additional maintenance support for students who do not have time to do a second job. She has not made that commitment, yet she has criticised our efforts to increase maintenance support by 25% precisely to help those people who would not otherwise be able to take time out to take on a university course. She cannot have it both ways. She cannot criticise us for the reforms we are undertaking while at the same time saying that students need greater support. It is precisely through these reforms that we are producing the support that so many students require.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): The Minister talks about maintenance support, but can he clarify that that support will no longer be in the form of a grant, and will now be in the form of a loan? Does he acknowledge that that will land students in even more debt when they finally qualify?

**Ben Gummer:** By reforming the system so that this becomes a loan rather than a grant, we are able to produce 25% extra support for these students while they are training, much as with the rest of the student population.

The results relating to newly qualified nurses are not as the hon. Member for Lewisham East suggests. She should be very clear in the way she addresses this question, because all of us, whatever our views on this subject, have a duty to inform the public properly. It would be remiss of all of us, even those who disagree with the policy as she does, to mislead potential students into thinking that they will have to pay more than they would otherwise. She said that students would have to pay hundreds of pounds more in repayments once they had qualified. That is just not the case. We anticipate that a newly qualified nurse will pay roughly £90 a year more; that will be about the same as they are currently paying, because of the way in which student payment finance is graduated. The impact on newly qualified nurses will therefore not be anywhere near the impact that she has suggested. She should be very careful about how she addresses her points; otherwise, people could receive an impression about these loans that is not actually a fact.

**Nic Dakin:** What calculation has the Minister made of how much of the loan will not be paid back over a period of time? Can we have that information in the public domain as well?

**Ben Gummer:** The economic impact assessment is part of the consultation, and the hon. Gentleman should consult that. It will obviously depend on the way in which the student workforce develops over the next 20 or 30 years, but this has been fully costed within the Treasury's assumptions, and we anticipate that people working beneath the current limits will not be paying back more than they are doing at the moment. That is

in the nature of the way in which student finance repayments are calculated. These measures will not land newly qualified nurses with new payments that they might otherwise not have expected.

**Heidi Alexander:** The Minister has urged me to be careful with my words, which I was, and I recognise that he is being careful with his, too. He is talking about newly qualified nurses. Can he confirm what the average repayment would be for the average nurse?

**Ben Gummer:** We do not currently have a figure for the average nurse, as the hon. Lady puts it. I cannot project where a nurse's career path will take them 50 years into the future, for precisely the reasons that we have been discussing. The actual repayments—[*Interruption.*] I will come to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) in a second. The actual repayments are clearly listed in the consultation document. They are clear about the amount that will be paid back over and above what existing students would be expected to pay.

The only way in which we will be able to square the circle that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North mentioned is by reforming student finance. Rather than shouting from a sedentary position, she might like to know that, contrary to her suggestion that many people in her constituency were none the wiser about this reform, I talked about the reforms to nurses in her constituency a few months ago. I also talked to them about the introduction of apprenticeships and of nursing associate grades, all of which are part of the reforms that I am outlining, and they were very excited about the changes that we are making to the nursing profession. All of this is possible only within a budget that is being carefully controlled, and in which priorities are placed on where the money is spent.

**Diana Johnson:** I am sorry; perhaps I should not have been shouting at the Minister from a sedentary position, but I am surprised that he has come to this House and been unable to answer a basic question about the amount of money that will be lost through the scheme that he wants to introduce. Surely he ought to have those facts at his fingertips when he is standing at the Dispatch Box.

**Ben Gummer:** I do have those facts at my fingertips. A newly qualified nurse will not be paying any more than he or she is paying under the current system. For those on higher pay rates, the figures are in the consultation document, and if the hon. Lady is not willing to go and look at that herself, I will write to her with the details for her ease and comfort. Opposition Members, rather than picking at points because they refuse to face the fact that they have to fund their commitments with additional money, should listen carefully to the entirety of the reforms that we are proposing.

**Diana Johnson** *rose*—

**Ben Gummer:** I will make some progress now, if the hon. Lady does not mind.

We are introducing a new nursing associate grade. This will present an extraordinary opportunity to eradicate one of the great unfairnesses in the NHS, which is that there are brilliant people working as healthcare assistants who are unable to become

registered nurses because they were let down by the schools they went to. I am afraid that this is a consequence of the failure of school reform under the previous Government. Under previous Governments, people were failed to the extent that they have not been given the opportunities that they deserve.

We are going to reverse that situation by providing an apprenticeship ladder to a nursing associate role, and from there to a registered nursing position. A degree apprenticeship will be available to those who are able and competent to reach that grade. That will provide a route of opportunity that was not available under the previous Labour Government. It is being brought in by this Conservative Government—a one nation party for all.

By bringing in these reforms, creating a nursing associate role and creating 100,000 apprentices in the NHS, many of whom will be healthcare assistants working their way towards a nursing associate position and from there to a registered nursing grade, we will give people multiple opportunities to become nurses. That will include those who are already in the service and who want to earn while they are learning. It will take them between four and a half and six years to get to a registered nursing position from a healthcare assistant role. It will also include those who are able to take time out and do a degree to become a registered nurse, for whom we will provide additional support in the form of increased maintenance grants. Opposition Members are shaking their heads, but at what, I do not know. Are they shaking their heads at the 100,000 NHS apprentices that we are creating? Are they shaking their heads at the nursing associate roles? Are they shaking their heads at the increased maintenance support? None of those issues was addressed in the speech of the hon. Member for Lewisham East.

**Richard Graham:** Will the Minister give way?

**Ben Gummer:** I hope that my hon. Friend will not mind if I just conclude my remarks, because I know that Members from across the House want to contribute to the debate.

In my remaining minutes, I want to state why the reform is important not only for the individuals who want to become nurses, and not just for social equality and opportunity, but for the NHS. The NHS is unable to innovate like other parts of our public sector and our private sector because of the long lead times for training people. We do not have the instruments within the NHS to reflect the dramatic changes in demography and technology that change the NHS not year by year, but month by month. The great benefit of bringing in apprenticeship routes and nursing associate roles, of diversifying the skill mix and of creating quicker, more numerous routes into the nursing profession is that we can create a more diverse, flexible and agile trained workforce.

All that will be possible as a result of the changes, of which this bursary reform is part. None of it would have been possible with the reduction in funding promised by the Labour party, or a failure to wish reform upon the system. That is why I hope the House will reject the motion, which is full of suggestions and implications rather than firm plans. It says nothing about the future of the people on whom the NHS depends, and does

nothing to suggest how we will increase numbers, provide additional maintenance support or, most importantly, provide opportunities for those who have not yet had any. We will do that by reforming the system, just as we did in 2010. We will ensure that we do not listen to the well-intentioned but erroneous voices of the Labour party. Had we listened to them back in 2010, tens of thousands of people would have been denied an opportunity. We are determined not to do that. We will be the party of opportunity, presenting it to people who want to be nurses or hold any other position in the NHS. This NHS will be truly national only if it provides opportunity to the many, not the few.

2.22 pm

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I must declare an interest due to my work in the NHS and having had the privilege of a grant when training to be a doctor.

The NHS is one of our most esteemed public services, but there is a long-standing shortage of qualified healthcare professionals. While the current bursary system for nursing and allied healthcare students in England may not be without issue, the UK Government's proposed changes are concerning, as is the manner in which they have been presented, with detailed consideration of the impact somewhat lacking.

As we have heard, the UK Government have proposed changes to the current NHS bursary system. Instead, healthcare students will be required to pay tuition fees and will be subject to the same standard loans-based system to which other students in England are subjected. The UK Government have indicated that they expect the reforms to create up to 10,000 additional nursing and health professional training places over the course of the current parliament. However, that appears to be narrow-sighted. The proposed move to a system that relies on students funding themselves by taking on significant debts has raised substantial concerns among unions, professional bodies and students. One of the key fears is that such a move could be a barrier that deters prospective students from entering the profession. I stand here as the first doctor in my family, and I have to say that I would not have considered applying if it had meant racking up debt. I am particularly concerned about access to doctorate courses and postgraduate requirements. Will we create an elite workforce based not on ability, but on means?

Unison estimates that a student undertaking a three-year, 30-week course outside London under the new scheme will graduate with a debt of at least £51,600, plus interest and any overdraft and commercial debt.

**Richard Graham:** The hon. Lady's achievement as the first doctor in her family is to be applauded by us all, but does she recognise that there are many people who do not think that university is for them? The two-year apprenticeship course offered by the new nursing associate route will provide them with a real opportunity to get into the NHS and maybe to go on to become a full nurse later on.

**Dr Cameron:** I want to see a widening of access to training schemes in the NHS, and I would hope that that would be properly funded and that we do not rely on NHS staff doing other jobs while dealing with the

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

stress of training. We should invest in and fund them properly, letting them know that NHS staff are invaluable.

For many, loans may be higher due to the additional costs of longer courses or of courses within London. As I said, I am particularly concerned about postgraduate courses and doctorate trainees, who may not be able to afford further loans that will add to their debt. It is likely that debt could be considerably higher for the majority of healthcare students. It is naive to think that larger loans will not be a psychological deterrent, especially to those from poorer or non-university backgrounds or to mature students and career changers, who may have additional financial responsibilities or debts from first degrees or family life.

The demographic of students on nursing, midwifery and allied health professions courses tends to be different from other student populations, as we have heard. They are more likely to be women, from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, parents or mature students. It is therefore likely, and a real concern, that abolishing bursaries will reduce diversity, foster inequalities and discourage potentially high-quality applicants.

**Angela Rayner:** The hon. Lady is making an important point. Returning to something the Minister said, the frustration for me is that I was a Unison rep in homecare before coming to this place, and we were able to give unqualified women access to a foundation degree when they were healthcare assistants. They could then do a vocational degree and get into hospitals in much the same way as what the Minister claims is not currently available. It is important that that route remains open and that its users, mature students in particular, do not get disadvantaged because of the thousands of pounds-worth of debt that they would take on at the end.

**Dr Cameron:** The hon. Lady makes her own point. It is important that people from all backgrounds are encouraged to enter our NHS. The UK has a diverse society and we must ensure that our healthcare staffing system reflects that and supports those from all backgrounds to enter it.

It is not enough just to increase numbers by creating an open market for training. In order to ensure a quality service, it is crucial that student placements are well planned, well supervised and well distributed between the various areas within the service, so much consultation is required. In response to the Government's proposals, a former chief executive of the Royal College of Nursing commented:

"The last thing we need are disincentives to recruitment. We should be doing everything possible to attract applicants, as the country needs more nurses now than at any other time in its history."

**Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab):** The hon. Lady is making many valid points. If someone lives in Wales and wants to study at an English university, it is proposed that the bursary will be stopped. If someone lives in England, Scotland or Northern Ireland and wants to study nursing, midwifery or an allied health profession at a Welsh university, the Labour Welsh Government will pay the bursary. Taking that to its logical conclusion, the numbers will decrease in England and increase in Wales, Scotland

and Northern Ireland. Of most concern is the fact that the UK Government did not commit to undertake an impact assessment of cross-border applications before proceeding with the changes. Does the hon. Lady think that they should have?

**Dr Cameron:** Once again, the hon. Lady makes her point very well. I believe we need to staff the NHS well right across the UK. Impact assessments may require consideration down the line if there is a shortage in England as a result of this policy. I hope that answers her question.

In Scotland, the SNP Government recognise the value of investing in our NHS, providing a support package that is hugely generous in comparison with that in England. The nursing and midwifery student bursary in Scotland provides all eligible students with a non-income-assessed and non-repayable personal allowance of £6,578 per year, excluding additional allowances. That can be topped up by a range of income-assessed allowances, and it comes in the context of there being no tuition fees. Therefore, there are other examples of ways to make progress in this policy area.

Under the SNP Government, NHS staff numbers have increased by more than 10,000, and the party is committed to supporting the development of a quality health service that will meet the needs of the Scottish people, not just now, but in the future. Workforce projections show that more than 1,000 extra NHS staff are expected to be recruited across Scotland this year. There has been an 8.4% increase in NHS staffing, to a record high. There are more qualified nurses and midwives per 1,000 of population in Scotland than there are in England and Wales. In the past year, Scotland has seen the total number of nursing and midwifery staff increase by more than 500 whole-time equivalents, with boards projecting an increase of more than 600 whole-time equivalents in this financial year. The number of doctors has increased by 26.7% or by 2,560 whole-time equivalents, and the number of consultants is now at a record high, having increased by 40.3%. Every newly qualified nurse is guaranteed one year of employment once they complete their studies—that commitment is not offered anywhere else in the UK. Our health Minister, Shona Robison, has also confirmed that the nursing and midwifery student bursary and allowance will be protected at existing levels in 2016-17. A review of the scheme is due to report in June 2016.

The NHS is a crucial public service, and the UK Government cannot continue to railroad their way through it. They are making significant changes and although reform may be needed to address current issues within the service, such decisions should not be made hastily and without full consideration of their impact and of potential workable alternatives. We have heard about some workable alternatives today. I therefore urge the Minister to commit to having a comprehensive consultation on the full proposals, to determine the best way to support and invest in this service and its students. This is a vital workforce, whom we depend on in our times of crisis. It is only right therefore that they should be able to depend on us during their training and when they hope to help the NHS in the future.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. Before I call the first Back-Bench speaker, I should say that we are going to have a time limit of seven minutes to start with. The debate finishes at 4.27 pm and a large number of people wish to speak.

2.33 pm

**Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con):** Let me start by congratulating the shadow Health Secretary on calling this important debate. First and foremost, it matters because of the impact on patients of a nursing workforce shortfall. When the Health Committee's recent primary care inquiry took evidence, Professor Ian Cumming estimated that shortfall to be between 15,000 and 20,000 nurses. This is not just about the overall shortfall; it is also about shortfalls geographically and in certain key areas, particularly primary care, community care and mental health. We therefore need to look at the big picture.

The workforce shortfall adds costs. We know that the agency staffing bill was about £3.3 billion in the last year and that three quarters of trusts are still breaching the agency price caps, although we are making some progress on that, with the relevant figures being £303 million in October last year and £287 million in February this year. These resources should be spent elsewhere, on patient care. There is an over-dependence on nurses who are trained overseas. They are a very valued part of our workforce but they are often being recruited from countries that can ill afford to lose them. We will need to train more nurses—that is the prime consideration of this debate, along with how we achieve that.

I congratulate the Minister on the proposals to open up many more places to nursing students, but we should consider some unintended consequences and I wish to touch on those further in this debate. We must do this without disadvantaging or cutting off our current core nursing workforce. It is absolutely right that we pay particular attention to the impact on mature students, because we have heard the data on that: 23% of all nursing applicants are over 30; more than half are over 21; and, as the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) said, the average age is 28. The question is whether this core mature nursing workforce are going to be deterred from applying.

We have already seen an example of innovation, with the University of Bolton partnering the Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to start offering places where students apply through the UCAS route. They introduced 25 places in the first pilot, with the first intake being in February last year, and there were 650 applicants for those places, even though they knew that they would have to access loans. There has been a very successful second round, with an increase to 75 places this year, and so the assumption that people will simply not apply for these courses just is not correct. We need to bear it in mind that we cannot necessarily extrapolate from there to a wider increase in numbers, but I ask the Minister whether there is any room, as we start to roll this out, to retain some bursaries for our very valued core mature nursing workforce for at least the first few years, until we know what the impact is. Will he address that in his summing up? Is there any role for a period of transition? It is important that we bear in mind the potential for unintended consequences.

Two thirds of those who apply for nursing places are unsuccessful, and it is unreasonable not to increase the opportunity for those students. I very much welcome the Minister's plan to roll out other opportunities to enter the nursing workforce. We know from the Cavendish review that one reason we lose so many from our core healthcare assistant workforce is because there are no continuing professional development opportunities for them. Very many of those people, whom we know to be fantastic at their job, are not able to progress in the way that we should be allowing them to do. The key focus for us in this House should be: what is best for patients? What is best for patients is for us to train up a more diverse workforce, through many routes. There is a case for saying, "Let's not completely abolish bursaries in the first round. We could phase things in more slowly."

Another opportunity we could look at to try to attract people into nursing is through recognising that the clinical component is very high in the nursing course, at about 50%. Is there any way we could recognise that with a limited grants system for those who would otherwise be deterred? Perhaps at the end of a nursing course we could recognise mature students, particularly those who have taken on a second degree. Is there a way we could allow an extra payment to go to those nurses, particularly those who are going to go on to train in specialties where there is a shortage, linked with a period of NHS service. I know that we are using such an approach in general practice to try to attract people into shortage specialties. Would the Minister also consider that in responding to the legitimate concerns about the impact on the mature nursing workforce?

In summary, there are things we are doing where we are making progress, but there are things we can recognise as being unintended consequences. I hope the Minister will also look at some of the other recommendations from the recent Health Committee inquiry on primary care and say, "What can we do, as we increase the number of these courses, to increase the exposure to shortage specialties within the training period?" Too many of our healthcare workforce are staying within acute care and we know that if they have increased exposure to primary care during their training, they are more likely to want to go into those specialities.

Finally, as we increase these other opportunities for nursing and physician associates, may I ask the Minister please to touch on registration? We have heard evidence that, sometimes, not being registered can deter people from taking on physician associates. Allowing those associates to be registered is a recognition of their skills. These should be professional qualifications, and I hope that he will refer to that in his summing up.

2.40 pm

**Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab):** It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), as I have a lot of respect for her. Indeed, she commands respect across the House, and it is important that we listen to her views. It is also important that we listen to the views of others, including those of her colleague the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), who said:

"Speaking as a nurse, I would struggle to undertake my nurse training given the proposed changes to the bursary scheme."—[*Official Report*, 5 January 2016; Vol. 604, c. 15.]

Clearly, the changes have not been thought through.

[Jeff Smith]

As a south Manchester MP, I am very proud to represent a large number of Manchester University students, including many of our nurses and midwives of the future. Indeed, the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work at the university was the first institution in England to offer a nursing course, and it remains one of the top 10 universities in the world to study that same degree today. For the 2,000 students currently studying there, as well as for those weighing up their future with healthcare education in mind, the proposals on student bursaries will do nothing to instil any confidence that the Government understand the perspective of student nurses or potential student nurses.

I want to use my brief remarks to raise two main points. The first is the disappointing lack of consultation with organisations such as the Royal College of Nursing, and the second is the effect that this policy will have on potential students and patient care. Ensuring that access to these professions remains fair, that their funding is sustainable and that the Government consult experts from the sector are vital factors in securing the interests and the confidence of future healthcare professionals. Those roles are the lifeblood of our national health service, and we all have a stake in their future.

One big concern that we have consistently raised is the Government's reluctance to engage with stakeholders. We have heard from charities, representative organisations, and think-tanks that the evidence base for these proposals is at best uncertain, and at worst non-existent. The very real fear is that the proposals will reduce the numbers of people entering nursing studies. Even the 12-week consultation that the Minister was lauding earlier takes the form of a technical questionnaire on the implementation of the proposals rather than a real consultation on the substantive policy.

**Richard Graham:** On consultation with stakeholders and so on, does the hon. Gentleman agree that when a hospital such as the Gloucestershire Royal shows strong support for the concept of nursing associates and wants to run a pilot project for them, we have to assume that it sees real value in those associates in terms of providing good nursing for its patients and my constituents, and that that must be as telling as anything in a formal consultation?

**Jeff Smith:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Parliamentary questions have shown that the Department of Health failed to consult the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Nursing and Unison before the policy was announced in the autumn statement last year. It is not just the Labour party that is worried about this, but the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Nursing, the College of Podiatry, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and the NHS Pay Review Body, as well as Members across the House. It is little surprise, then, that the result fails to understand the unique characteristics of the sector and the hard-working professionals that work in it. This is a process that has been driven by short-term financial savings at the cost of tackling the big questions of how we adequately fund our NHS for the decades to come.

What about the effect of this policy on the nurses and midwives of the future? At the centre of any policy on healthcare education must be the students themselves. In this case, they are diverse: older than most—the average age is 28—and overwhelmingly female. There are greater numbers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. We should not forget that completing a degree necessitates 2,300 hours of clinical practice over three years. Any legislation that we need to design to encourage students in the future and to guarantee high-quality care for patients must recognise those types of people. They are people like Katie, a nurse in my constituency, who wrote to me about her concerns about the prospect of debt. She said:

“It is particularly worrying for mature students, many of whom have dependants, and it could deter them from joining the profession altogether. I can relate to this as three of my close colleagues are mature students and have stated on multiple occasions that, without the bursary, nursing school would not have been an option. Student nurses are not like other students: 50% of their time is spent on unpaid clinical placements in hospitals and in the community and there are simply not the same opportunities for part-time work as other students. I could not have completed this course without the bursary. Studying nursing requires participation in extra-curricular activities. This is in line with a recent national initiative: revalidation... Therefore, finding time for part-time work becomes very difficult, and many of my friends have been turned away from part-time jobs as our weekly schedules, working shifts and time for completing university work are often sporadic. The bursary covers my rent and without that I would not be able to support myself and nor would my family.”

We need to take such views on board when looking at a new policy.

**Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): Research from the House of Commons has shown that of the net savings made to the Treasury through measures taken by this Government since 2010, 86% will have come from women. Does my hon. Friend agree that these proposals are no different from those we have seen in the junior doctors' contract dispute, and that they will adversely affect women rather than men?

**Jeff Smith:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point. It is important to remember that, and to think about how the prospect of paying off more than £100,000 worth of debt affects the calculation of a mature student looking to study a second time to become a mental health nurse. It is important to think about how a lone parent, who is hoping to become a midwife, might feel the pressure of £59,000 of repayments when considering the future of their family—that is the latest estimate of debt from the Royal College of Midwives.

It is important to wonder how a nursing student, taking part in a 48-week extended course, is expected to find part-time work to make their studies viable. Not only is the Government's evidence base desperately weak, but research by the Higher Education Funding Council for England tells us that poorer students, lone parents and BME students—the demographics of many of the people attracted to nursing—are disproportionately dissuaded from applying to university by the prospect of large debts.

The policy fails on two fronts. The refusal to engage with experts in the field has led to a misguided policy that makes healthcare education the privilege of those who can afford decades of debt. It fails to ensure fair and equal access to healthcare education. Secondly,



there is a real danger that this policy will fail to achieve its own aim of attracting future students. Everyone in health who knows about these issues will acknowledge the shortages of nurses, midwives and other health professionals, but moving the burden of payment to students is widely seen as a mistake. Deterring potential candidates by promising a lifetime of repayments immediately on graduation cannot be the answer.

I conclude by joining the calls of the Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Nursing for the Government to rethink the proposals and to scrap the NHS bursary. We need a thorough and inclusive consultation process so that those with experience of the system are able to contribute properly. I ask Ministers to ensure that future students at Manchester University's School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work are not forced to bear the burden of a Government unwilling to listen. The Royal College of Nursing has said that the Government have not thought hard enough about the risks. Now is the time to do so.

2.49 pm

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): It is an absolute pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), and I congratulate the shadow Health Secretary on securing this debate as it highlights the current pressures that we are facing in the NHS. We start with 20,000 nurses and we lose 3,000 a year. Perhaps that is where the Migration Advisory Committee report gets its figures from when it says that we need to plug a gap of 3,000 places. The Government say that we need 10,000 new nurses a year. In stark terms, those figures show that there is a loss percentage, so perhaps we can work out how many people drop out and what it costs, and use that money in the NHS by putting it back into an apprenticeship scheme such as that proposed by the Government. It seems that the magic figure of 3,000 plays into the Government's thinking about creating 10,000 new nurses.

The Opposition say that we lost 2,400 nurses under the previous Government, whereas the previous Government said that we have 3,000 more. Which is correct? The truth is that both are: it depends when we take the measurement. If we measure from election to election—that is, from May 2010 to May 2014—we find that the Prime Minister was correct to say that we have 3,000 new nurses. We also take into consideration health visitors and midwives, and physiotherapists to an extent. The Opposition say there was a drop of 2,400 between September 2010 and September 2014. Believe it or not, recruitment and loss are seasonal.

We have to be grown up and address these concerns. How do we do that? The answer is, quite simply, through reform. We must open up instead of having the fixed bursaries whereby we attract in the region of 20,000 nurses a year but lose 3,000 a year. I say this with all due respect to the Opposition, but under the previous Government the Opposition said that reforming education would deter people from all backgrounds—I would not say “disadvantaged” backgrounds—from going to university. I did not go to university, but my son is at university and is the first member of my family ever to go to university. That is an aspiration, and an accolade. Here we are, five years down the line, with 10,150 new places since 2010 for students going to university. We must open up that philosophy for the NHS.

What is the difference between a student nurse starting on £21,000 or thereabouts a year and a junior doctor starting on £26,000? Nurses are as valued as doctors in the NHS; I certainly feel that. Why do some have bursaries, even though we are not attracting the numbers, and why do some not have them? My own trust, which is in difficulty at the moment but has already overcome many difficulties and is out of administration—it should be praised for that—has been abroad recruiting nurses, but we could get the nurses by taking away the bursary scheme and opening it up to academia, trying to get more people in from inside the system through apprenticeships. That could plug the gap and allow us to have home-grown skills and jobs here.

Reform will plug the gap and solve the skill shortage. It will also be fair in bringing nurses into line with doctors in the profession. Mature students who want to go into the vocation of nursing and be correctly accredited through the academic route will see that as a good starting place for a career that starts at £21,000. In all honesty, the career path does not end at £21,000; it goes up the pay scale, as it does for doctors.

In conclusion, I thank all colleagues for this measured debate. This is a subject that we need to address on both sides of the House.

2.53 pm

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): I thank the shadow Health Secretary and the shadow Health team for securing this important debate this afternoon, which effectively gives us the opportunity to debate early-day motion 1081, which is set to become the most popular early-day motion in this Session of Parliament. It has been signed by Members from across the House, including Government Members, because of the concerns that people have bravely shown about the potential consequences of the Government's proposed decision on the NHS bursary.

As I have argued before in Adjournment debates on the Floor of the House and in Westminster Hall, what we are debating this afternoon is the biggest shake-up in the funding of nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects since 1968. It was announced, without adequate evidence and planning, as part of the Chancellor's Budget rather than being a carefully thought-through policy proposal; that is why the Government are consulting people only through a technical consultation rather than through a consultation of all stakeholders on the principle of the policy, as they ought to have done.

Although I and others will refer to “student nurses and midwives” as shorthand, it is important to acknowledge, as my hon. Friend the shadow Health Secretary did, that this will affect students of all sorts of subjects and vital workers being trained in a range of aspects of the NHS—physiotherapists, occupational therapists, chiropractors, dieticians, podiatrists, radiographers, paramedics, prosthetists and others. That is why more than 100 right hon. and hon. Members signed the early-day motion and thousands of members of the public have spoken out through the online petition.

At present, nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects are not subject to tuition fees and students on these courses receive a non-means-tested grant of up to £1,000 a year as well as a means-tested bursary of up to £3,191 a year. That recognises that students of these subjects have to work considerably long hours during their

[*Wes Streeting*]

courses—not just in the libraries and lecture theatres like most students, but on clinical practice as part of a full 24-hour care cycle. Indeed, it is estimated that student nurses work at least 2,300 hours across the course of their degree. I am not sure that many of us with degrees in this House could claim to have put in so many hours when we were at university. We should recognise the effort that such students need to make to secure their qualifications.

Those who work outside course hours to fund their degrees can end up working up to 60 hours, and we should not expect them to do so: it can have a deleterious impact not just on their academic studies but on their approach to clinical practice. Under the Government's proposals, the changes will mean that students of these subjects will be charged tuition fees in excess of £9,000 a year and, as a result, will be burdened with £51,600 of debt. They will begin paying that back as soon as they graduate, which means that nurses will take on average a pay cut of £900 a year.

As if that were not unacceptable enough on its own, will the Minister explain when he winds up how it can possibly be fair that under the proposed approach there is no recognition in the student support system of the unique demands placed on these students? The NHS bursary, as it exists, alongside the tuition fee remissions that these students effectively receive, at least recognise that for many of the students it is difficult, if not impossible, to take on the sorts of part-time work that I did when I was studying, either during my A-levels at McDonald's or during university at the now-defunct Comet. For those students, it is simply not possible to fund their degrees in that way.

The student support system should recognise that it is more expensive to study these subjects and that the opportunities to earn extra income on top of taking the courses are not as readily available as they are for other students. It is a real mistake for the Government not to recognise that in their plan.

**Dr Wollaston:** Does the hon. Gentleman also accept that there is a serious problem with hardship on the existing bursaries, particularly given that the amount of the bursary drops in the final year?

**Wes Streeting:** I am grateful for that intervention. I shall come on to thank some of the people who have been in touch, but I will never forget the very first conversation I had with a student nurse in my constituency who sat with me in the Members' area of Portcullis House and cried because under the existing system she struggled to meet the costs of training to be a nurse, even with the NHS bursary currently provided.

I want the student support system to be more generous for these students because other students like my constituent have dreamed of being a student nurse. It is not right that financial support, or the lack of it, should be a barrier to their taking on this valuable vocation, which does so much for so many.

The Government's policy is riddled with risk. Earlier the Minister challenged my assertions on mature student numbers. It is a fact that in the wake of the introduction of the coalition's reforms to higher education, there was a fall in part-time and mature student numbers. The

Minister claimed that there were record numbers of mature applicants to higher education; I can only assume that he was referring to last year's figures. We should not identify a trend from one year's figures, not least because UCAS figures for the 2016 application cycle published on 4 February 2016 show an increase in 18-year-old applicants, but a fall in most other older age group categories. I am more than happy to look at the data and conduct an evidence-based debate, but let us have an evidence-based debate and not take one year's worth of figures and claim that there is some sort of trend.

**David Morris:** The figures that the hon. Gentleman cites are welcome, but they are different from those of the shadow Health Secretary.

**Wes Streeting:** No, I do not disagree at all with the figures cited by my hon. Friend the shadow Health Secretary. This is the problem with lies, damned lies and statistics, as Disraeli once said. We need to look at all the data in the round before we identify trends. The Minister singled out one year's worth of application data to identify a trend.

It is also entirely possible that numbers relating to nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects account for a significant proportion of applicants to higher education and mature applicants to higher education. The Minister was talking about general applications for all subjects. We should probably ask the Library to do some work so that we can get to the bottom of the claims and counterclaims. None the less, most people involved in the higher education debate acknowledge that there are still serious challenges in access to higher education for part-time and mature applicants in the light of the coalition's reforms. That is one of the reasons why the Government ought to tread carefully in this area.

Against this backdrop, there is a shortage of nurses. In 2011 and 2012 the number of training places was cut to the lowest level since the 1990s. Unison, the trade union of which I am proud to be a member, conducted a survey which found that two thirds of nurses believe that staffing levels were worse now than they were previously, and 63% feel that the numbers are inadequate to provide a safe degree of support on wards. That reflects feedback that I have had from NHS staff in my constituency, and it is something that the Government should take very seriously.

Since I first raised the issue in an Adjournment debate in the House, I have been privileged to meet so many nurses, midwives, other professionals and students of allied health subjects. I am particularly grateful for the campaigning that Danielle Tiplady and Kat Barber have undertaken, not least in meeting the Minister. I thank Unison, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, and the National Union of Students. I take this opportunity to pay particular tribute to the outgoing president, Megan Dunn, for the effective way in which she has represented students during her term in office.

The reforms reflect a big risk to nursing numbers. At the very least the Minister should commit this afternoon to a further full debate on the Floor of the House and a vote of both this House and the other place before such

a radical change as the Government propose is made to the funding of these crucial subjects. There is considerable concern and the Minister should not downplay the issue. I hope he will at least commit to a full vote in the House before the change goes ahead.

3.3 pm

**Mr Peter Lilley** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow on from the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), who made a thoughtful speech and highlighted an important point about the different study load of those training to be nurses, compared with some of us when we were at university. I do not think that that invalidates the Government's proposals, but it is an important point to take into account.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I congratulate the Opposition spokesman on calling the debate, which has been an important one, and I congratulate the Minister on a characteristically thoughtful, reasonable and lucid response to it. I cannot help observing that the debate demonstrates the value of having people in this House who come from genuine professions, rather than having reached here purely as a result of being political professionals. There has been considerable input from those who have studied, worked or been in the national health service.

Although it is an Opposition debate, there are some points that we can all agree on. First, we should agree that we need to recruit, train and retain enough nurses to staff our health service to meet the needs of the British people. Secondly, we can agree that it is wrong—morally wrong—to rely on recruiting nurses from poor countries, who have had to bear the cost of their training, to meet our failure to train enough nurses ourselves. Thirdly, we should not be turning away British people who want to train as nurses when we need more nurses. Surely all of us can agree on those three points. We can debate how best we finance the recruitment, retention and motivation of sufficient nurses in this country, but we should all agree that that is the objective.

My initial interest in this topic came a couple of decades ago and resulted from my first career as a development economist working in Africa and Asia. I discovered while I was in the House that we were denuding Africa of nurses. We had recruited more than one in eight of all the nurses in sub-Saharan Africa and brought them to this country. That could not be right. I lobbied against it and the then Prime Minister promised that there would be no active recruitment from Africa, but seven years later I discovered that we had recruited another 60,000 nurses. We were continuing to recruit at several thousand a year, but we were promised that that would cease.

What I blame myself for is that it took me so long to realise that the problem did not lie so much in recruiting from Africa and other poor parts of the world as in our failure in this country to train enough nurses of our own. I did not ask why we were not doing so until I was talking to people in my local NHS, who told me that they were recruiting abroad, mainly in southern Europe but also in Asia, and they were doing so despite the fact that they would have preferred to recruit and employ nurses from the University of Hertfordshire, whom they described as excellent, well trained and in every way desirable. I asked why they did not recruit more, but they said that they could not recruit enough. Even if

they recruited the next several years' worth of output, that would not meet the needs of Hertfordshire's health service, which is why they were recruiting abroad.

**Dr Lisa Cameron:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is ironic that through our international aid programmes we are assisting developing countries to pay for trainee placements in clinical establishments such as hospitals abroad, yet we do not afford the same rights to our NHS trainees here?

**Mr Lilley:** It is certainly bizarre that we pay African countries to train nurses and promptly recruit them to come here, so we are getting them cheaply trained abroad. I do not mind particularly the manner in which their training is financed.

The problem faced by my local NHS was that it could not get enough nurses from the University of Hertfordshire. I spoke to the University of Hertfordshire, which said that there was no lack of applicants—it turned away three quarters of applicants to its highly regarded nursing courses—but it was not allowed to expand. It had taken me decades in this House to realise that we had a system that limited the number of people we were recruiting. I duly lobbied the Government, and it may be because of my lobbying that we now have this proposal for bursaries, though I suspect the Government reached the decision on their own evidence.

The sad truth is that successive Ministers of all parties—we should recognise that—have bucked the question of how we train enough people in this country. Ministers tend to have a time horizon of roughly the time it takes to train a nurse, so why put up with diverting resources into training when the output of extra nurses will come after they have ceased to be Health Ministers? I am glad that this Secretary of State for Health and his fellow Ministers have addressed the question. However, we should recognise that it is symptomatic of a wider problem across British business in both the private and the public sector that we have a culture that does not put enough emphasis on training. It is particularly bizarre that we allow unlimited numbers of people in universities to study art history and media studies—very valuable subjects—but restrict the numbers who can train to be nurses, when we know we have a crying and desperate need for more.

I am agnostic about the best way to finance the training of more nursing recruits. Clearly, if nurses bear the extra cost, that will have to be reflected in some way in their remuneration. The Minister told us that they will actually be no worse off, so I suppose the assumption is that they will not have to repay much of their loans. It is a somewhat artificial feature of the public finance rules, but it is a feature of them, that perhaps the only way of not borrowing the money from the public ourselves is for the nurses to borrow it and for us then to write off their loans. However, whatever the financial system—the end of bursaries and their replacement with loans is probably the only option—we have to pay nurses enough in the long run to recruit, retain and motivate them.

There is one other issue we should look at before we close the debate. There are 200,000 trained nurses who maintain themselves on the register at their own expense, but who are not currently working in the NHS or elsewhere—they may be taking time off to raise a family, and they may be thinking about coming back

[Mr Lilley]

some time. We must be much more flexible and creative about providing patterns of work that meet the family needs of those trained, valuable, caring and experienced people if we are to bring them back into the health service. That, too, will help to meet the needs of the health service, as the Government are trying to, sensibly and wisely, in the measures they have brought before us to replace bursaries with loans.

3.11 pm

**Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to today's important debate. This is the second time I have raised concerns about the Government's plans to scrap NHS bursaries in favour of a loans-based system for nursing, midwifery and allied health profession students, and it follows my contribution to a Westminster Hall debate on the same subject in January. I do not propose to reiterate in their entirety the arguments I put forward; instead, I intend to make just a few brief observations on the Government's proposals, which have been roundly condemned by students, trade unions and professional bodies alike. They have been described by one of those bodies—the Royal College of Nursing—as “high risk”. The proposals are high risk because they take a significant gamble with the future sustainability of the NHS workforce. There are several reasons for that.

First, the proposals have the potential to deter many committed and talented prospective students from pursuing nursing, midwifery and allied health profession degrees altogether. That is due primarily to concerns over the huge level of debt associated with the change to a loans-based system. That is particularly true for more debt-averse mature students, who may have young families, caring responsibilities and a mortgage to pay, and for those for whom healthcare is a second degree.

There is a considerable problem with recruitment and retention of staff in the NHS, and the Government's plans are likely to exacerbate that problem, so impacting adversely on the future security of the NHS workforce. This is at a time when we have an ageing and increasing population, which will require more, not fewer, front-line healthcare professionals.

Secondly, the proposals do not take into consideration the fact that nursing, midwifery and allied health profession courses are very different from most arts and science degrees. These courses are much longer, with shorter holidays, and they offer fewer opportunities for students to supplement their incomes, as people are required to spend a significant amount of time working with patients in clinical practice, with a requirement to work irregular and long evening and weekend shifts as standard. Effectively, the Government's proposals will mean that these students—the individuals who keep our wards running and who are involved in life-and-death decisions on a daily basis—are forced to pay for the privilege of undertaking often physically and emotionally demanding work in the NHS.

Thirdly, the proposals seek to replace the bursary system, which has, for some considerable time now, fostered strong and enduring links between healthcare students and the NHS right from the start of their course. The Government propose severing that link, which risks reducing students' loyalty to, and the attractiveness of, the NHS as a potential employer.

Those are just a few of the reasons why the Government's plans are so high risk. There are, of course, many more, some of which have been eloquently articulated by others in the House today. I conclude by urging Ministers to drop their proposals and instead work with trade unions, professional bodies and, most importantly, the dedicated individuals who work in the NHS—the nurses, midwives, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, dieticians, radiographers, chiropractors and podiatrists—to find a fairer, more sustainable and effective funding solution.

3.15 pm

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): May I start by declaring my interest as a member of a healthcare profession allied to nursing?

Two thirds of those who apply for nursing school places are rejected and have to look at other trades or professions—that is tens of thousands of people every year. Despite the comments of some hon. Members, those are good, high-quality applicants. I took the trouble of looking at the entry requirements of the three universities that accept adult candidates on to general nursing degree courses in the south-west—Bournemouth University, the University of the West of England and Plymouth University. The typical offer is 300 UCAS points—three Bs at A-level—so there is not a shortage of applicants who are academically well-qualified and, indeed, qualified in every way. Lots of young men and women who wish to study nursing and to be nurses are being turned away.

That is a double tragedy because we have a gross shortage of nurses in this country, and nothing I have heard from the Opposition gives me any confidence that they have any plan as to how we are to satisfy the two imperatives of allowing those who want to study nursing to do so and of plugging the shortage in our national health service. At the moment, I am afraid, we are able to deal with that issue only because nurses from overseas are prepared to come here—nurses, very often, from countries that can scarcely do without them.

Historically, student nurses have been an intrinsic part of the NHS workforce. My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) will remember, as do I, that they were essential to the working of hospital wards, and one or two of the good points made by Opposition Members revolve around that issue. The question is whether, in this day and age, we are still heavily reliant on that workforce for the proper functioning of hospital wards. If we are, there is a good case to be made for allowing for that in the bursary arrangements for student nurses, because it is simply not right to expect those people to do service work and not be compensated in some way for it. I hope very much that that strand of thought will be taken up as part of the consultation.

However, the fact remains that as part of Project 2000 in the 1990s, the nursing profession decided to move away from a hospital-based training structure to a structure based around universities—that was driven by the profession itself. The debate we are having today is part of that process—the process by which nurses become graduates, in exactly the same way as anyone else, including those who are preparing, for example, to teach in schools.

When we design the finances for student nurses, it is of course important that we understand the difference between a nursing degree course and a normal degree course, as it were. We must also accept that this is a graduate profession, and that it is not right to try—as I think the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander), who speaks for the Opposition, did—to distinguish between graduates and to say that one graduate is more worthy than another. She may have in mind a view of a typical graduate, but those graduates are also potential teachers, engineers, biomedical scientists, and all the rest. We start down a very difficult path if we try to hold up one graduate as being superior morally, or in some other sense, to others. That is a very difficult thing to sustain.

I very much support the notion of a nursing associate. I am old enough to remember state-enrolled nurses. These were nurses who would not satisfy the entry criteria for a course leading to state registration but wanted to be members of a caring occupation. Naturally enough, nursing associates will not be SENs revisited, because we now live in a very different age, but there is surely a place within healthcare and our national health service for a group of people who may not want the academic rigour that goes with a nursing degree—or indeed be fitted for it, at their stage of life—but who nevertheless want to nurse, and to enter an intrinsically hands-on, caring occupation. The important difference, though—this is where SENs, I am afraid, suffered so badly all those years ago—is that there must be a sufficiently pervious system to allow nursing associates, if they want to and have the necessary skill sets, to enter a professional nursing stream. It was a tragedy that so many well-qualified SENs were unable to develop their careers in that way. I hope that as we design the future for nursing, we keep that very much in mind.

A few hon. Members have commented on workforce planning. Historically, the NHS has been absolutely abysmal in this regard, and we need to do much better in future. We need to avoid unintended consequences of the changes that we are making. We need to ensure that the £21,000 threshold that would apply for nursing graduates does not mean that people are inclined to avoid it by working part time where they might otherwise work more full-time hours. That would be a great disservice to the overall workforce.

The 10,000 new places created must not be denuded by our offering them to applicants from overseas, because that would not be in the interests of our national health service. We need to understand that nursing graduates may be tempted to migrate as a result of the introduction of these fees. I ask the Minister, in his consultation, to think of all the unintended consequences that may develop, given our general historical tradition in this country of doing health workforce planning so abysmally.

3.22 pm

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the thoughtful contribution by the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), who draws attention to the whole issue of workforce planning, which is clearly very challenging for those who are doing it—or not doing it.

The recent inspection of North Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust exposed issues of real concern about staffing levels at Scunthorpe

general hospital. The challenge of attracting, securing and retaining sufficient nurses and other medical staff has been a constant theme in my conversations with the trust since 2010. In that respect, Scunthorpe hospital is no different from many others around the country. The more I have got involved, the more I have thought that locally designed solutions have a role to play. Having talked to Health Education England, it is disappointing that it cannot do more to support healthcare assistants, for instance, in growing into nurses on the local patch, because they are clearly a potential resource.

There are lots of issues about recruitment, training and retention, as the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) said, and about how, if we lose 3,000 nurses a year, as the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) said, we try to keep them. That is a big issue, as well as how we recruit and retain them.

**David Morris:** Just to clarify that, we are not losing 3,000 nurses a year—we are losing 3,000 applicants to be nurses a year.

**Nic Dakin:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, but many nurses are being lost to the system as well, as his comments clearly highlighted.

In Scunthorpe, as in other areas, we are having to recruit from Spain, Portugal and elsewhere in the world. Although that is helping and supporting us, it has impacts, as we have heard, on those areas of the globe from where those nurses are being recruited.

I would like to quote the words of a young student nurse—a constituent—because in some ways they capture the comments that people from around the country are making to us. Katie-May Taylor says:

“I’m a first year student nurse and when I start placement (for 3 months), I will just about be able to cover my travel on top of my rent and food. When you see the hours we have to complete and having a fraction of the summer holidays other students get, you have to understand why the proposed cuts to the bursary and overall funding to the NHS isn’t beneficial.

I appreciate that to other students, getting a monthly bursary must seem like a luxury, however every penny I get goes towards my rent—it’s not just pocket money.

We’re seeing reports that parents are already telling their children not to go into the nursing profession and future nurses are being scared out of applying for university. This is deeply saddening; it’s such a wonderful course to be a part of and our nurses are absolutely vital in the care of society’s health and the maintenance of OUR NHS.

If the bursary is scrapped, a lot of student nurses will end up working 70 plus hours a week (placement, study time, job/s). Is a student nurse working that many hours a week safe patient care?”

Those words capture very effectively the concerns that we have.

The Government are taking a huge gamble with the future of the NHS workforce and patient safety. There is already a shortage of nurses in the NHS, and scrapping bursaries risks making the recruitment and retention of staff even harder. Student nurses are not like other students: they are required to work in clinical practice throughout their degrees, and they deserve to be treated differently. The hon. Member for South West Wiltshire was right to say that it is worth looking at how much they are an intrinsic part of the NHS, and if they are, that must be recognised within the consultation so that they are given credit and remunerated effectively for it.

[*Nic Dakin*]

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) rightly emphasised the unique position of student nurses.

The longer courses and clinical placements make it harder for NHS students to get part-time jobs to supplement their income. NHS students are much more likely to be women, more likely to come from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and more likely to be mature students. Many nursing students have already completed one degree and turned to nursing in their late 20s or early 30s. The average age of a student nurse is 28. Many student nurses have family or caring commitments. MillionPlus has pointed out that the changes to the higher education funding system in 2012 have been much less favourably received by mature students and part-time students. Those two groups make up a much greater proportion of the nursing, midwifery and allied health student body, so it is worth looking at that part of the evidence as well.

Analysis by London Economics estimates that the switch to loans will have a significant negative impact of minus 5% on participation, at least initially, especially if one bears in mind the composition of the student health cohort. The Government's insistence that undergraduate and postgraduate loans will be repaid at the same time will require a repayment rate of 15% above the earnings threshold for those students accessing both undergraduate and postgraduate loans. That will be in addition to any tax, national insurance and pension contributions that will be due.

The savings to the taxpayer are questionable. The Minister was not clear about that when I pressed him on it during his opening remarks. The Department of Health estimate that taxpayers will be better off as a result of the switch is very much a short-term calculation. In fact, it is much less likely that these students will repay their loans as graduates in the 30-year repayment period than the general higher education cohort. Essentially this is a switch in responsibility for the funding of the education of the health workforce from the state to the workforce itself, and it is primarily designed to reduce the departmental budget of the Department of Health.

We need to know more about what estimate the Government have made of the percentage of second degree student loans that will be written off after a 30-year period. We need the Department of Health to provide an estimate of by how much the taxpayer will be better off. We need those figures.

All the key stakeholders have expressed concern, including the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Nursing, the College of Podiatry and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. Even the NHS Pay Review Body has said that

"the removal of the incentive of the bursary could have an unsettling effect on the number and quality of applications for nursing training places in the early years."

Those who are closest to what is going on are all concerned.

The Minister for Community and Social Care is a very good and thoughtful Minister, and I am sure that he is concerned about the issue. I hope that he will listen to and engage with all those bodies, which know what they are talking about. They are not making it up—their

concerns are real and genuine. The Royal College of Nursing is calling on the Government to work with all stakeholders to create a model of student funding that encourages people to join the profession and that recognises the unique aspects of nursing degree courses.

I hope that the Government will take this opportunity to engage with the strong initiative proposed by the shadow Health Secretary and work together to come up with a solution that will allow us not only to recruit professionals, but to retain them into the future. As the son of a nurse and the father of a speech and language therapist, I hope that the Government are listening.

3.30 pm

**Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): Welcome to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am glad that your first act has been to call me to speak.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), for whom I have a great deal of respect. He always speaks with credibility and from experience. I am more than happy to acknowledge that there are many colleagues in the House with more experience than I have of working in the NHS, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) and for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). My experience is as a customer or as a relative of someone who has been treated in the health service. I have to say that, to date, my experience has been nothing but positive. The treatment that our NHS continues to deliver to our nation is the best in the world, and Government Members can be immensely proud of that.

One of the things that I find most frustrating about our debates on the health service is the fact that the Opposition seem to think that they have a monopoly on caring for the NHS. Nothing could be further from the truth. Conservative Members care deeply about our health service and we do everything we can to support it.

It is worth saying that every Labour party election leaflet since the second world war has said, "We've got 24 hours to save the NHS before the Tories come into government." It repeats that message every time. If we look at the facts, however, we will see that the truth is that the Prime Minister was the only party leader to enter the 2010 general election saying that he would protect the NHS budget. Others did not. In 2015, the Prime Minister was the only party leader who committed to the extra £8 billion support funding for the NHS when other Opposition parties would not back that figure. Today that figure has increased: this party is now backing the NHS with an extra £10 billion. We are also delivering on the aspiration of people like me, who are either customers or relatives of people who use the NHS, to get a high-quality service seven days a week.

Whenever we debate this issue, the difference between the two parties is one of credibility. The only way we have been able to deliver the extra £10 billion of funding to the health service is by having a credible economic plan that stands up to scrutiny. The great British public understand that and what it means to have a credible plan that can be delivered in government.

As a number of colleagues have said, we agree on a lot of things. No one can deny that both the Government and the Opposition acknowledge that we need more nurses, but we differ on the credible plan to deliver

them. Members on both sides of the Chamber have made speeches today acknowledging the need to deliver extra nurses, but it is only Government Members who have a credible plan to make it happen. We cannot just hope it happens, or state that it will happen, without saying where the extra money will come from. The consequence of that would be to withdraw cash from front-line services, such as existing doctors, nurses, operating theatres and wards, and put it into training.

If we want to increase the number of nurses coming into the NHS, we should not restrict the number who can be trained. It seems obvious that the way to raise the number of nurses is to lift the artificial cap on the number that we can train. I welcome the fact that the Government are considering and consulting on their options and looking to ensure that there is no artificial cap, so that we can train as many people as are inspired to go into the nursing profession.

I reiterate my admiration for those people. People leaving full-time education enter nursing not because they want to be rich but because they care and they see it as a vocation. We need to support people who have that calling and who aspire to look after those in society who find themselves ill and in need of support. We must find a system that allows them to aspire to that, whatever their background and wherever they come from. They must be able to go through their training and reach the point where they can follow their vocation.

The arguments that are being deployed against the Government's suggestions appear similar to the ones that we heard about student loans. We were told that those from a deprived background or from more challenging areas would be put off and would not be able to find a way through the system. We need to reflect on the evidence, which shows that the opposite has happened—the number of people from challenging backgrounds going to university has gone up, even though we were told that they would not be able to go.

At the end of the process, we need an NHS that can adapt and change. There is enormous social pressure on it, and there is the challenge of getting a balance between adult social care and healthcare as society gets older. When cash is short, we must spend it on front-line services—on the doctors, nurses and drugs that can improve the lives of people who need the support of the NHS. I look forward to the consultation, and I know that the team in the Department of Health will look at the responses. I hope that we get to the right place, and that we have more nurses at the end of the process.

3.37 pm

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): I am pleased to hear that the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) values the NHS so highly, but he might like to reflect on the fact that the coalition Government legislated to allow all NHS hospitals to make up to 49% of their money from private patients. Perhaps he will review his opinion of his party's performance when he starts to see the number of private patients in his local hospital increase and the number of NHS patients decrease.

The Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Midwives are concerned that abolishing nurse bursaries and free tuition will break the historic link between the NHS and trainee nurses. I share their concern, and I believe that the Government's proposal is part and parcel of wider changes that they are seeking to make to

the culture of the NHS. They are turning the emphasis away from training people to be part of the NHS family, in which they can work with dedication throughout their working lives, towards training them to work in a fragmented health marketplace. If the plans go ahead, the nurses of the future may no longer feel the same obligation to work in the NHS and could be more inclined to work abroad or in private hospitals to pay off their debt. Who could blame them? They will feel that the Government have deserted them.

The Minister was unable to tell us what the average repayment would be, so I will let the union Unison give him the answer. It states that debt repayment will effectively mean a pay cut of more than £900 a year. The question arises of whether the changes will deter people from training to be nurses in the first place. The Royal College of Nursing and other bodies such as the Royal College of Midwives, the College of Podiatry and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists think that they will. The Government's own consultation document estimates that a trainee nurse who takes out the maximum tuition and maintenance loans for three years will graduate with debts of between £47,712 and £59,106. Who would want to embark on a lifetime of caring for others with a debt of that size?

That brings us to the concern that the measures will lead to further shortages. We are all aware of the shortages in our hospitals. The coalition Government allowed the number of training places to fall from more than 20,000 to just 17,000 in 2011 and 2012, the lowest level since the 1990s. As a result, over 8,000 fewer nurses were trained in the 2010 to 2015 Parliament compared with 2010-11. Those cuts in training places have meant that nurse numbers have failed to keep pace with demand. According to calculations by the House of Commons Library, the number of nurses per 100,000 population has fallen from 679 in 2009 to 665.

There are real concerns that removing NHS bursaries will only make matters worse. As was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), the independent NHS Pay Review Body has said that "the removal of the incentive of the bursary could have an unsettling effect on the number and quality of applications for nursing training places in the early years. In addition, the reduction of net pay in the early years, as nurses repay their loans, will make the employment package and medium to long term reward offer an important factor in attracting high calibre students who are choosing between courses and career options."

The Secretary of State should definitely focus on that.

The Royal College of Nursing is also concerned that there is a risk that the changes could result in an uneven distribution of students across nursing specialties and geographically across the UK. Health Education England currently commissions student places for four branches of nursing: adult, children, learning disabilities and mental health. Without workplace planning by a central body, there could be insufficient numbers across the four branches, as some may be more popular than others. There has been no indication of whether there will be any control over which sectors nurses train for in future or whether that will simply be determined by—of course, under this Government—the market. That could leave some sectors with even greater shortages than at present.

Tuition is currently paid for by Health Education England. Under the current system, no students have to pay tuition fees and fees are not means-tested. Students

[Margaret Greenwood]

also receive a non-means-tested grant of £1,000, or £1,000 pro rata for part-time students. Students also qualify for a maintenance grant or bursary, which is means-tested, as well as additional allowances when a term lasts longer than 30 weeks, and help with the costs of clinical placements. I believe that that is the appropriate way to deliver NHS nurse training. If we are to continue to have a state-run public NHS, free at the point of need, we must continue to provide bursaries for our NHS nurses. It is the very least that we owe them.

3.42 pm

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): If we ask any patients about their experience in hospital, one thing they are sure to talk about is the nurses who looked after them. In doing so, they are usually talking about both nurses and healthcare assistants—in my experience, patients do not tend to make a distinction. We know that nurses have far more interaction with patients, day to day, than doctors. Nurses' quality and time are absolutely critical to patients' experience.

Nurses are also critical to outcomes for hospital patients. Good nursing can be the difference between life and death. We have known that since Florence Nightingale, we were reminded of it by the inquiry into Mid Staffordshire and the Francis report, and we can see it from recent research into stroke outcomes. It will be clear to anyone who has looked at how Salford Royal has such good outcomes and such a good reputation—a lot of that is because of the focus on extraordinarily high standards of nursing.

The excellent NHS that I believe we all want needs excellent nurses. It also needs enough of them. This afternoon, people have talked about how we need something in the order of perhaps 10,000 to 20,000 more nurses—the numbers range widely. We also know that we need a shift in nursing skills, as we will need more nursing care for older people and people with long-term conditions, as well as more mental health nurses.

Right now, however, there are not enough nurses in our system, and hospitals across the country have vacancies. We know that they use large numbers of agency staff, and international recruitment is important to many hospitals, including those serving my constituents in Kent. I am not confident that more of the same will solve the problems, and neither was the nursing department of a London university that I spoke to last year. It said that it needed more funding per nurse place, but recognised that asking for more money for their nurses could mean taking money from front-line care in the NHS. That was not a good answer, and the department was open to a new funding model.

Last summer, the Council of Deans of Health and Universities UK stated that the

“current funding system is no longer working for either students or universities.”

Universities have to subsidise the cost of nursing and physio degrees from other courses, and NHS-funded nursing students have less to live on than others, even though they often study longer, more intense degrees with more hours, and are therefore even less able to do other work outside their qualification. We know that we need more nurses, and that the current funding system is not working.

How should we get more nurses? Around 2008-09, when plans were being drawn up for the Centre for Workforce Intelligence, I remember hearing that the answer was better workforce planning, with lots of skilled experts doing fabulous modelling of future workforce demands. I remember being a sceptic about that then, because when we consider the history of the NHS, and systems around the world that have centralised planning for the healthcare workforce, we find that it is almost always wrong. There are periods of over-supply and of under-supply—right now, we are in a period of under-supply, with all its knock-on consequences. Doing things better and having more experts sounds great in theory, but in practice we have seen that it does not work.

A much better answer is to set universities free to offer more places to all those students who, as we have heard, want to study nursing but are currently being turned away. I hope that we will have more nursing applicants, and that that career will become even more attractive, particularly as universities work more closely with employers on what is needed, and we must consider more of the specialist skills and expertise required within nursing by our care system now and in future.

To do that we must uncouple the funding of nurse training from the NHS, and take away the constraint that every £1 spent on training an NHS nurse is £1 potentially taken from front-line care, because that puts a premium on avoiding excess nurses. That is the right direction of travel, and it is also important to increase maintenance grants for nurses so that they do not struggle with their living costs as currently happens. There should be more routes into nursing. The nurse associate role is welcome, as is the apprenticeship route so that nurses can work and train in parallel. We know that that is appealing to more mature students who need an income and who want to be more hands-on during their training, and for whom a university environment has less appeal. Having worked for some time with healthcare assistants, I would like more recognition to be given to their role and qualifications, and I recognise the opportunity to support them even more to train to become qualified nurses.

We must invest more in continuous professional development for nurses. We know that we need a more flexible workforce that can adapt to future demands, yet in times of financial pressure, the investment and time given to ongoing training are often squeezed. Let us use this opportunity to try to shift that balance, and repurpose the workforce to meet the system's demands and needs.

I would also like more attention paid to the appeal of nursing and the experiences of nurses in work. I have heard many nurses on the frontline say, “This weekend, I'll be on my own—I will be the only permanent nurse on this ward. I will be working alongside agency nurses who do not necessarily know this ward, and it will make this weekend really difficult.” We badly need to put an end to that. The only way to do that, alongside the ongoing work to reduce the use of agency staff, is to increase the number of nurses who have been trained to work in the NHS.

I am out of time, but to sum up I think the direction of travel is absolutely right. Let us make sure that we get the details right on how the proposals are put into practice.



3.50 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate; I only hope that my somewhat scratchy throat holds out. With that in mind I have curtailed my remarks, and, with apologies to colleagues, I will not be taking interventions.

My contribution today marks the third occasion on which I have spoken on this issue and called on the Government to keep the NHS bursary for students in England who are studying to become the next generation of nurses, midwives and allied health professionals. The bursary is absolutely vital to ensure enough people are able to start and complete a nursing degree: the Royal College of Nursing and the BMA say so—and, perhaps more importantly, my sister says so. Luckily for student nurses in Scotland, the Scottish National party also says so.

I am very much aware that this debate is about the removal of the bursary offered to students in England; however, the SNP has said that it will be an ally to progressive voices in this place fighting Tory austerity. The Scottish Government provide bursary support, and will continue to do so. We want that same level of support to be offered to all eligible nursing students, regardless of where they study. As well as receiving representations from my sister, I have met nursing students based at my local university, the University of the West of Scotland. UWS helps to train and educate 4,000 nursing students, one of the largest cohorts in Scotland. It does a fantastic job in helping to equip tomorrow's health workers with the skills, education and qualifications they need when working on the ward.

It has been over five months since I posed a question on this very issue to the Chancellor, when he stood in at Prime Minister's questions. Unfortunately, his answer did not provide the commitment that nursing students were demanding. After a few months of contemplation, and notwithstanding the Health Minister's opening remarks, I urge the Chancellor and his party colleagues to consider abandoning their plans to remove the NHS bursary.

The Royal College of Nursing, which has a membership of about 435,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students and healthcare assistants, has made representations to the SNP, outlining its complete opposition to the Government's plans. It must be highlighted that it is not only students in England who are pleading with the Government to abandon their plans. The vast majority of other medical professionals, students and workers in Scotland are demanding that the NHS bursary package is retained.

It is important to understand why nursing students receive a different funding settlement from other students'. I know only too well the long hours my sister and her colleagues spent studying when she was at university. Nursing students study and work longer hours on their course than other students. They spend a considerable amount of time on the ward, learning alongside fully qualified nurses and other health professionals. I am aware that the students value the time they spend working in hospitals and I also know that they are put through their paces while on the ward. Replacing the bursary package with a maintenance loan will effectively mean that students are paying the Government for the privilege of working when on placement.

We need to be mindful that the majority of our nursing students are women who are older than the typical student. The RCN suggests that the average age of nursing students is 29 and many have caring responsibilities. In addition, it is not uncommon for these students to work part-time, alongside studying and despite the particular demands of the course. It is only right and proper that they should have a funding support package that meets their particular circumstances. As we have heard, a coalition including Unison, the National Union of Students, the Royal College of Midwives, the British Dental Association and others, states that the new system will lead to students accumulating debt of £51,000.

Many dream about working in our NHS. Instead of putting roadblocks in their way—let us be clear: the removal of the NHS bursary will deter people from choosing to study to become a health professional—we should be looking to incentivise and encourage people from all backgrounds to consider a career in our NHS. This point was made by the Royal College of Midwives, which said:

“The cuts are likely to deter many potential students from entering the profession which is not good news for the future of midwifery in the UK...The axing of student bursaries will inevitably make midwifery an unattainable and less attractive profession to thousands of potentially excellent midwives that our maternity services so badly need.”

The Chancellor and the Health Secretary may claim that the current system is unaffordable, but I disagree. I encourage them to look at the Scottish Government for guidance on how to support the health workers of tomorrow.

In contrast to the UK Government's desire to abolish bursary support for nursing students, the Scottish Government will provide over £6,500 to them. The UK Government previously operated a means-tested system; the Scottish Government will continue to offer the bursary to all of these students—without means-testing. Where the UK Government sanction charges of up to £9,000 a year for a university education, the Scottish Government have preserved the right of a free education. Where the UK Government work against the health service and education partners, the Scottish Government work with these bodies, in partnership, to ever improve on the education and health services that exist in Scotland.

There are 41% more qualified nurses and midwives per head of population in Scotland than there are in England. Yet despite that, we have committed to increase nursing and midwifery student numbers by 5.6% in the next academic year. On average, there are 1,000 extra nurses in training in each and every year in comparison with the previous Scottish Executive.

The Government need to stop attacking the health service and those who work in our wards and clinics. If the Prime Minister is serious about running a one nation Government, he needs to listen and engage with the concerns being raised by nursing students and others right across the health and university sectors.

3.55 pm

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): I congratulate the shadow Health team on securing this debate.

Just a few weeks ago, I found myself in a packed lecture theatre in Cambridge. I had been invited there by Giovanna Mead. She is a student nurse, and the room was packed full of her colleagues. They were

[Daniel Zeichner]

angry—not for themselves, but for those in the years ahead who should be following in their footsteps. They were absolutely convinced and absolutely sure that if the Government's changes go ahead, people like them would not be doing as they had done. They would not be embarking on the training that is so essential to the future of our NHS.

Those people are rightly furious that there seems to be a complete misunderstanding about just how different they are as a cohort from other students, and just how different their course is from other courses. There has been a complete failure to understand how their course involves being at work and sometimes, as they explained, going way beyond the call of duty. Being at work is different from just being on a course. The testimonies of these nurses and those of others across the country speak volumes. I pay tribute to the Royal College of Nursing for pulling together hundreds and hundreds of these stories. What makes the Minister so sure that he knows so much better than all these people, who are actually doing nursing and who know and understand the choices that people in their situation are likely to make?

Before I was elected here, I worked for Unison and met many student nurses, so I know that the Government fail to understand the simple truth that nursing, midwifery and allied health professional students are not like other students. One important and fundamental difference lies in the requirement that healthcare students spend a significant proportion of their studies on clinical placements. As the Royal College of Nursing points out, and as others have said,

“student nurses aren't like other students. 50 per cent of their time is spent in clinical practice working directly with patients and their families and they have a longer academic year.”

Indeed, student nurses must spend a minimum of 2,300 hours on clinical placement during their studies—working, providing care and making a vital contribution to the health service. This often includes early shifts, night shifts and weekend shifts. In practice, the funding changes being driven through will charge students to go to work and to do a job that is desperately needed.

Furthermore, it is clear that these changes are being rushed through without proper consideration of their consequences. The Government say that they will create 10,000 new nursing, midwifery and allied health degree places, which would be welcome if it were to happen—particularly at a time when agency staff are plugging the staffing gap and draining NHS finances. It has not been made at all clear, however, that the resources are in place to support an influx of new students in clinical settings. Put simply, do the placements exist?

This concern is linked to a wider issue about the uncoupling of education commissioning and workforce planning. The potential consequences of a disconnection between university recruitment and NHS workforce planning must be addressed, and I would welcome the Minister's comments on the risk this uncoupling poses to the ability of the NHS to best assess and plan workforce requirements.

**Wes Streeting:** One of the more interesting aspects of the Government's proposals is to increase routes through non-degree courses. In view of the report of *The Lancet*

in February 2014, does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should tread carefully here? Based on data across nine European countries, it suggested that every 10% increase in the number of Bachelor degree-educated nurses in a hospital is associated with a 7% decline in patient mortality. Even on the more positive aspects of the proposals, does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should tread much more carefully than they are?

**Daniel Zeichner:** My hon. Friend has made an interesting point, and I hope it is one that the Minister will address.

There are other ways in which student nurses, midwives and allied health professionals are different. As we know, they are more likely to be older, to be women, to come from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, to have children, and to have first degrees already. The average age of a new nurse is 28. Those characteristics matter, because they increase the likelihood that the changes in funding for healthcare degree places will be a disincentive to the undertaking of degrees. According to the Royal College of Midwives, the removal of NHS bursaries means that

“Women with children and those who already have a first degree will be particularly hit hard...many of these women already make up a large proportion of our current midwifery student base.”

Many students take up healthcare studies as a second degree course. Already saddled with repayments of undergraduate debt, they are hardly likely to be enthusiastic about the prospect of taking on an additional debt of £51,600. The starting salary for nurses is only £21,692, and replacing NHS bursaries with loans will mean an average pay cut of more than £900 a year for a nurse, midwife or allied health professional, given current salary levels. We know that debt particularly deters poorer students, single parents and BME students—those who are more likely to be found entering nursing and midwifery.

I think that the people who can best explain what the Government's decision will mean are those who will be most directly affected. The Royal College of Nursing has collected their testimonials in a huge big blue book, which I have waved around hopefully during a number of Question Time sessions over the last few weeks, and which I commend to the Minister.

Let me end by returning to that packed room in Cambridge, and give some of those students a voice. Sarah from Cambridge says:

“I would not have survived without my bursary. The nurse's salary is poor and to have debt on top is terrible.”

Amanda says:

“I am an adult learner with a husband and two children. I had my children young so was unable to fulfil a degree at the usual time... If I was to have a mountain of debt at the end it would not have been worth my while! I fear it will put off adult learners entering into the degree programme, which will mean the NHS losing out on valuable, decent people who would make fantastic nurses!”

Maria says:

“By stopping the bursary we are in danger of preventing mature students from entering training as those who already have financial commitments will struggle. This will mean that the NHS loses the chance of recruiting a great resource of potential nurses.”

Another Sarah says:

“I am really disappointed by this change, and nursing is not like any other profession so should be treated uniquely. It is really tough being a nursing student and I think that the proposed bursary changes should be considered carefully to respect the work, commitment and enthusiasm of student nurses.” She puts it very well. If the Government will not listen to me, perhaps they will at least listen to her.

4.2 pm

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): This has been a high-quality and comprehensive debate. I have to say that I have a small amount of sympathy for the Minister for Community and Social Care, because, as we all know, this policy was not devised in his Department, but hastily put together on the back of a fag packet somewhere in the Treasury following the Chancellor’s £2 billion raid on the Department of Health budget. It looks very much like a case of “Cut first and ask questions later.” I say that because in just two lines of the autumn statement, with no consultation and no evidence base, the Government have committed themselves to a huge gamble with the future of the NHS workforce and with patient safety.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) for leading the campaign with his early-day motion. His record in this area is unparalleled. He explained expertly why many student nurses are in a different position from that of other students, and expressed the concern that he and many other Members feel about the deterrent effect that the Government’s proposals will have on future numbers. Other Members spoke in similar vein, including my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) and for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher), as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), who pressed the Minister on what estimate had been made of the number of loans that would be written off. He did not receive a reply; I trust that the Minister for Community and Social Care will be able to fill in the details.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood), who came to this place with a strong reputation as a health campaigner, spoke with great authority about the pitfalls of the proposals. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), who also has great experience in this area, asked a very pertinent question about the capacity of the health service to take on the extra students. The Chairman of the Health Committee, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), made an important contribution, and I hope that the Minister will respond directly to some of the very real concerns that she raised.

The Government are presiding over the worst A&E figures since records began, the biggest financial crisis in the history of the NHS—three quarters of trusts are now in deficit—and a crisis in morale across the workforce, with a Secretary of State too belligerent to listen. They have already alienated a generation of junior doctors, and now they risk doing the same for our future nurses and midwives, as well as many other health professionals. Why are they looking to unsettle a huge section of our NHS workforce at a time when good will is more important than ever?

We have several concerns about this policy, many of which hon. Members have aired today and to which the Government are yet to give any credible answer. First,

let us look at the actual problem the proposals are trying to address—not the black hole created by the Chancellor but the shortage of nurses in the NHS. Be in no doubt, the Government are entirely responsible for that shortage, because they decided to reduce the number of nurse training places. Had they maintained the level set by the last Labour Government, 8,000 more nurses would have been trained in the last Parliament alone. When we hear, therefore, about spiralling agency costs and staffing shortages, let us remember the cause—not the nurses, the trusts or the patients, but the Government’s chronic mishandling of the NHS.

The proposal, with all its risk and uncertainty, will, in the Government’s most optimistic scenario, deliver 10,000 more nurses, midwives and other health professionals. When they say the proposal could deliver up to 10,000 more staff, they really are looking at the glass half full. The figure comes with so many caveats that, if it were a used car, I would not even take it for a test drive. The Government’s own equality assessment acknowledges that there could be an adverse impact on parents and carers and that childcare costs could have a significant influence on participation. It is worth picking up a few quotes from their impact analysis and evidence document, to get a flavour of just how flaky the proposal is. It says that the

“precise impact is difficult to estimate with certainty”, that

“Behavioural change is uncertain”, that

“there may be some uncertainty over applications in the very short term”

and—my favourite—that there

“is no robust set of information to make this assessment.”

In other words, the Government are saying they have done an assessment but have absolutely no idea what the impact of the policy will be. If that does not amount to a huge gamble, I do not know what does.

If the Government will not take heed of their own assessments, they might listen to the Royal College of Nursing, which has said that

“there is a risk of people being put off from applying to nursing degrees, because of concerns over debt.”

It, like many Members, is particularly concerned about the impact on mature students. As we have heard, the average age of a student nurse is 28. The RCN has said:

“There is a worrying lack of assessment of the potential for the changes to act as a disincentive for some students, such as mature students or those from lower income backgrounds.”

Research by the trade union Unison shows that nine out of 10 student nurses surveyed said they would not have gone into training had the new proposals been in place. That is not a trivial number. If the numbers put off turned out to be even half that, the implications for the NHS would be catastrophic. So where is the evidence to reassure us that it will not happen? There is not any. The Minister prays in aid the experience across the general higher education sector, but he knows that he is not comparing like with like. The evidence from the mature student experience does not support his case. In fact, the Higher Education Statistics Agency says that between 2011 and 2015 the number of mature students fell by 17%.

Let us be clear about what the policy really means for nurses. Owing to the Government’s reprehensible decision to freeze the student loan repayment threshold at £21,000

[Justin Madders]

from 2017, all future nurses are facing a real-terms pay cut. According to Unison, based on current salaries, the average nurse, midwife or allied health professional will lose over £900 a year to meet their debt repayments. Staff retention is a huge issue across the NHS, including in nursing, and as the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) rightly pointed out, the Government's record is poor. Saddling nurses with extra debt will only make the matter worse.

**David Morris:** I did not say that the Government's record was poor; I pointed out that we needed reform, which is what we are here to discuss. I am disappointed in the hon. Gentleman's approach, because we have had a very constructive debate today.

**Justin Madders:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. If he is stating the facts, then I interpret them as being a poor record for the Government; that is more about the facts than about the way in which he presented them.

Let us be clear: we are talking about a debt that nurses are never likely to pay off. They will graduate with debts of between £50,000 and £60,000. Many of the mature students who take nursing as a second degree will find themselves with more than £100,000 of debt. Let me repeat that figure so that it sinks in: our country is looking down the barrel of a policy that will saddle nurses with a six-figure debt. They are not bankers or lawyers; the people who keep the NHS going will be earning just a fraction of what they earn. We already have the highest level of student debt in the English-speaking world, which is not a record we should be proud of, and these proposals will only make matters worse.

It would be an error to put nurses into the same category as other students, but I think that the Government are making that error. Student nurses' courses take up much more of the year, meaning that they have much less opportunity than other students to work while they study. They are also required to spend 50% of the time working with patients in clinical practice, including on evening and weekend shifts. That requires a real commitment of at least 2,300 hours over the length of their course, during which they do difficult jobs at unsocial times. Now the Government are asking them to pay for the privilege of doing that. This policy is like some kind of perverse extension of workfare. Last year, there were 10,000 unfilled nurse places in London alone. Is getting people to work for free really the answer to that?

The Government really need to raise their game to improve retention among nurses. The situation has been getting steadily worse over the past few years, and nearly 9% of nurses left last year. Some might have gone to work elsewhere in the NHS, but many have left the profession altogether. Surely sorting that out would provide a more effective solution to our problems than taking a punt on an untested plan. There appears to have been no dialogue with providers, who seem unaware of the oncoming rush. Each student nurse has to be clinically assessed by a registered nurse who has done their mentoring and assessing course, but no assessment appears to have been made of the capacity for trusts to take on those extra responsibilities.

It is clear that this policy, with all its flaws, was announced with no consultation, no engagement with the sector and no evidence basis. With such a high degree of uncertainty, surely it would have been sensible to consult on the principle before embarking on the policy. But not this Government; they know best, even though they do not seem to know their own record in this area. When I asked the Minister a simple written question on how many nurses had qualified in the last five years, I received the following response:

"The Department does not hold information on the number of nurses who qualified in the last five years".

What an absolute shambles!

Anyone would think that with such a gap in the available evidence, the Government would have gone out of their way to undertake a full consultation and to seek out evidence before announcing the policy, but no. The Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Podiatry and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists are all respected institutions with years of experience and a wealth of knowledge in this area, but not one of them was asked to make a formal input into this policy before it was announced, contrary to what the Minister has said today. When he was asked, in a Westminster Hall debate on 11 January, who he had consulted, he said:

"There has been consultation with leading nursing professionals."—[*Official Report*, 11 January 2016; Vol. 604, c. 237WH.]

He said nothing about the royal colleges. I hope that we shall be able to clear this up. I ask him to tell us exactly who he did consult, and to place in the Library a copy of the advice that he received following the consultation.

Let us not pretend, now that the consultation has been published, that it is a meaningful consultation on the principle or the detail of the proposals. It simply asks a few technical questions on how to implement the changes. You can have any colour you want as long as it is black. It is frankly an insult to the public, to patients and to the profession. The Government should withdraw this proposal and instead commit to a full consultation on how to improve the support available to student nurses, how to increase the number of nurses in the NHS and how to improve retention. I urge all Members who genuinely care about the future of our health service, who have concerns about the potential deterrent effect of these proposals, and who are not prepared to gamble recklessly with our nurses, to join us in the Lobby today and send a clear message to the Government that it is time to think again. I commend the motion to the House.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): Pick that one out of the back of the net!

4.14 pm

**The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt):** And where has the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) been during the debate? [*Interruption.*] Oh, I beg your pardon, but that is not as good as being here in on the Floor of the Chamber in real life.

Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to respond to the debate. I thank the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) for raising the important question of the development and expansion of nurse training in England. I thank colleagues for a

good debate, with discussions informed by those with close connections with the NHS, either personally or through family.

I pay tribute to all those who work and train in hospitals, who fill the posts that we have been speaking about, and who are the subject of our debate. They are not only nurses and midwives; several colleagues made specific references to allied health professionals, such as those in dietetics, occupational therapy, orthotics and prosthetics, physiotherapy, podiatry and chiropody, radiography, speech and language therapy, operating department practice, dental hygiene and dental therapy—all important components of the NHS. We recognise the importance of the work done in our hospitals, and we thank them for their effort.

This has been a not unusual debate in which the Government propose changing something and the Opposition react with horror. Whether the Government's arguments are good or bad, that is how it goes. There have been a variety of Opposition arguments—some good, some less good—but whenever change is proposed, there is a set of reactions. As for the poorest reaction, I say this to the hon. Member for Lewisham East with great sincerity: please do not go down the class route. It was absolutely unnecessary to try to pick out what people might have heard in various places as they were growing up and graduating. I am the son of a doctor and a teacher, so there were public health workers in my household. The sense that I got of public service and commitment was possibly shaped then. I do not think that the experience was any different from that of the hon. Lady, or of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), who had a private education at Haberdashers' Aske's School for Girls. I see no evidence in the hon. Lady's obvious commitment to mental health and everything else that her conversations shaped her poorly in any way. To suggest that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer), may not have picked up the same sort of information, and that that may have impacted on his care and work as a Health Minister, was pretty low. The hon. Member for Lewisham East should not go down that road again.

The two main arguments presented today against what we are trying to do have been about deterrents, or the idea that the occupations are somehow unpalatable and that people will not go into them. On deterrents, I am old enough to have been here for the original debates on the introduction of student fees. Everyone protesting against them at the time said that no one would ever go to university again, and that people from poor backgrounds would never go to university. The same arguments come up every time the subject is raised, and the same arguments have been proved false time and again. What is not false is the damage done at the time of the debates when it is suggested to those who want to aspire to higher education, and to take themselves in a different direction, that it will somehow be made impossible, and that they should not want to do it. Those arguments have been used time and again, and they have been used again today. They were wrong then; they are wrong now.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What is unique about this situation, as has been mentioned several times, is that a disproportionate number

of the nurses using the bursary scheme enter as mature students, including three of my nieces. If bursaries were not available to them, they would not have gone on to train as excellent nurses.

**Alistair Burt:** If the hon. Lady had been here for the entire debate, she would have heard people speak about the problems of hardship following bursaries; that was referred to by the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and by Government Members. People want access to more funds, which might help those whom the hon. Lady just mentioned, but the assumption is that, because it will be a student loan and because it is a change, people just will not want to do the courses. There is no evidence to suggest that that is correct. Using it as a scare story is unhelpful for the recruitment that we want.

**Nic Dakin:** Does the Minister accept that the royal colleges and others are genuinely anxious about the proposals? If he does, will he commit to engaging with them as fully as possible?

**Alistair Burt:** That is a good question. Yes, of course. At a time of change, there is a degree of uncertainty. My main point is about how the matter has been blown up yet again, as it was for student loans originally. The idea that people would be deterred from ever going to university, and that no one would go from disadvantaged backgrounds, has been proved false. Of course, the concerns are very much being addressed by the consultation that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich, is undertaking, and he is listening extremely carefully. The consultation process is very wide and genuine, and he is listening particularly to ideas on alterations and proposals. The consultations are not complete and the scheme is not complete, and he is keeping a close ear on those consultations.

There is recognition that there are different characteristics for those who go into nursing, midwifery and allied health professions, which is why we want to make sure that appropriate support is available. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills student support regulations give more support than the bursary; the Secretary of State retains the power to give discretionary funding in exceptional cases; and in the consultation, respondents can give examples of unique characteristics, so that the reforms can reflect that. Our position recognises that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) said, more of the same will not do the job. The need for change is there. We need more nurses, and we need more nurses domestically trained. We are going to do something different, recognising what changes there might be. That is why we have the consultation. Unique characteristics will be reflected in it; that is what the consultation is about. Keeping the current system is not working and will not work in the future. That is why we need change.

**Paula Sherriff:** My local Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust is, by its own admission, in the midst of a nursing crisis, with about half the wards staffed at below the minimum staffing level for nurses. Does the Minister think these proposals will help or hinder that?

**Alistair Burt:** I say in all honesty to the hon. Lady, who is knowledgeable about health matters and has been to see both me and the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich,

[Alistair Burt]

that the proposals help. At the moment, the problem with nurse training in this country is that it is limited. The universities cannot take all the people who want to be nurses; they have to turn them away—37,000 of them. This scheme opens up the opportunity for more people to train, and for more people to come into nursing through the nursing associates route. If the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) is looking for a straight answer on whether this will provide more nurses and help her local hospital, I can say: yes, it will. That is why these proposals are being made.

I wish to set out briefly the details of the basis for the reforms, just for those who were not able to attend the whole debate, and then answer one or two questions that were raised. To deliver more nurses, midwives and allied health professionals for the NHS, a better funding system for health students in England and a sustainable model for universities, we need to move nursing, midwifery and allied health students from grants and bursaries on to the standard student loans system. Putting more funding into the existing system was not a sensible or viable option for the Government, if we are also to increase the number of student places, live within our budget, and ensure that the NHS can use the extra £10 billion-worth of additional investment for front-line care by the end of the Parliament.

The subjects that we are talking about are extremely popular with students. In 2014, nursing registered as the fifth most popular subject on UCAS, and in that year there were 57,000 applicants for 20,000 nursing places. Rather than denying thousands of applicants a place to study health subjects at university, surely it is better that the new proposals ensure enough health professionals for the NHS, while cutting the current reliance on expensive agency and overseas staff, and giving more applicants the chance to become a health professional. Part of the reason why we need to modernise the funding system is that student nurses, midwives and allied health students currently have access to less money through the NHS bursary than students using the student loan system do. Under a move to the loan system, these health students will receive an increase of about 25% in the financial resources available to them for living costs during the time they are at university.

It is not possible to pick out all the speeches made today, but I would like to make reference to some. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) discussed issues affecting postgraduate students, which are important. The majority of healthcare students undertaking these courses will be able to access a BIS postgraduate masters loan, although we acknowledge in the consultation that some courses currently fall outside the BIS postgraduate loan package. We are working with BIS and the Treasury on their higher education and lifelong learning review, and we will address these matters in the Government's response to the consultation, so she is right to raise that issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), the Chair of the Health Committee, said straightforwardly that we need to train more nurses. That is our bottom line; it is what we are trying to do. On transition, she said that it was important to listen to needs, and she spoke about getting more professionals away from the

acute sector and into primary care. As she knows, that is a major interest of this Government, and these proposals will help in that regard.

My hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) was straightforward. He talked about his trust recruiting from abroad, but said that it would like to recruit more at home. It will be able to do so under these proposals.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) talked about what he discovered when he spoke to his local university and trust. He discussed the morality of taking more nurses, and student nurses, from overseas. It is important to recognise that our proposal will ease that situation to some degree. He also spoke about the important issue of the Ministers' dilemma: of whether to put money into training now, knowing that the benefit will come some years later. It is important for any Government to recognise that more money must go into the training of doctors and of the people about whom we are talking today. There will be a return later.

I am conscious of time, and I am sorry that I cannot cover more speeches. Let me say this: the NHS never sleeps or stays still. As our country changes, so does the NHS; it must. It is always comforting to resist change, even when the status quo is not good enough; however, the need for innovation, which will be challenging and resisted, is imperative. This Government have given the NHS that commitment, and we will promote the finance, planning and innovation that were denied by the Opposition. We will not allow so many people to be denied the opportunity of becoming a nurse. We will not allow those on hardship funds and bursaries to fail to get access to more finance. We will not allow them to be—

**Mr Alan Campbell** (Tynemouth) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure* (Standing Order No. 36).

*Question put forthwith*, That the Question be now put.

*Question agreed to.*

*Question put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 158, Noes 277.*

**Division No. 263]**

**[4.26 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane	Buck, Ms Karen
Abrahams, Debbie	Burgon, Richard
Alexander, Heidi	Burnham, rh Andy
Ali, Rushanara	Byrne, rh Liam
Allen, Mr Graham	Cadbury, Ruth
Anderson, Mr David	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Ashworth, Jonathan	Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Austin, Ian	Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Carswell, Mr Douglas
Beckett, rh Margaret	Chapman, Douglas
Benn, rh Hilary	Clwyd, rh Ann
Berger, Luciana	Coaker, Vernon
Blenkinsop, Tom	Coffey, Ann
Blomfield, Paul	Cox, Jo
Boswell, Philip	Crausby, Mr David
Brake, rh Tom	Creasy, Stella
Brennan, Kevin	Cryer, John
Brown, Lyn	Cunningham, Alex
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Bryant, Chris	Dakin, Nic

Danczuk, Simon  
 De Piero, Gloria  
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.  
 Dowd, Jim  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Ellman, Mrs Louise  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Field, rh Frank  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Glass, Pat  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh Mr David  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Mr Mark  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hoey, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Hunt, Tristram  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, rh Alan  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Graham  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, Mr Kevan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Kerr, Calum  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lynch, Holly  
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Mann, John

Marsden, Mr Gordon  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonnell, John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McMahan, Jim  
 Meale, Sir Alan  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Monaghan, Dr Paul  
 Morris, Grahame M.  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Jamie  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Spellar, rh Mr John  
 Starmer, Keir  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 West, Catherine  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

**Sue Hayman and  
 Jeff Smith**

**NOES**

Adams, Nigel  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria

Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, Richard

Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 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  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cameron, rh Mr David  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 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, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Mr David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Field, rh Mark  
 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  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 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  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 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  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Sir David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kirby, Simon  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Leadsom, Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver  
 Lewis, Brandon  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 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, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Parish, Neil  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Daniel  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, Mr Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 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  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 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, 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  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watkinson, Dame Angela  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggan, Bill  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Guy Opperman and**  
**Stephen Barclay**

*Question accordingly negated.*

## Backbench Business

### Education Funding in London

4.38 pm

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House notes the Government's intention to implement a new funding formula for schools from April 2017; welcomes the Department for Education's commitment to hold a detailed consultation on this proposal; calls on the Government to recognise the unique challenges schools in London face; and further calls on the Government to ensure that any changes to the funding model are both fair and proportionate to London's needs.

It is a pleasure to have secured this debate and to have the chance to raise the matter on behalf of myself and a number of colleagues cross-party who are members of the all-party parliamentary group for London, which consists of 47 Members of Parliament from London and 20 or so peers. The matter is of concern to the current Mayor, any future Mayor and the leadership of all parties on London councils. That is why we raise it in the way that we do; it is an important debate for us.

I should make it clear at the start that neither the Mayor nor London councils have an issue with the principle of a national funding formula and greater transparency in funding. The lack of transparency is a genuine issue for many local education authorities, and that is my personal approach as well.

One issue we want to flag up is that there is currently a consultation, and there are some good things in it, but there are also some risks. Those need to be drawn to the attention of the House and the Government because they could impact on London, given its particular nature.

**Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate and on the powerful start he has made. I have no argument with fair funding, but my schools are telling me, "We need to level up, not down. We are in danger of setting deficit budgets. We want to retain some local flexibility."

**Robert Neill:** I am conscious that those views were expressed at the meeting sponsored by the all-party group, and the right hon. Lady and others may well raise them in the debate.

A number of issues arise, but I want to concentrate on just a few. First, I have no problem with the principle of national funding, but we must take into account the particular circumstances in London. We should also remember that London is not a single, homogeneous unit; there are different pressures, which make the capital different from the rest of the country, and the different parts of the capital different from each other. We must therefore be particularly granular and careful in applying any formula.

That is important because London has been a success in education. It now outperforms all other regions at every key stage of testing. London pupils outperform their peers nationally at key stage 2 and key stage 4 and in entry to the English bac, and London schools outperform others in being rated outstanding or good, with 89% above the national average. London is therefore a success story, and it is one we do not want to put in jeopardy.



**Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Robert Neill:** I will give way once more—to someone from outside London.

**Lucy Frazer:** My hon. Friend perhaps anticipates the point I am going to make as the Member who represents South East Cambridgeshire. Of course London has enjoyed great success, but is it not only right that other areas—areas that have been underfunded for years—should benefit from the opportunity to enjoy the same success so that they can be brought up to the level that London has enjoyed?

**Robert Neill:** That is part of the point about levelling up that was made by the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan).

The other two things I would observe are these. I mentioned that London is not homogeneous. The levels of funding in outer-London boroughs such as mine, Bromley, and in others, such as Richmond upon Thames and Kingston upon Thames, are actually often much lower than those that are headlined in respect of inner-London boroughs. Boroughs such as mine have levels of funding that are scarcely different from those in the shire counties around us.

**James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): As one of the Members of Parliament representing Kingston upon Thames, may I ask my hon. Friend whether he agrees that it cannot be right that my borough gets less than £5,000 per pupil, while other boroughs in London get more than £7,000 per pupil?

**Robert Neill:** That is the point we need to address.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Robert Neill:** I will make a little progress and then I will take some more interventions, because it is worth setting one other point in context.

Historically, London has had higher levels of funding, but, as I said, that does not apply to every borough. There is also a reason for that funding.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Robert Neill:** I am just going to make this point before I start giving way again—otherwise I will not make a coherent argument at all. There is a reason for that funding, which is that London has, on many levels, greater challenges. There are far more children with English as a second language. There are higher levels of deprivation on almost any indices. There is great wealth, but there is also great deprivation, and those are closely—geographically and physically—juxtaposed. On any view, there are also extra costs involved in being a teacher or in running a school in London. The capital cost of sites is more because the land values are much higher. The cost of housing also means that teachers' wages have to be higher. It is not illegitimate for those things to be reflected in the formula. London as a city is also the UK's principal economic driver and puts in more to the UK economy than it takes out, so in that respect we are already subsidising the rest of the UK.

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate and on the manner in which he has approached it. I agree with

almost everything he has said. I come from an outer-London borough officially, but we have inner-London needs, and that is not reflected in the funding we receive from central Government. Does my hon. Friend—sorry, the hon. Gentleman—agree that we must make sure that funding is commensurate to the needs of the children in an area?

**Robert Neill:** The hon. Lady is almost an hon. Friend when West Ham are playing on Saturdays, and we hope for a good end to the season. She is right, and that brings me to the second point about funding. First, some outer-London boroughs are no better funded than shire counties anyway, yet in London there are much greater costs than in the rest of the country; and secondly, there is an artificial distinction in how funding in London is split up between inner and outer London. If justice is to be done in a formula, we need to move away from that distinction, which is purely historical. It goes back to the creation of the Greater London Council in 1963, when the then Inner London Education Authority was in fact part of the old London County Council, which had been a county education authority, while the outer-London boroughs had been educational authorities in their own right, either as parts of counties or as county boroughs. The historical anomaly that the hon. Lady mentions is the fact that her local authority is an amalgamation of two county boroughs that are part of the east end but were not in a county of London, so are treated as being in outer London, whereas Wandsworth, for example, which, in many respects, is much more prosperous, is an inner-London borough. That is a wholly illogical and unsustainable distinction that we need to break down because it distorts the arrangements.

**Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): My hon. Friend is right. The funding system we have today, handed over from the previous Labour Government, is broken in London and in urban and rural areas alike, and needs to be fixed. On additional costs in London, no proposal that I have seen from anyone, including F40, suggests anything other than that London would continue to have significantly more money per head than other areas.

**Robert Neill:** I am grateful for that point, and I accept it. Provided that we get that built in, this need not be an argument, but rather a question of making sure that any formula reflects the diversity of needs that exists within London.

**Dame Margaret Hodge** (Barking) (Lab) *rose*—

**Robert Neill:** I give way to the right hon. Lady, who is very well regarded in London for all her work.

**Dame Margaret Hodge:** I thank the hon. Gentleman and congratulate him on securing this debate. He talked about some of the factors that impact on the differential costs in London and elsewhere. Does he agree that the mobility of families in London is another factor? Two primary schools in my constituency have a 30% turnover every year, meaning that every teacher has to teach 40 children a year. The additional costs of getting to know, assessing and then responding to those needs ought to be had regard to in setting the formula if it is to be fair for every child in the country.

**Robert Neill:** I entirely agree with the right hon. Lady. I say to the Government that I hope that this could be reflected the formula without causing any damage to the overall principle. That is for the very good reason that because inner-London boroughs are geographically so small, and part of one single housing market and one single jobs market, people will very frequently move across them. In my constituency, one can move a quarter of a mile or half a mile down the road and be in one of two other London boroughs. London boroughs experience much more cross-border mobility than in a shire county where one could move 20 or 30 miles and still be within the same county. I would urge that that matter could fairly be taken into account.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his remarks. The right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) mentioned turbulence as a reason for funding certain schools, particularly in London. Does my hon. Friend agree that London is not the only place where turbulence is suffered, and that the pupil premium that the Government rightly introduced to allow for the fact that service families move all the time is germane to this debate and needs to be reflected in the funding formula?

**Robert Neill:** I supported the introduction of the pupil premium, as did my hon. Friend. It is worth stressing that although turbulence occurs in other places, it is particularly acute in London owing to the size of its population and the churn of its population as a whole, with people moving in and out of London, and people moving within London, and therefore families and children moving and London authorities having to cope with far more cross-borough placements than other areas. That issue, together with the artificial distinction I mentioned, could be sensibly incorporated into the formula to reflect the position in London.

Many other hon. Members want to speak and I do not want to deny them the opportunity, but I just want to touch on a few other matters. We have discussed the two key issues, namely the churn and mobility and the inner-outer distinction, which is out of date. There is also pressure on how the question of deprivation is measured. It is currently done by postcode, but there can be massive extremes of wealth and poverty within some London borough postcodes. That is very apparent in some places in docklands.

**Victoria Borwick** (Kensington) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and absolutely concur with what he has said about deprivation. Kensington still has two of the most deprived areas in all of Britain, so nobody should think that it is paved with gold. We also have some outstanding schools. We have run through the initial proposals and—I hope that the Minister will take cognisance of this—it is calculated that 28 of our 33 schools will face a significant funding reduction should the proposals be implemented in full, with some outstanding schools set to lose 10% of their budget. I thank my hon. Friend for drawing the issue to our attention.

**Robert Neill:** There are pressures and they are only going to grow, given that the London pupil population is going to increase significantly: the year-on-year growth rate is 3%. That needs to be funded. London also faces

particularly high pressures in relation to special educational needs provision. The Department does not provide the capital funding for special educational needs and disability provision, which is an issue for areas with higher land values than those elsewhere in the country.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Robert Neill:** I have been generous and I really do need to move on.

There are other issues that do not relate directly to the national funding formula, but they could correct one or two anomalies in how dedicated school grants work. The Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), has already been helpful and met representatives of my local authority and others to try to iron out the rigidities. It is not possible, for example, to spend money on SEND transport, which seems anomalous given that it is integrally linked to the provision of the schools themselves. There are similar issues with psychological services. If the consultation picks up on such things around the margins, that would greatly assist London boroughs, many of which run a pretty tight and efficient ship.

Councillor David Simmonds, the deputy leader of Hillingdon Council and chair of the Local Government Association's children and young people board, is well known to Ministers. He has said:

“Probably the biggest risk lies in the underfunding of the High Needs Block which will remain with councils. I am concerned that there is an implicit assumption that councils will bail out the underfunding through recourse to council-tax payers, which is a major departure from the principle that underpins the Dedicated Schools Grant that education funding is ring-fenced.”

That is a fair point. I hope that the Government will take it on board and find a means of removing what I am sure would have been an unintended consequence of an insufficiently flexible formula.

My final point comes from two headteachers in my constituency. I took the liberty of asking them about their experience. The headteacher of a very efficient and highly rated primary school near where I live says that they

“already manage...on a very tight budget. I can confidently claim that without the very generous support of our Parent Teacher Association we would not be in a position to afford many of the resources that make our schools run so effectively—such as computing technology, sports coaches and even basics like exercise books.”

She refers to housing costs and the

“tendency for excellent young teachers to move away”.

This small school is doing all the right things. It has joined a multi-academy trust and is doing what the Government want it to do, but it is right up against it, on the margins. In an outer-London borough with low funding, we would want to ensure that the formula does not prejudice such schools.

The head of a good secondary school points out that “Bromley is still the lowest funded London authority and actually as low as many of the Shire counties”.

She goes on to mention having some flexibility on the availability of schools forums, where they are still useful. She also reiterates the arbitrary distinction whereby she pays teachers from outer-London funding, while in Lewisham and Greenwich, which is a quarter of a mile

up the road and where the demographic is no different, the situation is different because there happens to be a line on a map. That needs to be addressed by a sensible funding formula.

That is a helpful summary from people at the coalface. I will not trespass on the House's time anymore, because I know that a number of London Members of all parties want to bring their own perspective to the debate, but I hope I have flagged up the key issues. I am grateful for the chance to do so.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. May I suggest that Members take about 10 minutes, so that everybody gets equal time?

4.55 pm

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) for securing this debate on such an important issue, and I pay tribute to him for his work with the all-party group on London.

As the hon. Gentleman said, there are concerns that changes to the national funding formula will have a massive negative impact on London schools and their pupils. Despite the Government's hollow promises of ring-fenced education funding, the Institute for Fiscal Studies reports that London schools already face an 8% real-terms reduction in funding over the next five years. Now it looks likely that they will face a further cut of £260 million a year due to the changes to the national funding formula. The Minister has said in the past that that is not the case, and I hope he will take the opportunity to clarify today whether he accepts that figure. Perhaps he can confirm to Members that London schools will not face that cut.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): Does not the funding formula also drive perverse outcomes as between schools within the same local authority? Westminster Council has advised me that 20 schools will lose up to 14% of their grant because of how the funding formula works. Perversely, some of the schools with the highest levels of deprivation will lose the most and some of the schools with the least deprivation will be gainers. The problem with how the funding formula works is not just between local authorities but between schools.

**Rushanara Ali:** I thank my hon. Friend, and I hope the Minister listened carefully to her powerful insights about what will happen both within and across local authorities. It will be schoolchildren who suffer, and the improvements in performance in London schools will be put at risk. That improvement is the envy of the world, with many studies showing how London has progressed. It has taken a generation to achieve that, and I hope the Minister will recognise the concerns being expressed today and the dangers of the changes, which risk having a negative effect on the performance of London schools.

I want to highlight some of the challenges that exist and the backdrop against which London has transformed its schools. As I said, that has taken a generation, and the danger is that the change will set us back in a very short time. London faces some of the highest child poverty levels in the country, and, as the hon. Member

for Bromley and Chislehurst pointed out, the highest inequality. The extremely high cost of living, and especially of housing, has a detrimental effect on teachers' ability to find accommodation.

Despite those challenges, local education authorities across parties—Labour councils as well as Conservative councils—have worked tirelessly to improve education in London. As a result, nine out of 10 schools are good or outstanding. I hope the Minister will think carefully about the impact of the reforms on that progress. If we are not careful, we will set schools in London back.

Other regions see London as an exemplar. People point to the London Challenge, which the last Labour Government introduced, and which was supported by people across parties and recognised for its achievements. Other regions have tried to emulate it. It is really important that we build on the successes of our regions rather than pit them against one other, which I fear will happen as a result of the changes. It is wrong to put educationists in competition with each other for the wrong reasons. We should be looking at how to improve the achievement of all our children, across the country.

**Graham Stuart:** It is worth saying that it is important to have a fair system across the country. Certain parts of London—and it is only parts—have disproportionately benefited. A Lambeth school can have more than £1,500 a head more—for a class of 30, that is £45,000 more—than a school half a mile away in Croydon. We have a broken system, and we need to fix it.

**Rushanara Ali:** We have very good results in London. Nine out of 10 schools across London are good or outstanding. We should build on that, not pit schools against one other. The hon. Gentleman served on the Education Committee so should know better than to make that argument.

**Dame Margaret Hodge:** I was not going to intervene again, but I have to on the back of that. In its manifesto, the Conservative party said:

“Under a future Conservative Government, the amount of money following your child into school will be protected.”

Does my hon. Friend agree that changing the formula to take money away from some children is not the right way to meet a manifesto commitment?

**Rushanara Ali:** I completely agree with my right hon. Friend. It would be yet another broken promise. I hope that the Minister will listen carefully today and make sure that that promise is not broken.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): Has my hon. Friend seen the estimate which states that if the F40 proposals were implemented as tabled by the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) and others, the most prosperous 30 authorities in the country would gain more than £200 million and the least prosperous would lose more than £200 million?

**Rushanara Ali:** My right hon. Friend makes a very important point. That is exactly what schoolteachers are concerned about. That cannot happen. It goes to show that there is not a good motive behind this change. The Government should be ashamed of themselves, and the Minister should take action.

**Ms Harriet Harman** (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point about the collective endeavour to improve standards of education for children in London. Does she share my concern that in Southwark that will be undermined if Southwark schools lose, as they risk doing, between 8% and 20% between now and 2019-20? Does she agree with the point made by our right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) that that is not protecting funding?

**Rushanara Ali:** I completely agree with my right hon. and learned Friend. I find it shocking that Ministers can make the argument that they are protecting budgets when these changes mean quite the opposite and will devastate schools in London. I appeal to the Government to look at how to build on the achievements in cities such as London, rather than setting them against other regions. That is deeply unhelpful to our educationists, who work tirelessly to make sure that schools do well.

I will set out the specific example of my constituency, to highlight to the Minister just how the investment in schools in London has transformed education. Under the last Labour Government, schools in Tower Hamlets rose from the bottom of the national league tables, where they were in the 1990s, to being some of the country's best. That happened against a backdrop of two out of three young people being eligible for free school meals, more than 75% of pupils having English as a second language, and some of the highest levels of child poverty in the country. Tower Hamlets is now in the top third of the national league tables, in a city that, as I mentioned earlier, has the highest percentage of schools that are good or outstanding.

We cannot afford to be complacent, however. Despite the achievements in London, including in boroughs such as mine, 40% of London's pupils leave school without good GCSEs. Any funding reduction could put further improvements at risk. We need to build on our achievements and make sure that that 40% can leave the education system with good results. That is what the Government should focus on, rather than on potentially decimating success through cutting funding in London.

As has been pointed out, funding is connected with recruitment, and London faces increasing recruitment challenges because of the cost of living crisis. When an average of 73% of the schools budget is allocated to staff costs, these changes could mean more than 6,000 fewer teachers in London's schools.

**James Berry:** Does the hon. Lady accept that the increase in house prices in outer London as well as inner London means that the difficulty in recruiting teachers affects the whole of London? The distinction between inner and outer London is no longer a good one, given the increase in house prices across the city as a whole.

**Rushanara Ali:** The hon. Gentleman will recognise that in boroughs such as mine and in Newham and Hackney, the unprecedented rise in house prices has been much greater than in outer London. I accept his point that house prices are a major issue, but the Government should be considering how to address that across London and the country, rather than dividing communities and areas. That is our point. We must

build on our achievements and not close our ears to each other, because that does not serve our constituents or young people well.

Let me turn to population growth in London. When the population is growing by 100,000 a year in London, we cannot afford to have fewer teachers. If we are already looking at 6,000 fewer teachers with these cuts, imagine what will happen in the future. We need to plan ahead for the needs of cities such as London. If we want London to remain a world-class city with some of the best educated young people in the country, and help other areas to improve and replicate what we are achieving, we must ensure that we do not throw away that success.

**Lucy Frazer:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Rushanara Ali:** I will continue my remarks because other Members wish to speak and I have given way a number of times. Perhaps the hon. and learned Lady will also have the chance to speak.

As has been mentioned, the increased cost of living in London has meant that teachers find it increasingly difficult to survive on their current salaries, and they require the London weighting equivalent to enable them to live and work in London. Already in boroughs such as mine and elsewhere, local authorities are struggling to maintain teacher numbers, and with these cuts they will have to lay teachers off, which is not what local schools need.

In boroughs such as Tower Hamlets, Hackney and elsewhere, we have seen such as collaboration, partnership and the effective use of resources by teachers and local education authorities have helped to create a success story that has transformed our schools. We must build on that model. It is not about the academisation of schools in my borough—we did not have academies; it is the collaborative model and partnership, along with well-targeted resources into schools, investment in training, and support to teachers, that transforms schools in my constituency and elsewhere. That is well recognised around the country. Recent reports by the Brookings Institution and the Institute of Education highlight what it took to transform education, and spending resources effectively was critical to that.

My plea to the Minister is that he take back these plans, consider the formula again, and ensure that funding is targeted on those who need it. In London, given the inequality and deprivation, it is vital that we maintain that support. The Government should be looking at levelling up support to schools across the country, not taking resources away and punishing schools for doing well. It has taken a generation to transform schools such as those in my borough and across London, but it will take a matter of years—perhaps even less—if this funding formula is introduced and resources are taken away from schools, to decimate our education system. Surely the Minister will appreciate that it is far better to learn from one other and to build on our achievements rather than damage them.

5.9 pm

**Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) on leading it.

It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali), although I must say from the outset that I did not agree with the tone of her speech. The Labour party is committed to the fair funding formula. The one we have now is broken and it is broken in London. I described the difference between Lambeth and Croydon, but we can find examples all over London. Schools hundreds of yards apart have differences in funding of up to tens of thousands of pounds per classroom. The current system is completely broken and wrong, and it is wrong across the country. The biggest gainer from the F40 proposals would be Barnsley. Other major northern cities would be beneficiaries, too. If we created a fairer system, other northern cities would lose out, because what we have now is erratic, irrational and bears no examination.

I beg Opposition Members in particular not to use the language that the hon. Lady used. The Government have set out a consultation on the principles. She did not itemise a single principle in the consultation with which she disagreed; she simply asserted that it was some sort of appalling assault on London to reverse the progress that has been made. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are limited resources; that is recognised by those on the Front Benches on both sides of the House.

Talk of levelling up is all very well, so long as the hon. Lady's party is committed to the vast budgetary increases that that would require. However, the Labour party is committed to no such thing and neither is the Conservative party. Even if the budget for this broken inequitable system was increased, we would still have to sit down and seek to ensure that the needs of every single child, regardless of disability, race or geography, were met.

The hon. Lady was right to say that we should have a system based on needs. That is precisely what the Government have consulted on. Whatever they come up with will doubtless not be perfect—nothing ever is—but to question the motive, when the Government are setting out to introduce a fairer funding system with the support of Labour Front Benchers, is beneath the hon. Lady. To say that London education will be decimated is so far from the truth. We need every area of the country to enjoy the improvements that have happened in London. One way to do that—it is only one way; money is not everything—is by making sure we have a system that is truly fair. I hope that, across the House, partisan voices will not stop us coming to a fair and consensual conclusion.

**Lucy Frazer:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point. We need fairness so that every child has an equal opportunity to get an education. Does he agree that many of the points made about London—growth, special needs, high house prices, a need to recruit and retain teachers—apply to other areas of the country, too? I cite by way of example Cambridge and its outer areas. Every one of those factors applies to us as it does to London.

**Graham Stuart:** My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. We heard language about dividing communities. With respect, the only person attempting to do that today is the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow, who used inappropriate language. No one is seeking to divide communities. We have a broken system. If anyone would like to make the case that the current system is

fair, reasonable and just, then please do so. But if it is not—and it is not—then we have to redistribute.

Making pernicky points about the manifesto, which says that the Government are going to protect the amount of money per child—which they are—*[Interruption.]* To the point where we cannot redistribute from someone who is grossly and unfairly funded in one place to another person somewhere else who is on the other end of the spectrum? That is ridiculous. Again, that is beneath the hon. Lady who brought the issue up and it is beneath other Labour Members—including the highly distinguished figure of the right hon. Gentleman, to whom I am happy to give way.

**Stephen Timms:** I think most people do not regard manifesto commitments as pernicky. The difficulty with the case the hon. Gentleman is making is that he is dressing it up in terms of principle. The reality is that he is asking for more resources for his local authority and less for others. Will he be frank enough to acknowledge that?

**Graham Stuart:** The right hon. Gentleman is incorrect. I want a fair system based on principle in which need is assessed, and where the money follows the pupil and that need. That is precisely what all of us should want.

Given that the Government have set out, in a transparent way, how to bring about this fairer funding formula, the suggestions that have been made are for political purposes; I know there are elections for London Mayor tomorrow. The House should rise above that. If the details come out and they are found not to fit with the principles, they will be worthy of criticism, but right now, such criticism cannot be made. When we have a badly broken system, the failure to demonstrate how it should be changed is not good enough.

What we should be talking about now is what emphasis we want to be placed on deprivation, for example, or population movements. Those things are all reflected in the proposed formula. The Government have touched on all of them. I do not see how it is acceptable to say, “We have a problem with a lot of people for whom English is a second language”, when that features in the formula. It is the same with deprivation needs in London—that, too, is in the proposed formula. The truth is that we have the ingredients for a fair system.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab) *rose*—

**Graham Stuart:** I give way to my extremely experienced and knowledgeable north-eastern colleague.

**Ian Mearns:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. There are many different facets to the differential funding around the country, and one of them is the historical choices of the relevant local authority. We used to have what was called the standard spending assessment, and some authorities chose to spend above the standard level. They funded the extra out of local taxation, which was built into the funding taken forward into the current distribution. It is one part of many facets, but it is a crucial part.

**Graham Stuart:** As ever, the hon. Gentleman makes an interesting and well-informed point. Westminster has been mentioned, so let us look at that as an example. People in very expensive properties are paying council tax rates that are absolutely on the floor; their rates

[Graham Stuart]

should be compared with those paid by my constituents living in homes worth a tiny fraction of the value of those in Westminster to see how much more those constituents are paying.

It does not wash to suggest that a fairer funding system is undermined because people paid more or less council tax in the distant past. The truth is that there are very high levels of council tax in many of the areas, including my own, that have the lowest funding, while there are very low levels of council tax in some of the richest and most prosperous parts of London. What we need is a system that is fair to all.

**Ian Mearns** *rose*—

**Dame Angela Watkinson** (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con) *rose*—

**Graham Stuart:** I give way to my hon. Friend.

**Dame Angela Watkinson:** Does my hon. Friend agree that property prices are an element in the formula that must be taken into consideration, particularly in areas such as the London Borough of Havering, which is right on the outside of outer London? Teachers there are paid the outer London allowance, but property prices are very high. Often newly qualified teachers who apply for jobs in our schools find that they cannot afford the accommodation, so they then move inwards towards Barking, Dagenham and other nearby boroughs where the properties are a bit cheaper.

**Graham Stuart:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are all sorts of boroughs across London, and some areas are funded to the tune of tens of thousands of pounds less per classroom than one that might be just a short distance away, yet they are in exactly the same market for teachers—the vital ingredient for raising educational standards. Despite that, when it comes to improving standards, outer London has been part of the London educational transformation.

The suggestion that moving from a situation of gross inequity to one that is fairer to all will undermine quality, when those who have suffered that inequity, such as the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Dame Angela Watkinson), have none the less managed to improve standards, proves that the issue is not just about money. The money needs to be distributed fairly.

I think the most important thing we should do today as a House is to say that we want a system that is fair to all. We should be discussing the principles and ensuring that the Government do not wriggle on any them for their own partisan or other interests. That is quite right, but let us not scaremonger. Let us not send out messages about dividing communities when the aim of fair funding is right and supported by everyone—including the Labour, Conservative and other major Front-Bench teams. I shall end there.

5.19 pm

**Mr Steve Reed** (Croydon North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) on securing this important debate. I was delighted

to co-sponsor it with him and several other hon. Members. I have been delighted, too, to co-chair with him the all-party parliamentary group for London. It is important to see London Members of different parties in the Chamber, making the case for London's children in the expectation that the Government will listen and do the right thing by our capital's children.

London's schools have been transformed in recent years, particularly since the London Challenge, which was introduced by the Labour Government in 2003 and which pushed the performance of London's children above the national average, where they have remained ever since. London's students outperform their peers both in GCSEs and at key stage 2, and they have a higher performance rate in GCSE maths and English than those in any other region in England. However, no one here—no one involved in education in London—considers that to be “job done”. We need to keep up the pressure in order to improve still further. In a globalised economy, London needs to compete with the best in the world, and that means no funding reductions that undermine our schools, heads, teachers, parents, governors and, above all, hard-working students.

The hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) said that it was pernicky to keep education promises. That is not pernicky; it is a matter of trust—the trust of the electors. To breach that trust, as the Government do time and again, is absolutely wrong. All schools deserve fair funding, and, as my hon. Friends have pointed out today, that means levelling funding up, not down. London Councils estimates that London's schools could lose about £260 million a year from their budgets as a result of the Government's proposed new funding formula, and some London boroughs are bracing themselves for a loss of up to 20% of funding at every school. Cuts on that scale would push education backwards in the capital.

To protect completely the funding for all the schools that stand to lose out, the Government would need to increase the block grant by £514 million a year. That would give all schools the resources to match the country's best-performing schools. That is clearly a very significant amount of money, but it is a fraction of the cost of forcing 18,000 maintained schools to become academies, which, in some quarters, is estimated to be as much as £1.3 billion. That is surely a deranged proposal that would distract many of the best schools from providing excellent education and force them to focus, quite unnecessarily, on governance instead. More than 80% of those schools are already rated good or outstanding, so it beggars belief that the Government want to undermine their success by making unnecessary and dogmatic changes.

There is no need to penalise children in London in order to increase funding elsewhere. Spending on education cannot be seen as a sunk cost; it is an investment that gives young people a better chance in life, and boosts economic growth by providing a better-skilled workforce that benefits all of us.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): We are talking about a better chance in life and a more skilled workforce. I am sure that everyone in the Chamber will agree that children with special educational needs are often disadvantaged. We must make sure that their funding is maintained, if not increased, because real problems are starting to appear in the constituencies of Bromley and

Chislehurst, and of Beckenham—particularly in secondary schools such as the Langley Park schools, of which my own children, I have to declare, are a part.

**Mr Reed:** The hon. Gentleman has made an important point. I am glad that he raised it, and I would be astonished if anyone in the Chamber disagreed with him. He is right: we need to keep a particular eye on the support available to those children, because of their vulnerability, and because they have not always been supported properly and helped to achieve what they should have been helped to achieve.

I want to focus for a moment on the situation in Croydon. Our borough's funding per pupil is £592 lower than the London average. We have the biggest shortfall in places in the country, and over the next five years the number of primary school pupils in Croydon is projected to grow at twice the London average. Croydon faces a huge demand for new primary school places that the Government cannot continue to ignore; they cannot exacerbate the problem by making funding changes that will further disadvantage children in our borough.

A particular problem that has already been mentioned is that teachers in inner-London boroughs can be paid up to £5,000 a year more than those in outer London. A school that is right on the border, as several in my constituency are, may find it hard to attract teachers who can earn so much more at another school just a few hundred yards away. That anomaly needs to be addressed in the new formula—and not, so that Ministers do not misunderstand me, by cutting pay in inner London.

The hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness asked why anyone would question the Government's motives. One reason why parents in London fear for their schools is the way the Government implemented the transitional relief grant earlier this year. Under that scheme, intended to ease the pain of local government funding cuts, £300 million of funding was made available, but all the relief went to wealthier areas that had received the lowest level of cuts. Surrey got an extra £24 million to spend, while Croydon got a further £44 million of cuts. It was nothing more than naked party political gerrymandering. If that happens again with schools funding, London's children will suffer.

London Councils, a cross-party organisation, estimates that 29 of London's 33 boroughs are at risk of losing funding that is likely to be transferred to less deprived areas. Such a decision would be perverse. I hope that the new Mayor of London, who will be elected tomorrow—I hope very much it is my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan)—will join me and other London MPs in making powerful representations to Ministers to protect London's schools and children. We will not allow the Government to undermine education in our capital city. Our children's lives matter too much, and our economic future depends on their success. I urge Ministers to turn back and think again.

5.26 pm

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) on securing this debate and on how he introduced it. I also congratulate him, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed), on how they chair the all-party parliamentary group for London. They are absolutely right that this is a crucial issue for the future of the capital.

I am worried about the process the Government have gone through to get us to this point. As we have heard, a consultation document was published in March. In the run-up to the consultation, meetings were held that, as far as I can tell, were exclusively with representatives of the F40 group of authorities. According to the F40 group website, its representatives met with the Department on 21 January 2015, 15 June 2015, 9 September 2015, 9 December 2015 and 7 April 2016 to discuss these proposals. As far as I can establish, no representatives of any London councils were present at any of those meetings. I am worried that because of the unbalanced process the Government have gone through, we will end up with an unbalanced proposal.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr Sam Gyimah):** I can reassure the right hon. Gentleman that my door is always open to every Member or representative of any local authority who wants to discuss school funding or any other concerns within my portfolio.

**Stephen Timms:** I am grateful to the Minister. The worry, however, is that up until now, the Department's door has been open only to this particular group. The hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) champions F40. Nobody can object to representatives of that group of local authorities lobbying and promoting their own interests; it is worrying, though, that it has had this exclusive access up until now.

A version of the minutes of the September meeting with the F40 quoted an official from the Department offering to share "emerging proposals" with the F40 group "in confidence". Proposals should not be shared in confidence with one particular set of authorities. I note that the minutes have now been altered, so they do not say that any more, but no such offer should ever have been made. My deep worry is that we are heading towards a woefully unbalanced proposal as a result of the privileged access given to that group.

I am grateful for the Minister's reassurance about his door being open, but I want him to give us a commitment that when the numbers are put into the structure in the consultation document published in March, there will be the constraint that there should be no cuts in school funding for pupils in the most disadvantaged areas of the country.

As we have heard, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) has pointed out that the Conservative manifesto certainly sounds as though it is saying that there will be no cuts for any individual students; I hope that that commitment will be maintained. I particularly want to press the Minister on this point: there should be no cuts to schools funding for pupils in the most disadvantaged areas. Indeed, the Government have recognised the need for additional schools funding for disadvantaged students through the pupil premium, so it would surely be quite perverse to slash the same funding through this formula.

As I mentioned earlier, if the F40 proposals were put straight into effect, it would result in the 30 most disadvantaged local authorities in the country losing £245 million per year and the 30 most affluent authorities in the country gaining more than £218 million per year. That would be a straightforward switch of hundreds of millions of pounds from the most disadvantaged authorities

[Stephen Timms]

to the most affluent ones. I hope that the Minister can reassure us that that kind of switch, as advocated by the F40 group—understandably; it is in the group's interests to do so—will not happen.

My authority, the London Borough of Newham, made a freedom of information application for the Department's modelling or analysis of the likely impact of the new formula. The request was refused. Officials said that they had the information, but its release was refused on the grounds that it related to the formulation or development of Government policy and was therefore exempt from freedom of information obligations. As I have said, however, there has clearly been a lot of access for representatives of the F40 authorities. The Minister has given us a commitment that his door will always be open, and I ask him release that information to the other authorities as well, so that everyone can see where we are heading. As things stand, some authorities have been taken into the Government's confidence and others have not. Indeed, some of those others have been refused information relating to what has been going on. That information should be released.

A cursory glance at the F40 proposal published in 2013—it is on the F40 website—and at the consultation document published by the Government in March shows an uncanny resemblance between the two. Clearly, the F40 group has been very influential. I feel particularly strongly about this, because modelling suggests that my local authority will be among the biggest losers. Analysis of the F40 proposal shows that seven of the 10 biggest cash losers under the proposals will be in London, while none of the 10 biggest cash winners will be in the capital. That is the direction of the F40 group's proposals. Of course it is advancing its own interests, but it should not have special access to Ministers in doing that. That is not a fair way for policy to be made.

I want to pick up on one point of detail that has already been touched on. The point was made in responding to the consultation document that the extent of pupil mobility in London has a big influence on school costs. Mobility has been used in school funding formulae up till now, but it is not used in the F40 proposal. Nor is it in the Government's proposal. That is a very troubling omission. The hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst rightly underlined the point that high levels of mobility in London add significantly to the cost of running schools here, and that fact should be picked up in the formula.

Research published by the Fischer Family Trust this year estimates that a student who moves in-year will perform 10% less well than the average for their class, and that if three or more students join a class mid-year, attainment for the class as a whole will suffer by one to two percentage points. It estimates the combined cost of pupil mobility to schools and local authorities in London at £35 million a year. That should not be excluded from the formula, although the consultation document proposes excluding it. I understand that mobility is generally low in the authorities of the F40 group, and that they do not want it reflected in the formula, and the Department immediately put that into its version of the formula. Authorities such as mine, where mobility is high, will unfairly lose out on funding if that view prevails, so I hope that it does not.

I am worried that the process that has taken us to this point has been flawed, which is leading to an unfair proposal. I hope that the Minister will accept that schools funding for pupils in disadvantaged areas should not be cut as a result of the new formula, and that factors such as mobility, which have such a big impact in London, should be included in the formula, so that the damage is not inflicted on schools in London.

5.35 pm

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) and my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) on their excellent work with the all-party parliamentary group for London and on calling for this debate today.

The transformation of London's schools has been remarkable. London now has the highest percentage of good or outstanding schools in the country. Let us compare that with the situation of 20 years ago, when there had been almost two decades of Tory cuts and a lack of national political leadership on education. I attended an excellent secondary school with brilliant teachers, but there were holes in the roof and often not enough books to go around. It was a national problem in the 1980s, but there were much more serious problems in London, where the desperate state of too many schools was driving population outflow from the capital and generations of children were failed.

The transformation was achieved through leadership on quality standards and investment in buildings, facilities and staff. Schools were given the resources to deliver, but there was a clear expectation from the Labour Government that poor standards, either in schools or in local education authorities, would not be tolerated. Many London councils also had a clear commitment to press hard on education standards. I am hugely proud of the schools in my constituency. I have met so many inspiring, hard-working teachers and see amazing things happening in our schools. There are too many examples to mention them all, but I think of Hill Mead Primary School, an outstanding school under the new inspection framework in the middle of the Moorlands estate in one of the most deprived wards in the whole country; the Gipsy Hill Federation of outstanding primary schools; The Elmgreen School, a parent-promoted secondary school that achieved its best ever GCSE results last year; The Charter School, an outstanding secondary school launched following a parent-led campaign that is now setting up a second school to meet demand; and Evelyn Grace Academy, where Labour's investment enabled the employment of the late, great Zaha Hadid to build a school in Brixton that won the Stirling prize for architecture.

The funding formula has reflected both the additional costs that London schools have to bear over and above other parts of the country for building work, staffing, catering and a range of other issues, and the additional challenges faced in London, such as higher levels of deprivation, higher incidences of children with special educational needs, looked after children and pupils with English as a second language, and higher pupil mobility. There are also huge challenges around the need for new school places as London's population expands. The Government's funding formula proposals could result in London schools losing £260 million or more of funding, which is equivalent to almost 6,000 full-time



teachers or nearly 12,000 teaching assistants. Inner London would be hit the hardest, losing 9.4%, or £586 per pupil on conservative estimates, compared with a 4.5% cut across London.

The impact of such losses would be devastating, leading to larger class sizes, less support for pupils with particular needs and challenges, and the loss of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Music, art and sport are already stretched as a consequence of the Government's approach to the curriculum. The cuts will also exacerbate the problems facing teacher recruitment and retention. There is already a crisis in headteacher recruitment in London, and many schools are struggling to recruit teachers. Fifty per cent. of headteachers are over 50 and approaching retirement, and the impact of the housing crisis on younger teachers is devastating. Such cuts will have a terrible impact on the ability of London schools to overcome inequality and disadvantage, and we will be heading back to the bad old days of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Proposing such large cuts to London schools makes no sense, because of all the types of public revenue expenditure, spending on education is perhaps the closest to a straightforward investment rather than a cost. It is an investment in the potential of our children, the talent of the next generation and the economy of our capital city. To fail London's schools is to fail not only our children—that would be terrible enough—but our economy. The difference in funding between different local education authorities is due in no small part to the commitment of so many London councils to ensuring that there is investment in our children. I have no problem with the principle of levelling the funding formula to some extent, but a fair and independent assessment of need must be made and the funds must be allocated according to need. There must be a levelling up, not a levelling down.

Schools in my constituency do not deserve, nor can they bear, a further cut in their funding of 10% or more, and neither do good or outstanding schools deserve to be forced to become academies. Perhaps, as my colleagues have suggested, the money that would be spent on the lawyers' fees for forced academisation should be reallocated to help protect the funding for our schools. The involvement of parents in schools is crucial to improving pupil attainment. Parent governors should be present on governing bodies as of right, and I can tell the Minister that parents in my constituency are powerful advocates for funding and resources for their schools. Government plans to stop this are another step in the wrong direction, alongside proposals to cut London's school funding.

A high-skills, high-wage economy needs investment in skills and training, and investment in our schools is the very foundation of that. A 10% cut to London schools would not be fair, would deliver worse outcomes for some of the most deprived children in the capital and is not acceptable. Most importantly, such a cut does not make any sense. I therefore call on the Government to address inconsistencies in the schools funding formula by levelling up, rather than levelling down—by investing in our schools—because we will all reap the benefits. Schools in London have been on a 20-year journey from being the worst in the country in the dark days of the 1980s and early 1990s to being the best now. Long-term sustained investment and leadership were needed to achieve that. Now is not the time to turn the clock back to a decade of failure.

5.42 pm

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a delight to follow the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). We all seem to agree that there is no point in trying to compete on bleeding stumps and regions by saying, "My stump is more bleeding than yours." We know that there are enormous issues in rural communities, seaside communities and across cities outside London. However, we are here to talk about London schools and how very proud we are of them. As others have given examples from their constituencies, may I say that Haringey schools are among the most improved in the country, particularly at GCSE level? We know that 43% of pupils on free school meals in Haringey achieved five A\* to C grades at GCSE level in the 2014-15 academic year, which is significantly above the national average of 33.1%, and 50% of Haringey's pupils are eligible for free school meals. Our ranking has gone up to 44th in the country from its position of 90th some years ago. The theme here is continuous improvement and the nub of the matter is that we do not want it to stop.

**Ian Mearns:** The point my hon. Friend is making exemplifies why we do not need any rounding down, anywhere across the country. We are getting real evidence that the right systems, the right approaches and the right innovation, backed by the right investment, can bring school improvement to every child in the country.

**Catherine West:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point: it is about believing in every single child in our country, regardless of where they live, what language may be spoken at home or whatever other background they may have. On that point, may I mention the high number of students who have a particular educational need? I am sure that the excellent civil servants will have taken into account in their formula the fact that a lot of children face both language difficulties and other educational needs in London, and many of them come to our advice surgeries. There is nothing more tragic than hearing the stories of certain children who have had a difficult journey through school. I hope that that is reflected in the funding formula. We know that sustaining educational outcomes and improvements in all schools are essential across the piece, and that a reduction in funding would put all of that at risk. We spend a lot of time in this Chamber talking about the productivity puzzle, and we know that education is crucial to understanding why, in terms of our productivity, we as a nation are not doing as well as some of our comparative neighbours. Much of that comes down to our basic skills.

Let me provide one further example from my constituency—a Wood Green primary school. The Trinity Primary Academy required improvement the last time that Ofsted visited, but now 86% of its pupils achieve level 4 or above at key stage 2. I am so very proud of those children, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) is too, because many of them live in his constituency. When we go to the schools, we tell the children that we are very proud of them and that we talk about them all the time in this Chamber, and they seem to respond to that.

[Catherine West]

I will be brief, as I know that others wish to speak. Housing has been mentioned. We know that a deposit for a home in London is £91,000, which is far beyond the average starting wage of a teacher, which is between £20,000 and £30,000. We know that recruitment challenges are likely to be on the horizon, particularly for leadership and senior roles, both at a regional and a national level. The report “Building the Leadership Pool in London Schools”, which was published in November 2015, found that 58% of headteachers in London-based schools are considering leaving their role in the next three years and that 44% of governors in London schools are reporting difficulties in attracting good candidates for senior roles. We have all learned from the school improvement lessons of the past 20 years that school outcomes are very much down to the leadership in schools. I am talking about the wonderful outcomes, the wonderful school exam results and those wonderful smiles on the faces of children when we visit them in August, take photographs of them and praise them up to the heavens. It is a wonderful experience as an MP or an elected representative.

Finally, we have unique challenges in London. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) talked in detail about mobility, which we are very keen to see reflected in the funding formula. There is also English as an additional language, looked-after children, of whom there are many in London, the high levels of deprivation and the population growth. We know that, due to the wonderfully fertile families that we have in London—our baby boom—we have an 8.2% growth, compared with an overall reduction nationally of 0.2%. Although we delight in having a young city, it is a pressure that creates costs within the system and they should be reflected in the funding formula. Forecasts show that the pupil growth rate in London over the six years from 2012 is twice that of any other region and that, by 2017-18, pupil numbers in London are expected to have increased by 18%, which is considerable. There is also the mobility issue and teacher retention.

As we are coming to the end of the Session, may I wish you, Madam Deputy Speaker, all the very best for tomorrow and Friday?

5.48 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I begin by thanking the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) for helping to secure the debate and for his excellent speech, which managed to define all the issues. It was a shame that the only other speech from the Government Benches was that of the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart). I cannot be as rude about his speech as I would like because he has left the Chamber, so I will limit myself to saying that he purported to be talking about fairness while, in fact, thanks to the sleuthing work of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), we found that he had not only a special interest but special access to the F40 group, which he leads. The long and the short of it is that this is about taking money away from very deprived areas and areas with high levels of need. I am not going to attack any other local authority and say that they do not have a need for education funding, but I resent people coming to the House under

the guise of fairness saying that schools in my constituency, which are struggling, should lose a substantial proportion of their funds.

Let me begin by reading a short email I received a couple of weeks ago from a headteacher. I will not say from which school, although I think it will become clear as I read it out. It is a small, voluntary-aided, outstanding school. The email reads:

“Dear Andy, I would like to alert you to a meeting I will be hosting tonight and tomorrow morning for parents. I will be talking about the proposed cuts to our budget next year if the new national funding formula, which is out for consultation, gets the go ahead. It is likely that our school will suffer a 10% decrease in our budget, this coupled with a 9% decrease this year will leave us financially unviable. I recognise that this is very short notice, but if you happen to be available either tonight at 6 pm, or tomorrow at 9.30 am, I think that both myself and our parents would appreciate your input.”

I managed to get along the next morning and found a substantial number of parents who wanted to talk about a number of issues, including the consultation. They were extremely well-informed. They wanted, first, to talk about places planning and the fact that we have in the borough some new free schools that are half empty while other community schools are oversubscribed. They particularly wanted to talk about the new policy of forced academisation and the problems that have occurred through that. These are not subjects that I raised during the meeting, but subjects that the parents raised and ideas they unanimously opposed.

The parents, and certainly the teachers, wanted to talk about recruitment. Any headteachers to whom I have spoken in my borough say that they are facing real problems in that regard. It is ridiculous, in terms of both need and demand, to compare London with other parts of the country, such as Cambridgeshire, as has happened. The average price of a property in my constituency is knocking £1 million. The Labour council, when it was elected, converted some of the luxury flats that the previous Conservative administration were building into key worker flats specifically for teachers, and it managed to retain some teachers as a consequence. For most teachers, it is impossible to afford to live in those boroughs, even on a good salary.

The email I quoted talked about ongoing cuts. The Government would have us believe that there are no ongoing cuts, but of course there are. Spending on education is frozen and schools are facing rising costs from pension contributions, national insurance contributions and teachers’ pay rises. These costs, before any changes to the funding formula, mean a total of £3 million of real-terms cuts to school budgets in the borough, which is the equivalent of 61 teachers. That has to be found for this financial year before any of the other changes come on stream.

Let us also remember what we are losing. This has already been mentioned, but London schools are doing brilliantly compared with what happened under previous Conservative Governments. In 2002, the percentage of pupils getting five A\* to C grades at GCSE was 35%, and by 2013 it had almost doubled to 64%. For disadvantaged pupils, it had more than doubled, from 23% to 49%. That is what we are putting at risk with these politically motivated changes.

What will happen if further cuts of some 10% happen? Fewer subjects will be offered to children. Cuts will be made, which are already being flagged up, to mentoring support and to support staff and, perhaps, to teaching

staff. Enrichment activities such as music, sport and drama have already been cut, and, as Members heard from the email I read out, some teachers, particularly in small schools, wonder whether their schools will remain viable at all. On the whole, these are outstanding, or at least good, schools. That is all being put at risk.

We have talked about English as an additional language, and 49% of pupils in London speak English as an additional language. That is the case in very few parts of the country. We have talked about mobility. There are primary schools in my borough of Hammersmith and Fulham where, over the life-cycle of the school, more than half the children in a particular class will change, with all the consequences mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham and others. I do not think there is a single school in my borough, and probably not in London, that could say it had a bit of slack, that it had money to spare and that it could provide that money.

I fear that the changes are being discussed in a cynical way and that the Government are shroud-waving. We are talking about 10% cuts on average and perhaps up to 20% cuts in some cases. When the second part of the consultation comes out, the cuts will be only 8% or 15%, and we will be told that the Government have done us some favours along the way. They will not have done us any favours. If the term “fair funding” continues to be used, it must genuinely reflect the need.

I see the Minister nodding and I appreciate that. When he comes to respond, I hope he will specifically take account of the huge strides that London schools have made and that he will want to build on them. Given the economic stress affecting every aspect from teachers to school buildings, I hope he will realise that funding levels need to be maintained. We have talked about levelling up—it may be easy to say, but it needs to be done. Other schools around the country should have the same achievement levels as schools in London. We should be a beacon and an example to the rest of the country; we should not be punished for our success.

5.56 pm

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I congratulate hon. Members from both sides of the House on securing this debate.

Some months ago I was in the Chamber late one evening waiting for the next business. While waiting, I sat and watched as 15 or 20 MPs, mainly on the Government Benches, stood up one by one to present petitions. The petitions had almost identical wording, the gist of which was that schools in their constituency were losing out because their per child funding was so much less than that of schools in London. I sensed not a coincidental simultaneous rising of anger from schools around the country, but an orchestrated campaign that could only have come from the Government party.

It therefore came as no surprise to me when the Education Secretary announced in March that she was consulting on the schools national funding formula. I wish I could say I was excited at the prospect of more funding for schools in England, so that all could benefit from the levels of funding that schools in London have benefited from in recent years and which have been part of the reason for London schools' success. However, knowing this Government as I do, I am sure that the outcome of this consultation will mean only one thing—a

significant cut in funding for schools in London. Based on the modelling carried out by London councils, as has been mentioned, London could lose around £245 million per annum. My authority estimates that there will be a significant cut for local schools; the NUT estimates a 12% cut.

My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) and I together represent the London Borough of Hounslow, whose schools, despite the challenges that our children and our teachers face, always perform well. Some 87% of borough schools are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. We are concerned that under the new national funding formula, the dedicated schools grant will mean that schools in Hounslow and London see a reduction in funding in real terms. That is happening now. Even under the current stand-still budgets, with rising recruitment, pension and other costs, head teachers are telling me they are having to make cuts to the curriculum. There are no inefficiencies to cut out now, unless that list of inefficiencies includes music, art and drama as A-level choices, or after-school activities or specialist help for children with additional needs to access learning. I do not call those inefficiencies.

Furthermore, there is already inadequate funding in the high needs block in Hounslow to fund the current and future special educational needs of children who need additional help. The ring-fenced nature of the schools block under the proposals leaves no flexibility. This year Hounslow Schools Forum agreed to transfer £7 million to schools with high needs. These proposals, which will stop such transfers, will create a huge shortfall.

London's schools have delivered success while facing greater challenges. At the secondary school my sons attended, 70 home languages are spoken, and many children arrive not speaking any English. Recruiting staff and maintaining buildings costs more in London. There are greater levels of deprivation, overcrowding, special needs and looked-after children. The housing crisis means that too many children have to move home and move school, which has a devastating impact on their attainment.

If we are to cut the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils and to stretch the most able pupils, we need to support them through adequate funding. We cannot ensure that our young people are ready for the world of work and that they can contribute to our economy if we sell them short at school—wherever they go to school.

The success of London's schools over recent years is undisputed, and that success is a model for all. It is based on focused and adequate funding, and it delivers results. It is right that all schools in England should benefit from adequate funding, and it is right that the formula should be updated. What is wrong is that schools in less deprived areas should benefit while schools with greater challenges face the greatest cuts. Sadly, that is the principle the Government are following in local government funding, and that is why, Mr Deputy Speaker—sorry, Mr Speaker; that will teach me not to look up—I do not trust them not to do the same with school funding. The Government should be levelling up so that all schools in England can achieve the success we have had in London.

If the Government really believe in a growth agenda for our economy, as the Prime Minister suggested this morning, they would do well to prioritise the education of all children in England, and to invest in their schooling

[*Ruth Cadbury*]

and teachers, as well as in spreading good practice in learning so that all can benefit. It would be great if, for once, the Government could listen to those in local government—from both parties—to ensure that there is sufficient funding to level up school funding allocations so that no local authority area sees a cut in funding.

6.2 pm

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) on not only his stewardship of the all-party group on London but his sterling work with the Justice Committee, which I serve on.

Redistribution is usually seen as a principle of the left. The last Labour Government sought to widen educational opportunity, from guaranteeing nursery places at one end of the age scale to pursuing the massification of higher education further up the age scale. They sought to stop education from being the preserve of the select few.

Achieving a fair funding formula to end the postcode lottery might look attractive at first glance, but plans designed to counter regional disparities and funding gaps have resulted in warnings—we have heard all the projections—that London schools could lose hundreds of millions of pounds to other regions.

I welcome the fact that we are having this debate at this juncture, because we are all somewhat in the dark. It would be good to have clarity today, because what is going around on the grapevine will worry headteachers in the capital. As right hon. and hon. Members have said, London contains some of the poorest communities in the country, and it has fared well under the status quo.

Since the dark days before 1997 and new Labour, when I was going through school—the days of leaking classrooms—London schools have become a success story nationally. With competing levels of disadvantage countrywide and a shake-up due, there are bound to be winners and losers in any new funding formula. When funding is reallocated, it is important that London is not left underfunded and that educational success is part of the equation, along with strong leadership, raising aspiration and outcomes, and investment.

London boroughs have received additional funding for years because the previous Labour Government were keen to help struggling pupils in the capital to catch up with pupils elsewhere in the country. We have heard that London councils estimate that school budgets in London could be slashed by 10%, but some press releases say the figure could be as high as 14%. It is rumoured that the consultation is likely to recommend phasing in whatever comes next so that angry London headteachers do not immediately suffer large cuts.

Whatever the motivation behind all this, I urge the Government to quash the rumours, think again, and heed advice—advice that often comes from their own side, as in the very eloquent opening speech in this debate. There have been some other unlikely bedfellows. The Mayor of London has made representations to the Government. He is not here; he also has a part-time job as a Member of this House, I believe. The Mayor of Hackney and the Mayor of Manchester have made

representations. The Conservative councillor Roy Perry, chairman of the Local Government Association's children and young people board, has said:

“Councils know their areas best, and currently work in partnership with head teachers and governors to set a local funding formula which allows local needs and priorities to be addressed. We'd want to see this local conversation continue, rather than having all school budgets set in Whitehall.”

**Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): A point that has not been mentioned so far in any great detail is the lack of local flexibility in the proposals set out in the consultation and the implications that flow from that. One implication is that the DFE or the Education Funding Agency will have to know, for example, every school that has a private finance initiative agreement, what the costs are, and how they are going to be met at a time of also maintaining the per pupil funding formula.

**Dr Huq:** My hon. Friend makes the excellent point that local accountability seems to be lost in all this. We have a Government who said that they were in favour of devolution, and instead we have centralised diktats coming from on high.

The National Union of Teachers has claimed:

“Without significant additional resources, plans for reallocation of school funding between areas under the heading of ‘fair funding’ will not address schools’ funding problems and will impose even bigger cuts in many areas.”

In addition, there is the already-raised suspicion that forcing every state sector school in England to become an academy, thereby going into the hands of unaccountable private sector pseudo-charities, is privatisation by the back door. Compulsorily taking schools out of local authority control, which my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook) mentioned, even when the local community opposes it, and handing them over, with their property deeds, infrastructure and taxpayer-funded education budgets, is massively opposed by many parents.

In my surgery, a complaint that often comes up is insufficient school places. I visit schools regularly; I did the assembly at St Augustine's Priory School this week and I am doing Derwentwater Primary School's next week. Teachers there raise a range of concerns, including recruitment and retention in London, particularly fuelled by the pricey property market. They talk to me about curriculum and assessment chaos. I have had 200 pieces of correspondence about forced academisation, with people pointing out that there is no evidence that academies improve outcomes. There is a cost to all this. Barbara Raymond from Acton says:

“We have lost social housing, are losing our health service and now our education system is being decimated.”

Dr Gill Reed of west Ealing is concerned that forced academisation will mean that schools are unable to remove asbestos from their buildings, because apparently Government funding for this was taken away, so if schools are using all their resources to convert into academies, that will put health and safety in our schools at risk as well. Sarah Mitchell, a parent who is also a teacher, is concerned about what will happen to the support services previously provided by local education authorities when they go over to private providers. John Davey of Ealing, in his 46th year of teaching, 21 of those in Ealing, says:

“This doctrinaire stance of the current government, supported by no research and choosing to ignore the available evidence, will do harm to generations of children.”

On the subject of unequal funding, it might just be coincidence, but the boroughs of Wokingham, Surrey, Windsor and Maidenhead have all seen the lowest cuts to their budgets. Between them, they represent the constituencies of half the Cabinet. The constituencies of the Home Secretary, Health Secretary, Leader of the House, Foreign Secretary and Justice Secretary are all covered by those areas, which also received £33.5 million in the transitional grant announced this year. To an alien looking at these things from outside, that seems politically motivated.

It is worth restating the London Councils figure of £245 million. In terms of people, that equates to 5,873 full-time teachers or 11,598 full-time teaching assistants. As has been pointed out, inner London will be hardest hit.

My constituency is in Ealing, which is the most inner of the outer London boroughs. Everyone who has spoken today, from the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst onwards, has said that there are dichotomous divides within boroughs. Some areas of Ealing have inner-city characteristics, such as Southall, which is outer London on the map, and Acton, which is inner London on the map and zone 2 for travelcard users.

Historically, we were never part of the Inner London Education Authority, but we have an excellent track record in delivering accessible education for our pupils. In 2015, Her Majesty’s chief inspector of schools rated the Ealing borough as having the most improved schools of all local authorities across England, but we do have deprived areas and areas with specific educational challenges, so I would say that our needs are higher than those of other suburban boroughs. None the less, all 14 high schools were rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, as were 59 of our 69 primary schools.

The predistributionary—if I can use that word—aspects remain sketchy, but Ealing Council’s ruling Labour group opposes academisation and wants to launch its own trusts to get around it. Should local authorities be trying to get around Government legislation, or should the two be working together? I would suggest that the latter is the better option. We should not be thinking of reasons to avoid horrid policies from the centre.

The average spend per pupil in Ealing is higher than the national average, as is the case in all but four of the other London boroughs. We have more pupils with English as a foreign language than elsewhere, and other hon. Members have mentioned the issue of churn. London Councils points out that all London schools are at significant risk of losing funding under any redistributive model. The bureaucratic reorganisation of academisation will cost the taxpayer £1.3 billion. Surely that is poor value for the taxpayer when we should be justifying every pound of public expenditure at a time of fiscal belt-tightening.

Improving the life chances of local young people in Ealing should be a key objective in education. Ealing has a good record of success and of driving up standards for young people, with the council and schools working in partnership, but there is now a sense of a double whammy from the reallocated funding formula and the academies plan. Ealing Council officers have built up considerable expertise and flexibility, and the proposals

are to the detriment of our young people. This is a top-down reorganisation from a Government who said, “No more top-down reorganisations”. One would have thought that they would have learned from their costly and unnecessary experiment with the health service.

Paul Goldsmith of Acton is a politics teacher in the independent sector. He wrote to me:

“I am a Governor of an outstanding primary school that under Conservative policy will be forced to be an academy. This means the Head and Governors over the next few years will have to work to the task of academisation, not maintaining an outstanding school.”

He also points out—remember that he is a politics teacher—that Conservatism can be defined as, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”, and asks what is the actual problem forced academisation is trying to fix if the school is outstanding. There are also questions about the financial stability and viability of academy chains as things stand. Plenty of academy chains have got into financial difficulties in order to meet Government targets. It is worth reiterating a phrase that has cropped up time and again: we should be levelling up, not levelling down.

On educational inequality, a degree of special pleading is necessary on behalf of London, because London is different. Its population is heading towards 10 million and its year-on-year population increase of 3% over the last Parliament was higher than the 1% for the rest of the country. The number of live births in Ealing increased by 31% between 2002-03 and 2010-11, which means that an additional 1,400 children a year have been born since 2002, although I think things have levelled off a bit. As an Ealing mum, I am probably one of the few people here to have experienced a bulge class. I remember being in a bulge class in 1983 as an Ealing pupil, as well.

There are concerns aplenty about the new proposals and the degree to which they tip over towards equalisation. Usually equalisation sounds like a good thing, but the proposals seem to be intended to benefit rural communities and buy off Conservative Members. We know that the Government have a small majority, and the proposals will ward off the rebellions that might be coming their way. There is a sense that the tinkering is a result of pressure from the heartlands.

I will end with one more quotation, from Rachael Stone, a primary school teacher from Acton who has been in the job for 20 years. She said that when she heard about the plans in the Budget to make her school an academy,

“my immediate response was that it is time for me to find a new career.”

We need to be careful about how we approach the issue and mindful of the need to avoid exacerbating the already plummeting morale among the teaching profession through academisation. We do not want to make a bad situation worse.

6.15 pm

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) said a lot about education in Haringey, and I do not want to repeat it, but I want to speak briefly as a former Higher Education Minister. I have great respect for the Minister and consider him a friend—I have doubts about his politics, but I know that he is an intelligent and intellectual man who applies rigour to his job.

[Mr David Lammy]

The Minister has heard a lot today about the need to level up funding. All Members recognise that there are real challenges for young people growing up in what would traditionally be described as white working-class environments—certainly in the seaside towns, and also in rural parts of the country. There are also many cities beyond London where there are real concerns about the educational picture and the league tables show that there is a lot to do.

However, the real challenge in our education system is not the gaps between state schools but the gap between state schools and private schools. That is why we have heard a lot about levelling up. The funding per pupil for students attending private schools is still double and more—[HON. MEMBERS: “Triple!”] Indeed, it is triple the funding for young people attending state schools. The ambition of all Governments, of whatever party, ought to be to reduce that gap, not to raid the budget of state schools.

A lot has been said about the success of education here in London, and it has indeed been a success story in the recent period. I was proud to support the London Challenge when it started, and we have certainly seen advances in London, including in my borough, but let us not go too far. Some 60% of young people in London on free school meals do not get five A to C grades in their GCSEs, and there is still a lot of work to do.

This city represents a larger share of our country's GDP than at any time since 1911, and its competition is with Shanghai, Bombay, Berlin and Bonn. It is with a lot of countries that are investing in their education systems, not raiding schools' funds. I know that when the Minister looks at the programme for international student assessment league tables, he will see where London stands—he will see that if we muck up the alchemy in London, my God will we undermine education in this country!

In respect of young people with English as a second language and families who have real needs because they are newly arrived in this country, if we change the formula just a bit we can see a huge slip-back in performance. I was at school in the 1970s and '80s as part of the African-Caribbean community in this country, and I think it is largely agreed that there were significant failures in education for that minority community. We now see the repercussions of that ricocheting across our country.

We also ought to remember the review that the Prime Minister asked me to undertake over the year. More details were published recently. It is wonderful that we have seen a reduction in the number of young people attending young offenders institutions in this country, but there has been no reduction for black, Asian and minority ethnic young people—a lion's share of them from London. In fact, things have gone the other way. Look, too, at our pupil referral units; there is a lot to do here in London.

Alongside all the issues that have been mentioned, there is the real issue of churn in our communities, because of the major housing crisis affecting the city. Housing is overcrowded. The vast majority of the young people we are concerned about are in private accommodation and move somewhere else every six

months, across borough boundaries. A funding formula that does not take that mobility into account is in real danger of compounding problems, not alleviating them.

Let us think about context. There is a housing crisis. So many Londoners speak English as a second language. Real deprivation still exists right across London. There are the concerns, which we talk about in this place, about guns, knives and gangs in this city. Given all that, I say to the Minister that he should tread very carefully when it comes to making the sort of reductions to London's funding over the next period that we have been hearing about. We will see a slip back. We will slip down the tables nationally, and our competitors in other countries will overtake us. The Government have to look again and find ways to level up the picture. They should remember that the real conversation about education in this country is not within the state sector, but between the state sector and the private sector.

6.21 pm

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting the debate, which was secured by the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), supported by other Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed).

It has been a good, positive and wide-ranging debate. In addition to the speeches, we have had contributions by way of intervention from my right hon. Friends the Members for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) and for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), my hon. Friends the Members for West Ham (Lyn Brown), for Westminster North (Ms Buck), for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) and for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook), my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), and the hon. Members for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), for Kensington (Victoria Borwick), for Hornchurch and Upminster (Dame Angela Watkinson) and for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). The range of Members involved demonstrates the importance of the debate and the issue. I am pleased that the Minister has listened attentively throughout the debate. He has been exemplary in that respect, taking on board the issues that have been raised across the House.

With the last intervention in the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich drew our attention to the dangers of taking away local flexibility while rushing for a national formula. That important issue was not mentioned by anyone else, so I thought it should be captured before I move on.

In an excellent opening speech, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst laid out the landscape really well. He reminded us of London's high performance, describing it quite rightly as a success story. He also reminded us of the reason for London's higher level of funding, namely the greater challenges it faces as a result of the number of youngsters with English as a second language, the breadth of the attainment gap and the deprivation in London. All those issues are very significant. His starting point was important; as he said, there is no issue with the principle of fair funding. That point was echoed by many Members from across the House throughout the debate.

What I liked most about the hon. Gentleman's speech was the sense of celebration—that here we have a success story and something we should capture. That was echoed by comments from many Members on both sides of the House, and by my hon. Friends in particular. My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) talked about the huge strides that London has made. My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) reminded us that nine out of 10 London schools are good or outstanding. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North talked about the transformation of London schools since 2003 through the London Challenge. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) reminded us of the many inspiring, hard-working teachers across her constituency, whose work is mirrored across the whole of London.

There is therefore something to celebrate, but there are concerns that it might be under threat. My hon. Friends the Members for Bethnal Green and Bow, and for Croydon North, pointed to analysis that suggested that funding might decrease for London; one estimate suggested that the cut in funding might be as great as £260 million a year. I understand why some hon. Members are rightly concerned about that, because it would be a huge funding cut.

In a thoughtful and considered contribution, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) explored the concern in the House that perhaps things are not being done in the right and proper way. Those perceptions may not be true, but that concern is palpable, and I am sure that the Minister's commitment in an intervention, when he said that he would meet groups of Members and engage properly with them, went a long way to reassuring my right hon. Friend. However, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith said, there is concern that there has been some special interest and access—not something that anybody wishes to happen. If that is the perception among some, the Minister's generous and immediate commitment to meeting Members who have expressed concern must be followed by thorough action and engagement.

My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham and others drew attention to the impact that mobility has on school costs in London. Much reference was made to housing issues in London—to the cost of housing, and to the nature of housing estates. I hope that the Minister will consider ways to include that mobility factor in the formula as it is developed. The former Chair of the Education Committee, the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), put the case for fair funding: if London is getting a good deal, everybody else needs to get one, too. He made that fair challenge in his usual passionate way.

Everyone will agree with the principle of fair funding, but the rub is that one person's fair funding can end up being another person's unfair funding. Although I commend the F40 group for its patient and persistent campaign to address the funding needs of its schools and children—indeed, I have been a supportive officer of that group in the past—care must be taken in how that is progressed. The Government have done the right thing in taking careful steps along that road, consulting before acting, and evaluating the consequences before proceeding. However, as this debate demonstrates, there is more to be done in that arena if the Government are to move

forward with the confidence of the whole House. There is still no detail about who will be the winners and losers, and by how much, and that major concern naturally leads to the sort of speculation that we have heard today. I hope that the Minister and his colleagues will provide more details, and view today's debate as a constructive contribution to the ongoing consultation.

Labour's candidate for Mayor is right to stand up for the capital's children, and to express the concern that if there are the cuts that some analysts are predicting, it would do huge damage to the next generation of Londoners. The current London Mayor, together with Jules Pipe, chair of London Councils, made clear the case for ongoing investment in London's schools in a joint letter to the Secretary of State. They are all right. Schools are the first part of the skills and employment supply chain, and any reduction in funding is likely to impact negatively on the growth and productivity of local economies. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) made that point in a good and powerful contribution to the debate. She also talked about the schools and school communities that she is proud to represent, and which have made some of the greatest strides in school improvement over the past year.

The Department for Education's fair funding consultation document states that it intends to address the variability in funding levels by distributing more funding to areas that are underfunded, while

“gradually reducing the funding of schools that have been generously funded to date”.

It is understandable that many in London fear that this will result in severe cuts to London schools' budgets, with a negative impact on the capital's young people. We all know that, with or without fair funding, all schools face a real-terms 8% cut in funding during the lifetime of this Conservative Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith detailed the type of budget pressures schools are under and having to manage. Schools are already having to cut back on extracurricular activities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood said, extracurricular activities benefit low-income children the most, raising aspiration and opportunities. It is a shame that they are already under pressure.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) pointed out, schools are already taking subjects off the curriculum to balance the books. There is already pressure in the system, and there is a worry that there may be more pressure in the future. Any headteacher will tell you that teaching assistants and teachers will be next in the firing line if there are further reductions in spending. Dramatic reductions in funding in some areas will make the situation much worse. It is welcome that the Chancellor has committed £500 million to ease the transition from one system to another. However, the Treasury has said that this funding is dependent on how much the Department is willing to contribute. As the Department is faced with the need for more cash for its forced academisation plans, that has raised perfectly reasonable concerns. It is therefore imperative that we have more detail on both the funding formula and the funding underpinning the recent academisation announcement, so that we can see whether the amount of transitional funding available will be adequate to mitigate the costs of the changes.

[*Nic Dakin*]

The indicative modelling carried out by London Councils suggests that the Government would need to increase the direct schools grant by about £521 million, a figure alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North, to protect completely all schools—not just schools in London—in local authorities that would lose money under the national funding formula. So £500 million is being made available, and the modelling suggests that £521 million a year is required to ensure that no school will be worse off. A lot of Members have talked about levelling up, rather than levelling down.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) made the last contribution to the debate. He reminded us, in his usual highly eloquent style, that the greatest disparity is between funding for pupils in the state system and pupils in the private system. I agree with him that nothing should happen that is to the detriment of any pupils in the state system. We should aspire to match the best anywhere in the world. He alluded to the programme for international student assessment league tables and, in his inimitable fashion, said, “Don’t muck about with the alchemy in London.” I think that is the phrase of the debate. We should be careful what we muck about with as we take this forward.

To be fair, I think the Government are taking their plans forward carefully at the moment. There are things they could do more carefully in the light of this debate. I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to give us his view on the levelling-up approach. Given the dramatic rise in standards under Labour’s London Challenge and investment in schools in the capital and across the country, is the Minister concerned that taking away funds from London schools will impact on results and outcomes? That concern has been echoed by Members across the Chamber.

I have one helpful suggestion—I am a helpful chap—for the Minister to consider as part of the ongoing consultation. The Secretary of State’s plan to force all good and outstanding schools to become academies against their wishes is estimated to cost £1.3 billion. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) said very succinctly, that is poor value for the taxpayer, and I tend to agree. Nobody wants this forced academy programme—certainly not the Minister’s Back Benchers, and certainly not local Conservative councillors. If Ministers dropped this plan, they would have more cash to play with to help deliver a truly fair funding formula. That would have the dual benefit of helping to deliver a manifesto commitment and leaving Education Ministers to focus their energy and effort on the things that really matter to parents and communities, without being distracted by an unhelpful row over forced academisation. Instead, Ministers would be able to tackle the real problems of place planning, teacher supply and exam chaos.

Labour supports fairer funding, but as always, the devil will be in the detail, and the jury is still out on whether there will be adequate mitigation in the system that this Government are bringing forward.

6.36 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr Sam Gyimah):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) for securing this important debate, and I commend all the contributions,

which have been hugely informative about education funding. As constituency MPs and parents, the subject is close to all our hearts.

For our country to grow stronger, fairer, wealthier and more secure, we need good schools and a well-educated population. Investing in education is an investment in the future of our children and our nation as a whole. That is why the Department is committed to delivering educational excellence everywhere—not just in London, but everywhere in the country—so that irrespective of where a child grows up, they can expect the best education possible.

There is no doubt that we are investing in education. The spending review confirmed a real-terms protection for the core schools budget. Throughout this Parliament, the money available for our schools will increase as pupil numbers increase. This will mean more than £40 billion next year, including pupil premium funding worth £2.5 billion a year targeted at the most disadvantaged pupils. That is also protected and will be maintained at current rates.

The right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) made the point about who had been engaged in making the case for funding reform. He is normally assiduous and careful in how he puts his points across, but on this occasion I would like to disabuse him of the notion that the cross-party F40 group has somehow had special access. I met a range of stakeholders both before and during the consultation, including the Local Government Association, while London councils have met either me or my officials in the Department, and that will continue. I have also met a number of Members of all parties to discuss specific funding needs in their constituencies, and I have a number of union representatives on speed dial as far as this issue is concerned.

**Stephen Timms:** I do not think that the Minister would deny that there have been many discussions. I read out a list of the dates of the meetings, set out on the F40 website, between F40 representatives and the Department. I think he would accept that there has been much more discussion with that particular group than there has been with the others to which he has referred.

**Mr Gyimah:** Ministers cannot be criticised on the one hand for not listening, and then be criticised on the other for listening too much. The truth is that my door is always open, and I am happy to meet whoever knocks on my door to discuss the issues as often as is necessary to address them.

There is an important need to address the funding system. There is a risk that the current system will not deliver the outcomes that we want for our children. For too long, schools have struggled with funding systems that are both unfair and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst suggested, opaque. The amount of money that schools receive is now an accident of history, not a reflection of the needs of their pupils or of children.

Local populations have changed over the past decade. For example, the proportion of children receiving free school meals in Manchester has fallen by 31% since 2005, while in Blackpool it has increased by 19%. However, schools funding has not kept up. The distribution of funding today cannot reflect the needs of our children



if it has not changed in more than 10 years. The key question is not about levelling up or levelling down; it is about whether funding is addressing the individual needs of children.

The impact of the current funding system is hugely unfair. Let me look closer to home for the benefit of those who have spoken today. A child who is sent to school in Bexley will attract £4,635, but in next-door Greenwich, that suddenly becomes £6,020. Different local authorities also make different decisions about how to fund their schools. In 2015, Brent chose not to allocate any funding to pupils receiving free school meals, whereas Ealing chose to allocate nearly £1,700 to each primary pupil in exactly the same position.

We are committed to fixing that. I am proud to say that last month we launched the consultation referred to by the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), on new, fair, national funding formulas for schools and high needs. Our aims are clear, and I hope that Members in all parts of the House will agree that they are worthy. We want to create a formula that is fair, objective, transparent and simple. It should be clear how much funding is following each pupil, and that should be the same wherever they are in the country. Headteachers or academy trusts should know that if they move to take over underperforming schools, no matter where they are, their budgets will be fair and their schools will have the opportunity to excel.

Allocation is also important. We must allocate funding for high-needs provision, which has not been dwelt on today, on a fair and transparent basis. For too long, funding allocations have varied without reason. Parents and children with high needs deserve to know that the funding they require will be there, irrespective of where they choose to live. They deserve that security; they deserve that equality.

**Robert Neill:** I am grateful for what the Minister is saying. Will he assure me that he will present direct proposals to deal with the issue that was raised by our friend and colleague Councillor David Simmonds on behalf of the Local Government Association—the need to protect the high-needs element within any new arrangement for the formula?

**Mr Gyimah:** As my hon. Friend knows, what has taken place so far is the first stage of our consultation. The next stage will come up with detailed allocations for local authorities, but it will also make clear how each block within the dedicated schools grant would function within the system, and will certainly take account of my hon. Friend's concerns about the high-needs block.

**Stephen Timms:** Will the Minister pay particular attention to the question of whether the schools block should include, as many have argued today, an element that would recognise the mobility within local authorities that we have been discussing?

**Mr Gyimah:** That is an important point. We will, of course, consider how the issue of mobility can best be addressed in the funding system. There are a number of ways of doing that, but it is certainly a priority in our determination of the new formula, along with in-year growth, population growth and so forth.

Despite the clear principles behind our national funding formula, there are still some myths about the potential impact on London, some of which we have heard about today. I want to take the opportunity to put those myths to bed. There is, for instance, the myth that the national funding formula is about London versus the rest of the country. There are two grounds on which that is simply wrong. First, the funding formula will deliver fairness to all parts of the country, whether they are urban or rural, shire or metropolitan, north or south. Secondly, London is not a homogenous area. At this moment, a parent who moved just a few miles from Haringey to Hackney—this point was made by the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West)—would increase the funding for their child by £1,000. We heard about areas such as Croydon—the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) made an interesting speech in this respect—that are struggling to recruit teachers because they cannot pay as much as better funded areas just up the road. We need a fairer funding system within London, just as much as we do across the whole country.

The second myth I want to dispel relates to funding for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, on which the right hon. Member for East Ham wanted a specific answer. I hope I can assure him that where pupils have additional needs, we will provide extra funding. This is a fundamental principle of the national funding formula to ensure that such pupils can overcome entrenched barriers to success.

**Ruth Cadbury:** I thank the Minister for his willingness to listen and the depth of his investigation into all the different issues around the funding formula. In the context of disadvantaged pupils, he just talked about “additional needs”. What does he mean by that? Is he talking about special needs or the issues that Opposition Members have been raising about the inherent disadvantages experienced by children living on very low incomes in many of our communities?

**Mr Gyimah:** The hon. Lady raises a good point. I am talking about additional needs in both respects, and during my speech I will address them. Obviously, some additional needs are addressed within the school system, and some within the high-needs block, but I will touch on both of those.

As our recent consultation made clear, the formula should contain a significant element of additional funding for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, and there should be funding on top of the basic per-pupil amount for pupils on free school meals, pupils with low prior attainment and pupils who speak English as an additional language. The higher the level of need in a school, the higher the funding will be. I could not be clearer on this point, and anyone who engaged with the consultation will have seen that set out in black and white.

Some have suggested that the national funding formula will not take into account the higher costs faced by schools in London. Again, our proposals could not be clearer. We consulted on a proposal for an area cost adjustment—a general increase for schools facing extra costs from higher wages—which will be important for schools in London. Our second consultation will detail exactly how this would work.

[Mr Gyimah]

The final myth I would like to address is that so-called cuts in London will undo the huge improvement in standards in recent years. Schools in London have improved tremendously in recent years. It is testament to the hard work of teachers, headteachers, pupils and their parents. There are schools up and down the country, however, that are still getting excellent results in spite of the funding system, not because of it. The national funding formula will put funding where it is needed, so that all schools have the best opportunity to deliver a world-class education for their pupils.

As hon. Members have made clear, London's schools are thriving and continue to thrive. Moreover, in the last 10 years, the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals has dropped from 27% to 18%, and the number of pupils living in highly deprived areas has also dropped dramatically, but of course challenges remain. The funding system will recognise the challenges in London. That is why London will continue to benefit from the pupil premium, receiving £436 million this year—nearly 20% of the total across the country. This is vital. We can see excellent examples across London of pupil premium funding being used to ensure that disadvantaged students receive the best opportunities for their education.

As for future funding, as I have said, we will publish proposals on the details for schools and high needs in the second consultation. In the meantime, hon. Members will understand why it would not be appropriate for me to speculate on the specific impacts of the new formula in London; suffice it to say that the new formula will reflect the responses to the consultation, rather than the specific requests made by the cross-party F40 group. The consultation so far has been very important, because there were several issues on which we needed answers in order to do the detailed modelling.

**Mr Steve Reed:** I understand why the Minister cannot give more detailed responses now, but will he agree to meet officers of the all-party group for London, when we reach the next phase, to go into more detail, when the information is available, so that we can discuss with him whether it meets the concerns raised in this debate?

**Mr Gyimah:** I would be delighted to meet the all-party group to discuss these issues before, during and after the consultation.

We still have a big and difficult job ahead of us. Reorganising £40 billion of schools funding is not an easy task, and it is one that we should carry out carefully and thoughtfully. We need to think through the transitions, as the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) so eloquently said. I continue to find encouragement from the wide support that exists for these reforms across the country, throughout the sector and between political parties. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst for putting this matter on the agenda again in the Chamber. Providing educational excellence everywhere is a key part of our mission, and it is something that we need to do very carefully. After all, this is about this country's future. A number of important points have been raised in the debate, and they will be reflected in the consultation and in the formula. I look forward to engaging with Members across the House to ensure that we have fairer funding for all our schools and all our children.

**Mr Speaker:** I know that the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) will make a brief wind-up speech. Even though he is a distinguished lawyer, if on this occasion he could confine himself to the norm of two or three minutes, we would all be greatly delighted, especially those who are waiting to present petitions and the Member who has the Adjournment debate. So the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst really just has an opportunity to clear his throat.

6.52 pm

**Robert Neill:** Thank you for giving me that time, Mr Speaker. I should like to thank all Members who have participated in the debate, and to thank the Backbench Business Committee for making it possible. This has been a constructive debate. It is not always necessary to approach these subjects in a partisan fashion, although there have been some partisan speeches. If we strip out the rhetoric, however, we find key issues on which there is common ground, as the Minister and the shadow Minister recognised. I am grateful to the Minister for his assurances about meeting the group and about taking on board some of the key issues that have been flagged up around the high-needs element, mobility, which is particularly important, special educational needs, and cost pressures and cost adjustment. He will know that the devil is in the detail, and his willingness to engage with members of the group is appreciated. This is obviously an important issue, and it was therefore important to ventilate it on the Floor of the House before the consultation finished. I am grateful to all Members for their help.

**Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con):** That was succinct.

**Mr Speaker:** It was extremely succinct. We are greatly indebted to the hon. Gentleman.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes the Government's intention to implement a new funding formula for schools from April 2017; welcomes the Department for Education's commitment to hold a detailed consultation on this proposal; calls on the Government to recognise the unique challenges schools in London face; and further calls on the Government to ensure that any changes to the funding model are both fair and proportionate to London's needs.

## PETITIONS

### Children's Centre Services in Corby

6.52 pm

**Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con):** I rise to present a petition relating to children's centre services in Corby which has the support of more than 1,700 people. Children's centres mitigate many of the challenges faced by children in Corby, and their services are relied on by many local families.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Corby and the surrounding areas, Declares that children in Corby statistically fair worse in education, income levels, life expectancy and health than children in many other parts of the UK; further that Children's Centres mitigate these challenges; further that many families in Corby depend upon the services provided by their local Children's Centre; further that Northamptonshire County Council is proposing to cut the budget of Corby's Children's Centre services by 25%;

further that these additional funding cuts are unfair and indefensible; and further that an online petition on this matter has been signed by over 1,700 individuals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage Northamptonshire County Council to stop their proposed funding cuts of 25% to the budget of Corby's Children's Centre services.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001689]

### Bowel Cancer Screening

6.53 pm

**Caroline Ansell** (Eastbourne) (Con): I rise to present a petition on the subject of bowel cancer screening in the names of Lauren, Peter, David and Scott Backler. My constituent, Lauren Backler, lost her mum to bowel cancer, the second most common cancer in terms of the number of lives it takes each year. She was only 56, which meant she was too young to be part of the screening process in England, although not in Scotland, where screening starts at the age of 50. There is public demand for the screening age in England to be brought into line with that of Scotland, as has been evidenced by the online petition in Lauren's name which has now gathered more than 216,000 signatures. In a Westminster Hall debate on this subject, the Minister recognised the significant level of parliamentary interest in the matter.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the age at which bowel cancer screening is offered by the NHS is too high at 60 years old, with up to 6,000 people in their 50s diagnosed with the condition each year; further that, when bowel cancer is diagnosed in its later stages, the five-year survival rate is 7%, compared to 97% when caught early; and further that an online petition on this matter has been signed by over 163,000 individuals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Health to consider the case for lowering the age of bowel cancer screening in England to the age of 50, in line with the screening age in Scotland.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001690]

## Taxi Licensing Regulations

*Motion made, and Question proposed*, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Kris Hopkins.*)

6.55 pm

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for ensuring that I was able to have this debate today, not least because I raised the matter at business questions last Thursday before I had seen the email that had already arrived from your office informing me that this date had been allocated. I do not know whether it is the curse of Andrew Gwynne, but the last time I applied for and was successful in securing an Adjournment debate, it was on the last day before a recess. This time, it is on the day before the local elections. Nevertheless, it is a great opportunity to raise a matter of importance on the Floor of the House.

I should start by declaring an interest in that my wife, Councillor Allison Gwynne, is the cabinet member for environmental services, which includes taxi licensing, at Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council. It was on a visit with her to the excellent taxi licensing department at Tameside during the February recess that people at the office raised with me some concerns about the operation of the current legislation.

The licensing of taxis and private hire vehicles, drivers and operators has been a function of local authorities in England and Wales for over 350 years. Local authorities are expected to run a licensing regime that ensures that fare-paying members of the public are carried comfortably and safely in vehicles that are suitable and roadworthy by drivers who are trustworthy and responsible. The legislation governing taxi and private hire licensing is quite old, but each local authority can determine its own policies and licence conditions to ensure that the taxi and private hire trade suits its area and its residents.

Long before the invention of the motor vehicle, it was recognised that drivers of public hire, horse-drawn carriages held a uniquely trusted position. Members of the public, who were often vulnerable and alone, got into their vehicles and were effectively at the mercy of the driver for the duration of the journey. The first hackney carriage licences were issued in London in 1662 in response to a rapid increase in the numbers of for-hire coaches and coachmen plying the streets for work. They were causing congestion, and fights over fares were a regular occurrence, and it was recognised that a number of the coachmen were undesirable characters who were likely to pose a risk to their passengers.

Further legislation was introduced over time, and local authorities now issue licences under two key pieces of legislation. The first is the Town Police Clauses Act 1847. It governs the licensing of hackney carriages, which are public hire vehicles that can ply for trade by driving around until they are flagged down by a member of the public or can wait for passengers at taxi ranks. The second piece of legislation is the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, which governs the licensing of private hire vehicles, drivers and operators. Private hire vehicles cannot ply for hire or wait at ranks; they can only pick up passengers who have pre-booked the journey via a licensed private hire operator.

The two-tier system brings many complications. Members of the public, and even some members of the taxi trade, often become confused by the differences between the

[Andrew Gwynne]

two regimes and how the legislation is applied. In addition to the two separate, distinct pieces of legislation and the two types of vehicles, local authorities are also able to impose their own separate, additional policies and conditions that apply to the vehicles, drivers and operators licensed in their area. That is why in some authorities, such as Tameside and Stockport, which cover my constituency, we will see only London-style black cabs being used as hackney carriages. In other boroughs and council areas, we will see all manner of saloons, hatchbacks and other standard vehicles being used as hackney carriages as well as private hire vehicles. Some areas require drivers to pass a driving test, an English language test, a local knowledge test and courses on how to behave appropriately, whereas other areas simply require a driving licence and a Disclosure and Barring Service check. In addition, the Transport Act 1985 allows local authorities the option of retaining or removing a limit on the number of—

7 pm

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).*

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Kris Hopkins.)*

**Andrew Gwynne:** As I was saying, in addition the Transport Act 1985 allows local authorities the option of retaining or removing a limit on the number of hackney carriage licences they issue. Prior to 1985, local authorities could simply set a limit on the number of hackney carriage licences they issued. That meant the licences became an asset, with a monetary value; nobody could simply apply for a hackney carriage licence if the limit had been reached, so the only way to obtain one was by purchasing the rights to a licence from an existing licence holder. Values of hackney carriage licences reached £30,000 or more—for the rights to the licence only; that did not include the vehicle.

The 1985 Act required local authorities either to remove their limit on hackney vehicle licences, de-restricting numbers, or to justify keeping a limit by holding an “unmet demand survey” every three years. The survey would assess the demand for hackneys in the council area and adjust—or increase—the set limit by the required number. In councils that retained a limit on hackney numbers, hackney licences—the plates—retained their value, and to this day taxi owners in these areas still view the value of their plates as an asset that they can cash in at some stage in the future by selling the plates on. In councils that removed their limit, the hackney trade was simply allowed to find its own level. There is only a certain amount of demand for hackney carriages, and, theoretically, hackney vehicle numbers will self-limit, because of the demand, or otherwise, for hackney carriages in each local authority area.

Since the existing hackney legislation was introduced in 1847, hackney carriages have always been able to carry out pre-booked work in the same way as private hire vehicles. Hackney carriage drivers can supplement their income by hiring a radio or PDA—personal digital assistant—from a private hire operator and carrying out private hire work alongside all the other private hire vehicles and drivers. The legislation also currently allows vehicles licensed as hackney carriages in one area to carry out pre-booked private hire work anywhere else in

England and Wales, apart from in London and, bizarrely, Plymouth, which are covered by separate pieces of legislation. This is not a loophole or a fiddle, but something that has always been permitted; it is not expressly prohibited by the existing legislation.

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 introduced legislation that, for the first time, governed private hire vehicles, drivers and operators, and set the legal parameters within which these vehicles were allowed to operate. This legislation did not affect the ability of hackney carriages to carry out pre-booked work anywhere in the country, because in 1976 all authorities had limits on the number of hackney licences, so there was no huge problem with hackney carriages working “cross-border”. There was always sufficient work for hackneys within their own boroughs and counties, and they were therefore not tempted to move to another authority to pick up additional work.

The introduction of the 1985 Act did not have a massive effect at first; a few local authorities removed their restriction on hackney numbers, but most kept the limit. Over time this has changed, and many more authorities have removed the limit, but matters only started coming to a head in the mid-2000s. The problems started in the north-east of England. In 2006, Newcastle City Council noticed that a number of their private hire drivers and owners left the authority and obtained hackney vehicle licences from the neighbouring borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed, as it did not impose a limit on hackney numbers and its procedures for obtaining licences were much easier than those set out in Newcastle. In two years, the number of hackney licences issued by Berwick rose from 42 to 672. The vast majority of those vehicles were owned by people who lived in Newcastle and used their vehicles for private hire work in Newcastle. For Newcastle City Council, there were a number of problems. First, officers from Newcastle had no powers to deal with complaints or issues involving Berwick vehicles and drivers. Only the licensing borough’s offices can deal with matters relating to their vehicles and their drivers.

Secondly, Newcastle had lost the ability to regulate numbers and, thirdly, there were more serious concerns that the much stricter policies and conditions imposed by Newcastle on its hackney and private hire fleet were being undermined by the influx of Berwick-licensed vehicles and drivers who were regulated by much less strict policies and conditions.

The matter went to court via a judicial review, which was heard in the High Court. The judge in that case, although sympathetic to the issues raised by Newcastle City Council, stated that Berwick-licensed vehicles and drivers were operating entirely within the relevant legislation and were doing nothing illegal.

That is now pertinent to Greater Manchester, because, although all 10 of the Greater Manchester metropolitan boroughs have fairly stringent rules and regulations in place governing who can and cannot apply for hackney licences, there is a problem in that a neighbouring authority across the county boundary in Lancashire is issuing quite a large number of hackney licences. We are now seeing those licence holders operating within Greater Manchester. I am referring to Rossendale, which is a small Lancashire district council. About a decade or so ago, following the Berwick judgment, the number of applications for hackney carriage and vehicle and driver licences started to increase in that particular authority.

At that time—I appreciate that things have changed—Rossendale’s standards were less restrictive than those of the 10 Greater Manchester metropolitan boroughs. It did not, for example, require applicants to pass an English language test or a local knowledge test. It also had much less restrictive conditions for hackney vehicles. It would, in effect, license almost all types of vehicles—saloons, estates and hatchbacks and so on—as hackney vehicles. Its age limits for vehicles were more relaxed and vehicles were tested to a lower standard than that of the Greater Manchester boroughs.

Previously, those policies and conditions had been fine for a small borough such as Rossendale, but it started to become apparent that the owners and drivers of these cabs were not in fact using the vehicles in that particular local authority. They were using them as private hire vehicles in other local authorities—indeed, lots of other local authorities. They started appearing in other Lancashire boroughs first: Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley and Hyndburn. They then started popping up in Greater Manchester boroughs: Oldham, Rochdale, Bury, Central Manchester, Tameside and Stockport. By 2015, Rossendale was issuing approximately 2,500 hackney vehicle licences a year and more than 3,000 hackney driver licences. By comparison, Tameside council currently has 150 hackney carriages and 450 private hire vehicles. To put that into context, the population of Tameside is around 221,000, and Rossendale has a population of fewer than 70,000 residents. It is clear what is going on.

As I have already said, no law is being broken. Rossendale-licensed vehicles are allowed to operate across almost the whole of England, and indeed that is what they do. They are working in Leeds, Bradford, Birmingham, Bristol and even Cornwall. There are large numbers of these vehicles operating in Greater Manchester, and licensing offices within Greater Manchester’s 10 boroughs are virtually powerless to deal with these vehicles and drivers. Some are known to have been refused licences for perfectly good reasons by the Greater Manchester local authorities.

In areas where policies and conditions are strict and high standards are required, the influx of out-of-county vehicles has been a particular problem. Members of the public regularly complain about poor standards of English and drivers who do not know the local area. Licensing officers and managers are concerned that their high standards are being seriously undermined, and there is particular concern in the light of what happened in Rochdale and Rotherham that child safeguarding could also be undermined.

To be fair, Rossendale has moved on that. For instance, the council has now adopted the Greater Manchester-approved convictions policy, which should ensure that its drivers are in future vetted to the same standards as drivers across Greater Manchester. In addition, Rossendale council has just introduced an intended use policy whereby, following the judgment in the Berwick case, it will now ask applicants whether they intend to use their vehicle within the borough of Rossendale and will refuse to grant a licence if the answer is no, but the policy will be slow to take effect as the council has given it a soft landing and it will not apply until 2017. Plus, if we do not change or tighten up the law, another council, if not this council or Berwick, will spot an income-generating opportunity in much the same way.

I want to turn briefly to the Law Commission report. The Minister will know that between 2013 and 2014, the Law Commission conducted a consultation on potential new taxi legislation in England and Wales. At the start of the consultation, it stated that it was looking to take a “clean sheet of paper” approach and potentially redesign the whole licensing regime from the ground up. Some early suggestions included removing the two-tier taxi licensing structure entirely and introducing a single national standard for vehicles and drivers.

The Law Commission was overwhelmed by the number of responses to the consultation, and the final report was far from the clean sheet approach that it promised. The final recommendations were, in fact, extremely watered down and seemed simply to be a re-write of the existing legislation with a few problems ironed out. Since publication of the report, it seems to have been shelved and no further proposals for changes to legislation have emerged, apart from two small ones that were introduced in October 2015 via the Deregulation Act 2015. The first was that drivers’ licences should last for three years and operators’ licences for five years, and the second was that operators should now be allowed to sub-contract bookings to operators in other councils.

I want to be positive in the last few minutes of my speech and give examples of how we might be able to deal with the issue. I have a number of ideas. First, I suggest that there could be a requirement that operators could operate only with vehicles and drivers licensed within their own council area. This would prevent out-of-council vehicles and drivers from working outside their licensed areas on other operating systems. Secondly, I suggest national standards for vehicles and drivers. If standards were consistent across the country, there would be no need for applicants to travel out of their council area looking for a more relaxed licensing regime. Thirdly, licensing officers could be given powers to deal with any licensed vehicle and driver, not just those vehicles and drivers licensed within their own council area. Fourthly, could the Minister consider making changes through the buses Bill? That might seem an odd piece of legislation to choose, so let me explain to the Minister why I think that it is pertinent.

Over the past few years in Greater Manchester we have seen a number of evening and bank holiday bus services removed because the subsidy from Transport for Greater Manchester has been removed, but rather than leave communities isolated—this is quite an innovative idea—TFGM has produced something called Local Link, which is a local telephone number that any user within the old area of the bus service that has been removed, or when a bus is not running, can ring to get a private hire taxi cab. The taxi will come and pick the person up and take them door to door, so long as that is within roughly the same area as the old bus service that was withdrawn. Because of the small numbers of people concerned, that is cheaper than subsidising a bus service used by very few people.

However, TFGM is using private hire companies in Greater Manchester that may well employ private hire drivers and vehicles that were not licensed by any of the 10 Greater Manchester authorities, and that raises some concerns for the travelling public. There might be an opportunity at least to give Greater Manchester additional

[Andrew Gwynne]

regulatory powers in that respect through the legislation that I hope we will be pleased to see in the Queen's Speech next week.

Lastly, I want to give a quick plug for guide dogs. I have worked with the charity Guide Dogs, which told me in advance of this debate that as the law stands, drivers who refuse to take passengers accompanied by guide dogs can face a modest fine through the courts, but not necessarily a revocation of their licence. It would be entirely up to the issuing authority whether such drivers were able to continue operating and, as we have heard, the issuing authority does not have to consider the interests of the population in whichever area the driver was operating.

To sum up, I hope the Minister will agree with the points that I have raised this evening. Privately, I am sure that he will agree that the taxi licensing regime is drastically outdated. I implore him to get his skates on and have his Department respond in full to the Law Commission report on taxi licensing. Let us sort out the problems that we face in Greater Manchester, and let us sort out the guide dogs issue too.

7.16 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) on securing the Adjournment debate this evening. I know that the topic of taxi and private hire licensing issues has been covered in previous debates in the House. Colleagues are very interested in the subject, but I doubt whether many colleagues could match the historical knowledge that the hon. Gentleman brought to the debate this evening.

As hon. Members will appreciate, although the Government are responsible for creating the legislative framework within which local licensing authorities license taxis and private hire vehicles, responsibility for licensing rests with the local authority. It is the local authority's responsibility to decide who is a suitable person to hold a taxi or private hire vehicle driver's licence or a private hire operator's licence. The local authority is responsible for ensuring that all its licensees comply with the rules and regulations that govern their industry.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's desire to raise on the Floor of the House his concerns about what is happening locally in his area—he obviously has an inside track on the situation in his council—but as licensing is the responsibility of the local authority, I may not be able to address all his points.

Let me start by emphasising the importance of the taxi and private hire vehicle industry. The traditional taxi has become an icon of passenger transport in the UK and around the world. The taxi industry has played a key role in keeping Britain moving for many years, and has a history and reputation that drivers are rightly proud of. The UK's taxi industry is recognised as one of the best in the world. All the vehicles are of a high standard and are driven by skilled and knowledgeable drivers. I admire the time and dedication that prospective drivers put into becoming taxi drivers—perhaps most famously London cabbies, who have to learn the world-famous “knowledge” of London. That brings the reward of having the unique right to ply for hire on the streets.

In the 1960s, minicabs began to appear in London and the private hire vehicle industry began growing across the UK. Licensing and regulation have ensured that when using such services the public have the same assurance of safety as when using a taxi, and have raised standards throughout the private hire sector. As of March 2015, there were 242,200 licensed taxi and private hire vehicles in England—an increase of 9.3% in just two years—and 69% of those vehicles are private hire vehicles. The availability of taxis and private hire vehicles offers the public real choice: they can instantly hire a taxi in the street or at a taxi rank, or they can pre-book a taxi or a private hire vehicle. When pre-booking, passengers can make an informed choice based on factors such as price, availability and quality. The combination of taxi and private hire ensures that the needs of as many customers as possible can be met.

**Andrew Gwynne:** If a licensing authority such as Tameside or Stockport in my constituency decides for perfectly legitimate reasons that somebody is unsuitable to be a taxi operator in its area, should it not have the power to enforce that to prevent that person from getting a licence from another local authority and operating on the streets of Tameside or Stockport?

**Andrew Jones:** I am coming to cross-border working and licensing. We have had some terrible cases across the country, which have clearly shown that the system has failed in certain areas. We all know these cases, and they are positively shocking.

The industry is seeing real change as new technology provides new ways for the public to engage taxis and private hire vehicles. Smartphone booking apps are now available for taxis and private hire vehicles, offering passengers easy access to services, more choice, faster pick-ups and options for sharing, which can reduce cost. It is encouraging that the London taxi trade has been at the forefront of that technological change. There are now numerous smartphone apps for booking a taxi, and more drivers are embracing cashless payment options. However, that new technology is challenging the traditional operating boundaries between the taxi and private hire trades. That is straining the relationship between local authorities and the industry, but by working in partnership they can deliver a modern industry that continues to provide choice and high standards.

I would like to say a few words about an issue that is particularly important to me. The Government are committed to building transport networks that work for everyone, ensuring that disabled people have the same access to services, and the same opportunities to travel, as other members of society. Disabled people are heavily reliant on buses and particularly on taxis and private hire vehicles, which are critical. That is why the Government intend to commence sections 165 and 167 of the Equality Act 2010 this year. That will impose duties on the driver of a taxi to accept and assist a wheelchair user and not to charge extra for doing so.

I would also like to mention the Government's ongoing work to improve air quality and reduce emissions in the taxi and private hire sector. In March 2015 the Government launched a £20 million scheme to support the roll-out of ultra-low-emission taxis across the UK. A further £25 million was set aside specifically for the Greater London area, to help taxi drivers cover the cost of

upgrading to a greener vehicle. Our aim is for almost every car and van to be a zero-emission vehicle by 2050. The transition to ultra-low-emission taxis is especially important to help improve air quality in our towns and cities.

The hon. Gentleman made specific points about working across areas, and I would like to address those now. The issue involves taxis and private hire vehicles licensed in one area working in another. I appreciate the concern here, but while standards vary between authorities, all taxis and private hire vehicles and their drivers should have been licensed by their home authority, thereby ensuring that the driver is a fit and proper person and that the vehicle is safe.

Local licensing authorities have a duty to ensure that any person to whom they grant a taxi or PHV licence is a fit and proper person to hold such a licence. The term “fit and proper” is not defined in legislation, but the procedure for assessing a driver’s fitness will typically involve criminal record and medical checks. In an instance where a driver commits an offence in a jurisdiction in which he is not registered, the local authority where the offence was committed can prosecute.

The points raised about protecting more vulnerable users are incredibly important in this regard. Some of the cases we have seen in different parts of the country are shocking. I therefore take this opportunity to address the issue of child sexual exploitation related to the taxi and private hire vehicle industry. Let me start by reiterating the Government’s commitment to eradicating the risk to children and vulnerable people from taxi and minicab drivers who seek to abuse their position of trust. I would also like to make it clear that local authorities are responsible for background and safety checks on all employees, including drivers, who work with children and vulnerable people. They have a duty of care to ensure that young people are protected.

The Government expect those who exercise licensing functions routinely to use the powers available to them to keep young people safe. We encourage all local authorities to carry out an enhanced criminal record check on everyone who applies to drive taxis and minicabs. We want to ensure that our licensing arrangements provide the strongest possible protection to children and vulnerable people. We are drawing on lessons learnt in Oxfordshire, Rotherham and other places. I know that there is currently a very topical issue in Lancashire in a neighbouring authority. We are drawing on these lessons to reform and strengthen the law. I have been meeting Home Office Ministers and will continue to work on this.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the Law Commission. The Law Commission undertook a very comprehensive review and published its final report, which contained recommendations for a modern and simplified structure. The legislation that governs this industry goes back hundreds of years and is convoluted. The Law Commission’s report provided not only crucial analysis of the problems posed by the current law but solutions designed to make a difference to the travelling public

and to those who work in the industry, either from a driving or a licensing perspective. As a Government, we are considering the Law Commission’s recommendations. I recognise the hon. Gentleman’s point about getting a move on with this. That is very timely, as we are working on it. I cannot yet give him a date for when the scrutiny will be complete. We will respond as soon as we can, and I recognise the requirement to do so.

The hon. Gentleman raised other points that I will mention briefly. I am happy to take ideas from all sides as to how we can improve the service, but it might be quite restrictive to operate only within a council area—for example, in the airport taxi service market. There are some difficulties there. However, I am happy to consider all sorts of interesting ideas.

**Andrew Gwynne:** Will the Minister give way?

**Andrew Jones:** It will have to be very speedy.

**Andrew Gwynne:** One of the benefits of an area such as Greater Manchester is that it is a big city region, so perhaps we could have a specific regulatory framework for Greater Manchester taxis.

**Andrew Jones:** I am happy for local authorities to work together to set high standards in their areas, and there is nothing stopping them from doing so. We should all be seeking to raise standards.

The issue of Rossendale’s performance has been raised. I suggest that I write to Rossendale to highlight the concerns that Members have expressed and make sure that it is aware of them. There are quite significant differences between the fees charged in Rossendale for a licence and those charged in Greater Manchester. That might reflect the different standards. It might also reflect the bulk purchasing that Rossendale may be able to do because it processes so many applications. In any case, I will raise the issues with Rossendale and come back to the hon. Gentleman when I get its reply.

The Government are fully aware of the changes and challenges affecting the taxi and private hire vehicle industry across the country, including in and around Denton and Reddish. There are the challenges not only of new technology and increased competition but of the need to ensure that vehicles play their part in improving air quality and accessibility. I believe the reputation of the British taxi trade to be high, and the quality of service it can offer means that it should be well placed to continue to compete in this changing market and have a strong and healthy future. Taxis are an important part of the transport mix in all areas. It is now our responsibility to make sure that they have the regulatory regime among local councils to ensure that they can continue to ply their trade profitably, but securely, for the people whom they serve.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.29 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Westminster Hall

Wednesday 4 May 2016

[MR DAVID NUTTALL *in the Chair*]

## The Gulf

9.30 am

**Charlotte Leslie** (Bristol North West) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK relations with the Gulf.

I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. In recent months, I have been lucky enough to go on two trips, to the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

For many years to come, any debate on the middle east such as this one will be prefaced by the phrase, "This could not be a more timely debate"—or at least until not a lot is going on in the middle east which, sadly, will not be any time soon. I am afraid that this debate, too, is particularly timely. Why? I could say economically, with the effects of the Iran deal to be seen in plummeting oil prices, making this a time of turmoil or of a renewables revolution for the region and all those who are linked with it.

I could say that it is a time for the west to be clearer to its historical allies about who its friends are. I could also argue for it to be a time to seize economic opportunities: in Dubai's Jebel Ali port; the London Gateway collaboration; Emirates' investment in London; and, we hope, the UAE's investment in Portsmouth—after my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), who has just taken her place, lobbied the rest of the delegates on a trip so excellently, but wearily, for UAE investment in her constituency.

I could also talk about security—Yemen, Syria, Iraq and the humanitarian crisis that such conflicts create, including their effect on Europe. This is a time to recognise the UAE's increased military activity and high-level capability, and the implications of that in the region.

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the UAE is a front runner in the area for use of airstrips and helping out the allies with their military air strikes against Daesh?

**Charlotte Leslie:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. We should be looking closely at how the UAE facilitates our shared battle against extremism, which I will talk about later.

I could also say that the debate is timely for social reasons. Amid human rights issues and questions about the role of Wahabism in extremism, Saudi Arabia has embarked on a time of enormous transition, against the backdrop of a changing Iran and an "Arab sprung"—now, rather, a perfect storm. I could also point to the little known role that the UAE plays in accommodating Syrian refugees. I will not say much about any of that, however, because I am sure my colleagues, such as my right hon. Friends the Members for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) and for Rutland and Melton

(Sir Alan Duncan), and many others present today, who have far more experience in the region than me, will cover those topics magnificently.

I want to talk about a path less trodden, starting with some lines from a musical. In Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's "Jesus Christ Superstar", a newly dead Judas accosts a soon-to-be-crucified Jesus with some slightly aggressive questions:

"Every time I look at You, I don't understand...why'd you choose such a backward time

In such a strange land?

If you'd come today

You could have reached the whole nation

Israel in four BC had no mass communication."

Those lines touch on something so fundamental to the Gulf and its politics that we cannot discuss the region without them. Yet western politics has such an inadequate currency of thought and language with which to discuss it: Islam and its values today.

Islam is a religion that is inseparable in its content from the Arab peninsula. In its own 1400s, it is now, perhaps, going through an enlightenment or reformation process that Christianity went through so brutally and bloodily in our own calendar's medieval period. This reformation, however, is happening with AK47s, global travel and the internet—"mass communication". As a result of global travel and mass communication, Islam's internal challenges are not only the problem of the Gulf and the middle east, because Islam is now a European religion, too, so its challenges are challenges for everyone.

The west has been very good at debating political solutions using political institutions, and security solutions using military equipment. None of that, however, touches on what is going on at the heart of the faith of Islam—things that have become either a victim of language inflation through abstract noun overuse, or remarkably unfashionable: values. The UAE ambassador to Russia, his excellency Omar Saif Ghobash, put it to me strikingly, "We are politicising our ethics, when we should be ethicising our politics."

In what could be called a western values vacuum, perhaps born of a bourgeois squeamishness about anything absolute in a relativist post-secular world, I have found that some of the most sophisticated understanding of extremism has come from the Gulf. In many ways that is not surprising, because Gulf nations have real skin in the game—the continuation of their very society in the face of the chaos around them.

Furthermore, Gulf nations are at home with, and understand in a way that the west finds hard to digest, the role of religion and faith and their values, as integral to politics and political thinking. For example, when I commented on the prevalence of conspicuous long-term thinking in the dialogue in the UAE, a Minister pointed out to me that it would be dishonourable for a leader not to leave a fine legacy of long-term thinking for the next generation. In Islam, the idea that man is here only for a season, and that it is his legacy that is important, is embedded in the way people think—a perfect of example of where political thinking and faith are inseparable.

We are used to discussing—it is right to do so—how emerging middle eastern societies can benefit from the experience of the west in forging relatively stable, free-speech societies that respect human rights. I know that colleagues will have that discussion. We are also used to debating

[Charlotte Leslie]

the military and economic collaborations that benefit both partners—I look forward to that discussion, too, and many Members present have great experience of that.

**Lady Hermon** (North Down) (Ind): Will the hon. Lady comment on and take the opportunity to pay tribute to President Obama, in his last months as President of the United States of America, given his long-term thinking about the Gulf region? What legacy has he left to that region?

**Charlotte Leslie:** I do not envy President Obama's role, given the legacy he was left with—a legacy of just how disastrous short-term and arrogant thinking can be, from the west invading Iraq. I was very against the Iraq war and, sadly, my preconceptions then, outside this place, can be testified to now. The ongoing role of America and the middle east's lack of trust in that country will be a challenge that we must all meet. I also pay tribute to the work of John Kerry in beginning to forge some kind of relationship there, which is extremely difficult.

Some of the most sophisticated understanding of extremism that I have come across was at the UAE Hedayah centre, which is dedicated to examining extremism and its causes. Hedayah has deconstructed several political common misconceptions: first, that extremism is simply born of poverty—it is not; it is about much more than only poverty. To equate ending extremism with simply ending poverty is misleading and dangerous.

After all, Sayyid Qutb, the Egyptian academic who inspired the takfiri thinking of al-Qaeda, was far from poor. I recommend anyone interested in the region and the birth of extremism to read him. His life and writings, from an early autobiography, "A Child from the Village", to his later, explosive and famous book, "Milestones", show that he felt isolated. A telling passage describes, in third person, his response to an event engraved on his adult consciousness. As a young boy, he spent just a day in a less progressive school than his usual one. He wrote, referring to himself:

"Our child's soul was filled with repugnance at everything that surrounded him. He felt bitter, abject loneliness."

Qutb's response? To become, at age six, in his own words, a "Missionary" in what he calls his progressive school's "struggle" against the less sophisticated school. That isolated and bitter, rather pampered and spoilt, primary school pupil later went as a student to America, where he felt even more isolated and bitter, and returned with a new struggle—as an Islamic extremist missionary. He attempted to execute Egypt's president, whom he saw as a traitor to Islam, was imprisoned and executed by Nasser in 1966 and has become a celebrated martyr of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Sayyid Qutb has been credited as the creator of takfiri Islam, which provides the convenient clause that if someone—even a fellow Muslim—does not think in the same way, they are no Muslim and can be killed. The story of that privileged man illustrates well the simple point made by the UAE Hedayah anti-extremism unit that it is not all about poverty. Those who join extremist groups seek something that is not so different from that sought by any human being: identity, community

and purpose. The mission, therefore, is how to provide something more attractive than Daesh that meets the needs of disaffected—often young—people. A way out of poverty is doubtless part of that, but we are completely wrong if we think that is the simple answer.

**Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): My hon. Friend says that extremism is not to do with poverty, but does she agree that it might be to do with underemployment? In some states, the nature of the economy means there is a large pool of young people who really do not have enough to do in terms of meaningful jobs.

**Charlotte Leslie:** Absolutely. That is a case for identifying illustrations of symptoms and their causes. Employment is crucial, because if someone is not employed, part of their identity—certainly their work community—and purpose is taken away. It is a manifestation of those things, but to understand what we are tackling we must understand the root underlying dynamics, of which my hon. Friend made the excellent point that unemployment, joblessness and poverty are a necessary part to understand, but not sufficient on their own.

The second reality Hedayah offered up was the prosaic observation that while tackling root ideology has a place, simply telling people strongly that their actions are wrong and that they should not do them is pretty useless—I will insert a quote from the "Life of Brian": "Don't do it again!"—and we cannot be surprised when that does not work. In a political world in which we can seldom find any initial response to atrocities such as those in Brussels and Paris other than to tell the perpetrators that we condemn them strongly, that rather unsurprising fact should be sobering.

Hedayah points out that for an individual to choose an alternative path, the alternative must match not only Daesh's offer of identity, community and purpose, but the practical reality of security and welfare. If Daesh promises security to a frightened man who wants to feed his children, a viable alternative needs to be more than a moral lecture. The insights from the Gulf help clarify what our response should be and what our challenge is in forging that alternative to Daesh: a value system, identity, community and purpose that competes on providing welfare and a sense of risk and achievement. How do we build that compelling and exciting muscular moderation?

There is then perhaps an even more difficult question. Who is the forceful, charismatic leader of that muscular moderation: the daddy, the Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Zarqawi, the bin Laden or the Sayyid Qutb? Who is the hero? Where is the leader in that new subversive movement that casts Daesh as the stale establishment and their hatred as weak and infantile and promotes a rebellious and resolute compassion for those who are different from oneself—even those who do not like us—as the strong and manly thing to do?

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Does she agree that in the middle east, and in the Gulf in particular, irrespective of the motivation of those of us in the west, we are almost always seen to be trying to impose some sort of external values? We need to see the intrinsic beliefs and views of the people in the region,

who need to show leadership to take their communities out of the morass into which many of those nations have sunk in recent years.

**Charlotte Leslie:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that good point. We often forget that the messenger is frequently more important than the message itself, because the message is fundamentally defined by who gives it. He makes a point that I will touch on later.

A third insight, which I found striking and relevant to our relations with the Gulf, was offered by His Excellency Dr Anwar Gargash, the UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. He talks of the dangers of a digital world, where

“my opinion has become my religion”.

That observation speaks not only to the role of the internet in spreading Daesh’s message—the mass communication that Tim Rice’s Judas so lamented the lack of—but to fundamental changes in digital technology that appear to have an effect on people’s thoughts. I have called that a change from cogito ergo sum, I think therefore I am, to sentio ergo sum, I feel therefore I am—or even to sentio ergo est, I feel therefore it is. In that, a person’s feeling dictates absolute truth.

As MPs, we have all seen—on social media in particular—that dangerous trend and false premise that says, “I am human. I think this. You do not think what I think. Therefore you are not human.” That is a seed of genocide and the beginning of a takfiri mentality that extends its blind intolerance way beyond the scope of Islam. We are beginning to see that in the hate diatribes of UK far-left groups who are sympathetic to Hamas, Hezbollah and other extremist terrorist groups. That is a slippery slope.

All those insights are from the hard end of battling extremism in the Gulf. It is easy for the west to forget that the majority of Daesh’s casualties are Muslim and that Daesh wants to punish nations such as the UAE for “poisoning” the sacred Arab peninsular with pluralism. It is also easy to forget that Sunni Gulf states are concerned about the rise of an emboldened Shi’a militia as Iran re-enters the global economy.

The response of the Gulf to extremism may provide a learning opportunity for Britain. What assessment has the Minister made of the UAE’s clampdown on extremist teaching in schools and of its policy towards registering imams in Mosques? Are there lessons to be learnt from that? More specifically, will he keep an open mind on Britain’s classification of the Muslim Brotherhood? That would be an extremely good way of working out whether they are moderate friends who can be engaged with on political terms and whether they will renounce the writings, teachings and celebrated martyrdom of Sayyid Qutb. If they refuse to do so, we may need to reassess urgently what we think of them in our political context. We cannot afford to be squeamish.

I have talked only about what Britain might learn from its relationship with the Gulf.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I have listened intently to the hon. Lady. Will she join me in asking the Minister to look at the human rights abuses in the UAE, where 27 Britons are currently detained? Some of

them have complained of torture and, indeed, I think that in the past five years 37 British nationals have made allegations of torture or mistreatment there.

**Charlotte Leslie:** I absolutely would ask the Minister that. I was going to say that—rather unusually—I have talked about what Britain can learn from the Gulf, because I know that Members such as the hon. Gentleman will be able to speak powerfully on other areas that we must look at.

It is easy to carp morally from the sidelines on issues such as human rights, which are a huge concern to us all, but that is not always the best way—it is seldom good at all—to achieve the practical change we want. I argue strongly that, if we want Gulf nations to improve their human rights and their freedom of speech, which essentially will improve their security far more effectively, the way to do that is to engage.

His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak al-Nahyan commented on how the UAE has achieved such pluralism while maintaining the Emiratis’ confident identity as rather conservative Muslims. This applies well to international relations and to the hon. Gentleman’s comments:

“Pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity...Pluralism is not simply tolerance, but the active quest for understanding along lines of difference...Pluralism demands dialogue...Dialogue does not mean everyone at the table will agree with one another”.

There is much on which we can engage with the UAE—I take the hon. Gentleman’s point on human rights—and much to work with from our history with Bahrain. I know that we will hear some fascinating first-hand observations from colleagues who have visited Saudi and other Gulf states.

I will finish by repeating a point that was made to me by the exceptional Minister of State for International Co-operation, her excellency Reem al-Hashimy, one of the incredibly impressive women Ministers in the highly conservative Muslim society of the UAE. She emphasised that the UAE could not “export” its pluralism to neighbours simply by preaching. It could demonstrate the possibility of such a pluralism within a conservative Muslim state only by doing. I hope the debate will be in some way instrumental in Britain’s continuing to meet the challenge that it shares with the Gulf states across our differences, by listening, talking, understanding and doing.

**Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair):** It is my intention that we will start the winding-up speeches at half-past 10. Nine Members have indicated that they want to contribute. I do not intend to implement a formal time limit at this stage, but I ask everyone to restrict their remarks to four minutes. Otherwise we will have to impose a formal limit.

9.50 am

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to be here under your chairmanship this morning, Mr Nuttall, to morally carp on the sidelines about human rights, as the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) put it. None the less, I congratulate her on securing the debate, because the topic is important and is perhaps not debated often enough.

I will not use my position as the only Labour Member in the debate to speak at length, but I want to make one or two points that I hope the Minister will have time to

[Andy Slaughter]

respond to. Last night I read again the Foreign and Commonwealth Office report “Human Rights and Democracy”, which was published last month. Although it is a slimmed down volume and in many respects weakens the Government’s commitments on human rights—at least in relation to the death penalty—it does include three Gulf countries among the countries of concern: Saudi, Bahrain and Yemen. It does not include the United Arab Emirates, which I think is a significant omission. The Minister may want to mention human rights in the UAE when he responds.

I am glad that the countries in question are what are now, I believe, called priority countries—another slightly euphemistic term. However, I am afraid the language that is used, particularly in relation to the Gulf states, does not match the seriousness of the human rights issue or the task that needs to be done. The Bahrain section of the report says

“there was progress on human rights”,

and mentions that the UK is providing “technical assistance”—which in some cases it is being paid for. We have just established a naval base in the country for the first time in decades. The report mentions that

“allegations of ill-treatment in detention continue”

and that there are concerns regarding

“freedom of speech and expression and peaceful assembly”.

However, little more is said than that.

As I mentioned, the report is entirely silent about the UAE, and that is regrettable. It is slightly more candid in relation to Saudi, particularly on the serious issue of executions, reminding us that 158 people were executed in 2015, which is a more than 15% increase on the previous year. On 2 January this year, 47 people were executed on one day, including three minors. There remain three minors on death row. They are Ali al-Nimr, Dawood al-Marhoon and Abdullah al-Zaher. Again, I ask the Minister, as I often do in written and oral questions, whether their cases have been raised again. I know that the Foreign Secretary has said he believes they will not now be executed, but in the light of what happened on 2 January and their continued detention, I cannot feel quite as assured as he does. Perhaps the Minister will respond on whether further representations have been made or whether there is further news.

Reports from Human Rights Watch, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Amnesty International show a rather more serious situation in Bahrain than the impression given by the Foreign Office. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has spoken of a clear realisation that

“little has been done in the fields of accountability and ending impunity, particularly in relation to violations committed against protesters and detainees, including alleged acts of torture”.

That has been going on since the Arab spring, five years ago, and there is continued oppression of the mainly Shi’a majority in Bahrain. There have been a number of deaths at the hands of the security forces. There was of course the notorious incident when medics who had treated those injured in protests were themselves tortured and prosecuted. Generally speaking, what the Bahrain Government have been best at is whitewashing what

has happened by setting up commissions whose recommendations are not implemented, and mounting an effective PR offensive.

I pay particular tribute to *The Independent* and *The Guardian*, which have sought to expose what happens in Bahrain. Headlines from the last couple of months include “Britain lobbied UN to whitewash Bahrain police abuses” and “British arms sales to Bahrain total £45m since Arab Spring—while claims of torture and oppression continue”. There is a lot more I could say about that, but I think the Minister gets the impression. I do not say, and have never said, that Gulf countries are, in either scale or degree, the worst offenders, but I do say that the Government operate a soft touch in dealing with such countries. We have just heard from the hon. Member for Bristol North West that it is often better to comment on such things in private, which I think is what the Foreign Office says about Saudi. I think it is right to raise them in private, but it is also right to speak out, and the Government have a moral obligation as an upholder of international human rights to do so.

**Sir Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is concentrating on human rights, but does he not attach any importance to the key role that the nations in question play in the battle against tyranny, and the long-standing support that they have given us and we have given them, historically? They are important allies of the United Kingdom and the hon. Gentleman is sending out the message that stability counts for nothing and that the only thing he is interested in is abuses by the authorities. I remind him that we have our own history. We took out 14 people on the streets of Northern Ireland. Does he regard that as a human rights abuse as well?

**Andy Slaughter:** I think you will forgive me, Mr Nuttall, if I do not stray into talking about Bloody Sunday this morning. The hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to make his points in his own way. I am simply setting out these matters, perhaps as a correction to others that will be raised this morning, and I think that is perfectly legitimate and reasonable. Of course we must have a relationship with countries overseas whose human rights records do not match our own, and of which we perhaps do not expect exactly the same standards. However, if the hon. Gentleman is saying we should not raise the issues, I cannot entirely agree with him.

To deal briefly with the UAE, the recent case of David Haigh, the former Leeds United managing director—[*Interruption.*] I am being heckled because I am taking some time. I will take a little more time. I said I would not speak for a long time, Mr Nuttall, but if I continue to be interrupted, perhaps I shall speak for rather longer. We will see where that goes. I think, particularly given that the Foreign Office did not address the matter in its human rights report, that it is worth putting it on record. Again, I will simply read some headlines. The first is from *The Law Society Gazette*: “Solicitor claims he was tortured in Dubai jail”. Another headline reads: “Businessmen held in UAE were tortured into confessions, says UN report”. I have mentioned the number of British nationals—37 in the last five years—who have made allegations of torture or mistreatment in detention in the UAE and the fact that there are 27 such detainees there at the moment.

I recently asked the Minister the following questions. Will the Prime Minister review the UK's special relationship with the UAE in the light of the report by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention calling on the UAE to release several foreign nationals, including from Canada and the US, who it says have been detained arbitrarily, tortured and forced to sign confessions? Will the Government confirm that no further Arab Partnership Participation Fund moneys will be allocated to the UAE by the Foreign Office until a review has been conducted in the light of the recent statement by UN special rapporteur on torture, Professor Juan E. Méndez? His office has received credible information that detainees were tortured and forced to sign confessions, and his request for a country visit to the UAE is outstanding.

I mentioned David Haigh, a former managing director of Leeds United who I think is a member of the Conservative party. He was recently released from a UAE prison and, on returning to the UK, said that he had suffered ill treatment and abuse:

"I was punched around, I was hit, I was tasered. People attempted to sexually abuse me. I now have a problem with my eyes. You are constantly kept in the dark...it damages your eyes." He was imprisoned, incidentally, under the cybercrimes law—a particularly Orwellian statute that criminalises electronic abuse. There are well-documented incidents of human rights violations in the UAE.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood)** *indicated dissent.*

**Andy Slaughter:** The Minister is shaking his head. Will he respond to those incidents?

**Mr Ellwood:** The reason I am shaking my head is that many other Members want to speak. They want to hear what the Minister and, indeed, the Opposition Front-Bench Members have to say on these matters. Your guidance was very clear, Mr Nuttall, on speeches being four minutes. I was shaking my head not about the substance of anything the hon. Gentleman is saying, but because he has now been speaking for 10 minutes.

**Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair):** I hear what the Minister has to say about the time limit. I am sure that the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) is about to draw his remarks to a swift conclusion. I am loth to impose a formal time limit but, reluctantly, that is what I will have to do. I look forward to hearing the final sentences of the hon. Gentleman's contribution very shortly.

**Andy Slaughter:** I will speak for half a minute on Yemen and then sit down, Mr Nuttall. I will just say, however, that I have been in Westminster Hall when Conservative Members have filibustered for an hour in order to prevent debates from taking place on issues of great importance to me. I do not intend to do that here. I do not think that a 10-minute speech for an Opposition Member is unreasonable, given the number of Government Members present.

Let me end by saying this. The Minister will be aware of the Select Committee on International Development report published today in relation to the need for an independent inquiry into what is happening in Yemen.

UAE and Saudi forces are engaged, with British advice and support, in the civil war in Yemen. It is clear to anybody who reads what is written by those reporting from inside that troubled country that war crimes are being committed and that there are breaches of international humanitarian law. Will the Minister agree to the Committee's recommendation of an independent investigation into what is happening in Yemen?

It is my view that we should have a suspension of arms sales to the countries engaged in that civil war, until it is demonstrated that breaches of international law are not happening. This country should not be complicit in matters of that kind and should certainly be asking for transparency in relation to what is happening in Yemen and, in particular, the involvement of other Gulf states in that country.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair):** Order. I will now impose a three-minute time limit on all speeches, so that we can hear from as many Back Benchers as possible.

10.3 am

**Sir Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Thank you, Mr Nuttall. I regret that we have seen two contrasting speeches this morning: one informed and thoughtful speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie), and one of an extraordinary lack of knowledge from the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), who I fear has travelled little to these areas. He may be able to read reports but knows almost nothing from his own experience. I declare my interest: I am chairman of the Conservative Middle East Council. I have taken an interest in the region for 30 years. I want to make, in the two or three minutes I have, one major point.

We are looking at a period of greater instability and danger than I think we have ever known. The last four decades have seen conflict, war and fluctuating oil prices, but never before, until the last five years, have we really seen countries completely falling to pieces. Now, around the region, entire countries are falling apart, and the centuries-old lines in the sand are disappearing. Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya—and, for a moment, it looked like Egypt, too—have been unstable and disrupted as never before. We have seen the rise of non-state fanatics and space ungoverned by legitimate and decent authority. Sunni and Shi'a difference has been polarised by the fall of the Shah and the revolution in Iran. In addition to countries being pitted against one another, we are now seeing them completely fall apart.

That leads me to the one point I want to make—one that is totally lost on the hon. Member for Hammersmith. Our watchword should be stability. It is very easy to criticise Gulf countries from the ignorant comfort of a British armchair. It is very easy to slip into prejudicial judgmentalism, but these countries need to be understood. Their particular social composition, their historical origin and the nature of their regimes need to be understood. I suggest that that understanding sits on the Government's side of the Chamber rather better than with the hon. Gentleman.

Our approach should be to hold the countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council together, to show respect and understanding and to work with them. Where

[Sir Alan Duncan]

would the world be if they were not there governing as they do? They would be replaced by something far worse.

In the 30 seconds I have left, I add that I am the Government's envoy to Yemen. I have been going to that country for 30 years. The hon. Gentleman has probably never visited it in his life. I have done so on a dozen or more occasions, and I look forward to continuing to work on the peace talks that are taking place in Kuwait at the moment. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will do its best to ensure that those peace talks are successful.

10.7 am

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. May I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing this debate? We are here to debate UK relations with the Gulf, but it will likely come as no surprise to the Minister that I would like to make use of my limited speaking time to focus largely on Saudi Arabia.

Although we maintain strong diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia, our values are ever more divergent. In 2016, it is legal for same-sex couples to marry across most of the UK. In 2016, Saudi Arabia remains one of only six countries to punish homosexuality with the death penalty. In the Saudi kingdom, women still need to be accompanied by a male guardian whenever they leave the house. Although 2016 marks 51 years since the abolition of the death penalty in Britain, we were all shocked at the start of the year by the brutal mass public executions of 47 people in Saudi.

Saudi Arabia is concurrently one of the world's most repressive states and one of our closest allies. It is clear that a relationship with Saudi is prized as being strongly in British interests, but at what cost? Concerns about British arms sales to Saudi still loom large, and they are concerns that I share. The ongoing Saudi operation in Yemen has seen a shocking number of civilian fatalities. In total, more than 6,000 people have been killed since Saudi Arabia launched a multinational campaign a little over a year ago. Around half of those deaths are estimated to be of civilians.

Although Saudi Arabia has argued that it is making every effort to avoid hitting civilian targets, the UN believes that Saudi forces are causing twice as many civilian casualties as all the other forces fighting in Yemen. The UN describes the situation in Yemen as a humanitarian disaster, yet we continue to sell billions of pounds worth of weapons to the kingdom. One human rights organisation claims that UK-produced bombs were used in strikes on a ceramics factory in northern Yemen.

**Sir Alan Duncan:** The alternative was to allow that country to be taken over by force. Does the hon. Lady not appreciate that among the Houthis who have taken over the country, 25% of those carrying guns are probably child soldiers?

**Margaret Ferrier:** I take the right hon. Gentleman's point, but he and I are on two different platforms concerning our relations with Saudi Arabia.

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen should shame us all. It requires an insurmountable effort to reconcile our aid efforts in the country with our continued arms dealings with Saudi Arabia. If there is any risk whatever of UK arms being used in breach of international humanitarian law, we should call an immediate halt to all arms sales until an in-depth, independent inquiry has been carried out.

**Seema Kennedy:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Margaret Ferrier:** No, I am sorry. More Members want to speak.

Saudi Arabia has a deeply troubling human rights problem. It would be remiss of me if I did not use this opportunity to speak up for Ali al-Nimr, Dawood Hussein al-Marhoon and Abdullah Hasan al-Zaher. These three young men were arrested and tried in the kingdom for crimes they allegedly carried out as juveniles. Although the Foreign Office has repeatedly assured us that it does not expect the death sentences to be carried out, they are still languishing in prison awaiting execution.

I do not expect us to impose our values and beliefs on another country, but I expect the UK to show some responsibility in our relations with Saudi. As our values widen even more, so does our responsibility to set a more progressive example. Today I ask the Minister to reconsider our dealings with Saudi Arabia. In February, the European Parliament voted by a large majority for an EU-wide embargo on arms sales to Saudi Arabia, but the Government have totally ignored that. I again ask them to heed calls for a ban on weapons sales.

10.11 am

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): I refer Members to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on obtaining this debate and on her excellent speech.

In the short time available to me, I want to focus on two issues. My right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) mentioned stability, which I believe is the key to our relationship with the Gulf states. We must not forget that that relationship is twofold. On the one hand, they have a huge commercial interest in this country, as we have in their countries. For example, Emirates, the UAE airline, is by far the biggest customer for Airbus A380 aircraft, which are manufactured in north Wales. It has been calculated that Emirates' investment in this country, via its purchase of Airbus aircraft, indirectly accounts for some 7,000 jobs. Our relationship is important and should not be undervalued.

The other issue is security. We have a huge interest in developing our relations with the Gulf states. They are at the sharp end of the battle against Daesh, which is a threat not only to the Gulf nations, but to this country. It is essential that this country develops relations with the Gulf states. When I visited Bahrain a few months ago, I was delighted to see that the British Government are investing in a new naval base there—HMS Juffair—and restoring our naval presence in an important part of the world.

In the few moments available to me, I want to mention the occupants of the other side of the Gulf in Iran, whom we often overlook when considering the Gulf.

Iran is undoubtedly a threat to the region's peace. There is no doubt that it sponsors Hezbollah and the insurgency in Yemen, and is a threat to that region. Another role for the United Kingdom is to ensure that the Gulf states receive our assurances that we will be at their side in the ongoing battle against Iran and its threat to the stability of the region.

10.14 am

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on her thoughtful opening speech. I draw Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I was lucky enough to visit Bahrain and Saudi Arabia recently.

I have received some criticism for visiting those countries, but I feel very strongly that we should not be armchair commentators. I hope that everyone who has spoken this morning has taken the time and trouble to visit some of the countries we are talking about. MPs have amazing opportunities to do so. We are always aware that our visits are stage managed to some extent, but we learn a huge amount in the process. No amount of being told women's rights are fantastic made up for me having to put on an abaya on the plane before walking off it. It was only a small thing, but for me it was part of the experience of being a women in these countries, in contrast with my male colleagues, who just walked out in whatever they were wearing.

I want to make three brief points. First, we must not be simplistic or naive in the way we think about these countries and our relationships with them. It is not just a case of goodies against baddies, liberals against dictators, or those who care about human rights against those who do not.

I am sure that we all care about human rights. I certainly do, and I particularly want to make life better for millions of girls and women throughout the middle east. However, we must not be naive about the alternatives to the Gulf Governments with whom we have important relationships. We must not think that if we can oust a ruling family we will suddenly and magically get a liberal western democracy. Recent events in other parts of the middle east have surely taught us a lesson. Colleagues have referred to the importance of stability. When there is a vacuum into which an organisation such as Daesh can move, there are atrocities on a completely different scale.

My second point is that we must be aware of the extraordinarily challenging times for Gulf countries at the moment. Saudi Arabia is surrounded by conflict in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, where it is controversially but understandably involved, and Iran, which is stoking conflict in the region. That is coupled with the plummeting price of oil on which its economy has depended for some 70 years. It is an incredibly difficult time for those countries to maintain stability and, if we do not want them to fall apart, we must be thoughtful about our relationships.

There are reasons for optimism, but I do not have time to go into that. We must have a positive and constructive relationship with the Gulf states, which is in our interest as well as theirs.

10.17 am

**Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing the debate and on her powerful, thoughtful and eloquent speech, which was fantastic. I refer hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I joined my hon. Friend on her recent trip to the United Arab Emirates. I will not have time to say much about human rights and stability in the region. They are powerful issues that I cannot do justice to in three minutes. I will concentrate on one area: business relationships and our opportunities in countries such as the UAE.

During our recent trip, we visited the Emirates airline, which is headed up by Sir Tim Clark. He is a fantastic British businessman and I wish he were doing fantastic business in the UK. It is amazing to see inspirational business leaders expanding global businesses in places such as the UAE. With his UK links, Sir Tim recently did a deal to buy Rolls-Royce engines for the Emirates fleet. It was one of Rolls-Royce's biggest deals. Our relationship with global companies around the world can tangibly benefit the UK.

We also went to Jebel Ali, the ninth biggest port in the world. It is owned by an Emirates company, DP World, which, as we have heard, also owns London Gateway. Who is the head of that? It is Simon Moore, another Brit, who has just gone back to Dubai to lead that organisation.

What that showed me was that we can have such entrepreneurship, coupled with the blank canvas that Dubai, Abu Dhabi and these countries have in their modern history, and a central location in the world as well. The Emirates are looking to move from an oil-based economy to a far more diverse economy. Their leading people are educated in the west and then go back, having been upskilled through the talent that they brought to the west. They will take on leading roles, but they will also look for other countries to trade with, for investment in and out of those countries. The UK is very well placed to do that—to offer services.

Bahrain has been mentioned. We have a 200-year relationship with Bahrain, the treaty of friendship having been signed in 1816. Again, that is something that we can capitalise on.

On women's rights, it was fantastic to hear the example from my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), who talked about her experience. Strong female politicians going to these countries and people seeing, for instance, Reem al-Hashimi and Noura al-Kaabi, the fantastic Ministers that the UAE has, and using them as examples of how women in government and in business can have such a positive effect will help to bring change in other countries, such as Saudi Arabia.

10.21 am

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Portsmouth South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) for her amazingly erudite speech, which I will not be able to emulate. I, too, recently went

[Mrs Flick Drummond]

to the UAE as a guest of its Government. That is declared in my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

My interest in this area started when I was a child. My father served in the Trucial Oman Scouts in the 1950s and, as an Arabist, spent most of his career in the middle east, in Suez, Yemen and the UAE, which was called the Trucial States in those days. The beginning of the close links between Britain and the UAE has been documented in his book, "Arabian Adventure", in which he discusses events in the 1950s and '60s, when he got to know Sheikh Zayed of Abu Dhabi, the founder of the UAE, through his weekly visits and recognised him as "undoubtedly the most powerful figure in the Trucial States".

My father says:

"I used to visit him weekly in his fort, and he would always describe the local political situation to me in an excellent manner. I always came to him with great respect and I left him with even greater respect."

I mention that because I want to reflect on our long-term and close relationship with the UAE, which was very obvious during our trip in April. Since 1972, when I left as a child, the UAE has developed incredibly. Out of the desert have risen several cities in each state, from Ras al-Khaimah, Ajman and Umm al-Quwain in the north, through to Sharjah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Fujairah in the east. Those states have come together and work closely, the richer states sharing their wealth with those that have not had the oil reserves but are developing in other ways.

It is with British help that businesses have become so successful. During our visit, as we have mentioned, we met Sir Tim Clark, who built up the Emirates airline, which now sponsors the Emirates Spinnaker tower in Portsmouth, and Simon Moore, who is running Jebel Ali, the port on which Dubai originally built its wealth. Dubai Ports owns Southampton port and has just built the London Gateway port. Investment is going both ways, including to the northern powerhouse, and my aim is to get more investment into the southern powerhouse and particularly Portsmouth. British people are leading at Masdar City, the first clean energy city.

We met British people working closely with counter-terrorism initiatives such as Hedayah and Sawab. Those organisations are identifying what is drawing our young people to Daesh and other terrorist organisations that have no state boundaries. Working together makes us more secure.

Many Emiratis have been educated in Britain, in our schools, universities and military colleges.

**Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that the family links that she has and, indeed, the wider expatriate community throughout the middle east region has are the reason why Britain can play such a key role in the future of that region?

**Mrs Drummond:** Absolutely. There are 120,000 British people living in the UAE, compared with just 50,000 Americans. We are the most important country to the UAE, and that must be continued.

Some Emiratis were educated at the same school as me, the English Speaking School in Dubai, and many were taught by my headmistress, Miss Dorothy Miles, who spent all of her working life teaching generations of Arab and foreign children in Dubai and Sharjah.

It is the case that 70% of university graduates are women, and women are encouraged to build a career and to continue it even when they have children. The Speaker of the UAE Parliament is a woman. Women sit side by side with men in their chamber; there is no segregation. Women are quickly moving to the top of the professions there.

Some people are concerned about human rights, and we looked into that when we were in the UAE. I am a believer that it is better to work closely with countries that are developing than to ignore them, and I was pleased to hear UAE Ministers appreciating that work is being done in this area and will continue. We heard about a domestic abuse charity set up by a female MP and work being done elsewhere. We met Tristan Forster, who runs FSI Worldwide to ensure that workers are not exploited. We were allowed to challenge Ministers on these points, and they are well aware of our views.

Only by continuing this close relationship can we challenge our friends and not avoid the difficult questions. Our ambassador, Philip Parham, is working hard to build the relationship, and I hope we continue to build on a friendship that has been part of our joint history for many years.

10.25 am

**Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing this timely debate. I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I should also state that my wife works in the Cabinet Office and has a significant interest in the Gulf region.

The Government's strategic approach to our country's engagement in the Gulf is a rare spark of hope in that troubled region. Because of the significant potential gain that that fresh approach can give Britain, I strongly believe that we would do well to replicate it in the wider middle east and elsewhere. I do not want to overstate the region's prospects. It faces vast challenges. The continuing low oil price is cutting Gulf economies off at the knees. In response, those countries with a relatively recent history of significant state subsidisation of their economies, such as Kuwait, are going through the very difficult process of readjusting the scale of state intervention. In doing so, their nascent democracies are facing a real test. The Gulf states also face a resurgent Russia, an Iranian regime high on the after-effects of its nuclear deal, Islamist extremism nibbling at the borders, and the threat of internal instability because the current social contract between rulers and ruled cannot be sustained. The population is mushrooming, and unemployment, human rights abuses and sectarian strife fuel the discomfort. Without doubt, vast reform—economic, social, religious and governmental—is urgently required.

I do not want to overstate our role, either. Our relationship used to be of a great power protecting small local powers. We are the region's oldest and staunchest ally, marking 200 years of relations with Bahrain this year. Today, the relationship has changed.



It is one of partnership. Our long-standing and deep relationship with Kuwait has become one of deep, mutual benefit—investment and knowledge flowing in both directions. Qatar's fast emergence in the region, along with its strong desire to use its new-found wealth to play a significant and constructive part in the region and the wider world, should be welcomed by us.

Clearly, Britain's partnerships have become critical to our mutual interests in the wider region. None is more vital than finding the settlements to sustain stability, for if we leave a less stable middle east to our children, we will have failed them—and if we are to leave a stable world to our children, we depend on the Gulf states. If we support our allies through gradual transformation, they can change peacefully; if we do not, they will not. If we withdraw, we must brace ourselves for the opposite, and we cannot kid ourselves any more that we would not feel the impact at home; we would suffer, too. The Gulf states of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, the UAE and Qatar are an island of stability in a deeply unstable region. We have to keep them that way.

**Mrs Drummond:** I do not know whether my hon. Friend has seen the Arab youth survey by ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, which talked to 3,500 young Arabs and showed that the UAE is the country that they would most like to emulate in their own countries.

**Dr Lee:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. More broadly than the UAE, across the whole region, the youth of the region is part of its challenge, but also part of the opportunity for the future.

I welcome the Government's broad, deep and integrated approach—addressing what underpins long-term security, such as education, economic resilience and good governance, as well as increasing co-operation to address immediate threats from terrorism, organised crime and the like.

I want to mention three specific issues. First, tensions with Iran are at an ever increasing risk of boiling over following the nuclear deal. If in the long term the west is to get rid of the responsibility of helping to keep the peace in the Gulf—a responsibility that it would have little appetite to fulfil if tested—we must help the region to develop its own infrastructure for resolving such tensions.

Secondly, the Gulf states face extraordinary demographic challenges from growing youth populations at the same time as economic means are being slashed. We must gear our engagement to support economic diversification and entrepreneurship to grow and then sustain jobs for young people, and to engage in new ways via digital and social media. There are myriad opportunities in cyber, in space and at the forefront of science, technology and innovation that could enable them to leapfrog stages of development. If they are successful at doing that, we will all benefit.

The third issue is resource resilience and, in particular, access to water in a region that already faces the biggest water deficits in the world and increasing demand. The Gulf states' existence is already a triumph of vision and wealth over the laws of nature. Human survival in that climate is a tribute to the miracles of air conditioning and desalination.

Finally, I am convinced—

**Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair):** Order. We will move on to the winding-up speeches.

10.29 am

**Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP):** It is a pleasure to serve under the chairmanship of a fellow member of the Procedure Committee, Mr Nuttall. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing the debate. Her speech was thoughtful and considered, setting the context for the debate. I understand the frustrations of Members who have not been able to speak for as long as they might have wanted to. Scottish National party Members have experienced that on a number of occasions since arriving in Westminster. I will try to keep my remarks reasonably brief so the Minister has time to respond to the various serious points that have been raised by all parties.

The hon. Member for Bristol North West made a number of cultural references, so I will chuck in one or two of my own. I recommend a book called "The Years of Rice and Salt" by Kim Stanley Robinson, which presents an alternative history of the world, imagining that the population of Europe is wiped out by the black death. As a result, the entire cultural, social and economic enlightenment comes from the east and from the Islamic world. The various reflections that the hon. Lady made about the role of Islam reminded me very much of that book and of the counter-history it suggests. Without giving anything away, the ultimate conclusion of the book is that some things change and some things stay the same.

While listening to some of the speeches, I was reminded of the television satirist Mrs Merton, who famously asked Debbie McGee, regarding her husband, "What first attracted you to the millionaire Paul Daniels?" An element of that attitude is, perhaps, reflected in some relationships with small, oil-rich countries that have huge energy potential and industrious, increasingly well-educated populations. In Scotland, we were told that such a model would lead to nothing but doom and gloom but, evidently, it seems quite acceptable for the countries of the Gulf.

Much has been made of personal experience. I will not pretend to have much in the way of first-hand experience of the countries being discussed, other than transiting Dubai airport, incidentally in an Airbus A380. I looked out of the window and was struck by those magnificent buildings rising out of the desert in the distance, but the sight made me ask at what cost many of those buildings were constructed. What was the human cost and what were the labour conditions when such cities rose from the desert? What is the ongoing cost to the environment and the climate of using carbon and energy-intensive methods to build a western model of capitalism in that part of the world?

I will reflect briefly on economic relations, defence and human rights situations, and echo some questions that have been raised with the UK Government. Although I have not personally travelled to the region, a delegation from the SNP visited Iran at around Christmas time. Perhaps the agreement that has been reached with Iran presents something of a model of stability and transition. The point about stability has been well made and it is a perfectly acceptable point, but perhaps something can be learned about transition and opening up economic

[Patrick Grady]

opportunities. Bilateral trade with the region is into the billions. We have spoken about Dubai as a transport hub and tourist destination. My city—Glasgow—benefits from direct flights to Dubai.

I have not heard mention of the 2022 World cup in Qatar, so I will touch on that. I mentioned labour rights and building rights. It would be interesting to hear what continued dialogue the Government have with FIFA and with the Government in Qatar about the treatment of migrant workers and the continued reports of deaths and injuries on construction sites. The Government are committed to the sustainable development goals of promoting equality and leaving no one behind in the world. How do those goals apply to the Government's relations with the Gulf states?

The issue of migration and security, including the ability of people to travel, was touched on. The Government have introduced visa waivers across the region, most recently in Kuwait. That contrasts quite interestingly with the crackdown in other areas—for example, the difficulty that people in sub-Saharan Africa face in obtaining visas for the United Kingdom. We have heard about defence contracts and the base in Bahrain. All I would say is that the arms industry is a choice. It is not inevitable. If we are to deal in arms and military contracts, we must ensure that they are not being abused.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** I represent the headquarters of BAE Systems, which, for half a century, has had a very important relationship with Saudi Arabia. Does the SNP not understand that these Gulf states are allies of the UK, and that they face a threat, to which my hon. Friends have all referred? Does the hon. Gentleman not think that the UK should help our allies in the Gulf to defend themselves against that threat with British equipment, much of which is made in Scotland?

**Patrick Grady:** I am not entirely sure that now is the best time to talk about defence contracts coming to Scotland, given the concerns being expressed about the shipyards on the Clyde. The reality is that, if British weapons are being exported and traded, there is a responsibility under the international instruments to ensure that they are being used appropriately.

**Seema Kennedy:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Patrick Grady:** I will not give way because the shadow Minister and the Minister still have to respond. The Minister needs to respond to points that have been raised several times about the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the conflict in Yemen. It may be that UK-built planes with pilots trained by instructors from the UK are dropping bombs that are made in the UK. That may be co-ordinated by the Saudis in the presence of UK military advisers. If that does not add up to some kind of UK complicity in the conflict and the alleged war crimes, I wonder what does.

**Sir Alan Duncan:** No, it does not.

**Patrick Grady:** Well, those are the points that need to be answered and investigated. Those are serious complaints. I met with people from Yemen who showed me pictures

of the destruction that has been caused there. They allege that that has been caused by weapons manufactured in the UK. Those allegations need to be investigated.

There is a contradiction in UK policy. The Home Office now accepts that there is a risk of violence against civilians and says that deportations back to Yemen could be a breach of human rights. Yet the Foreign and Commonwealth Office continues to deny that there have been war crimes and says that Saudi Arabia is acting within humanitarian law. Which is the UK Government's position? They need to have a joined-up approach, and that speaks to the wider questions in the region. If we want to promote stability and find an alternative to Daesh, we must find a way of leading by example. We have that opportunity in this debate. Those are the questions that we would like answered.

I echo an awful lot of what the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) said. We must not allow ourselves to be blinded by wealth glimmering off the desert sun. Economic gain should not be at any cost. The Scottish First Minister said, in China, that human rights and economic development should be two sides of the same coin, and that promoting equality and human rights is the best way to promote and empower populations, and to grow economies. We should use the stable and strong relations in these Gulf states to encourage democracy and promote human rights.

10.37 am

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing the debate. She gave a thoughtful speech and was, at times, very witty when she referred to “Monty Python's Life of Brian” and “Jesus Christ Superstar”. She mentioned the internal challenges faced by Islam and discussed how that reflects on the region and on the wider world.

I am pleased that we are having a debate on the broader thematic issues in British foreign policy and our wider strategy in the region. As we have heard, Britain has a long and close relationship with the Gulf. As many hon. Members have said, that is probably more important now than it has ever been before. The Gulf states are vital partners of the UK in trade and economic co-operation, defence and security, and cultural ties. It has been interesting to hear about the great deal of experience and knowledge of the region that hon. Members have brought to the debate.

On the economic relationship that we enjoy, the Gulf remains a key source of foreign direct investment into the UK and a market for our own exports. We heard about Airbus in particular. We only need to look at the London skyline to see Gulf investment in the UK, as the tallest building in Europe is the Qatari-funded Shard at London bridge. We should also recognise that one of the key benefits that the UK offers to the Gulf states is access to EU markets, and we would be vulnerable to losing much of that investment to other EU states if we were to leave the EU.

We have also heard today about the importance of defence co-operation. Several Gulf states are partners of the UK in the fight against Daesh. Many Gulf states send troops to train at Sandhurst, and the Gulf is one of the largest markets for UK defence exports. I am particularly

pleased to see British support for the development of the port in Oman, which will help Oman's economy and will provide a vital berthing point for our new Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers. Intelligence sharing supports our fight against terrorism at home and abroad, and that co-operation is underpinned by strong governmental relationships. The Gulf states are not just long-standing allies of the UK; we have formal relationships with states such as Oman, Qatar and Kuwait that facilitate regular dialogue and co-operation.

Those economic and governmental ties, built on years of co-operation, are what provide the strength of our current relationship with the Gulf states, but it is frustrating that the Government are reluctant to use the strength of those relationships to push for vital reforms. When it comes to human rights, democracy and environmental protections, we should expect the highest standards from our friends and allies, yet the Government appear reluctant to prioritise any of those issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) spoke eloquently about human rights and democratic reforms. We would like a greater pace of reform in all the Gulf states, but two countries are of particular note.

First, not only is the pace of democratic reform in Saudi Arabia very slow but there are widespread and severe human rights abuses, with high levels of corporal punishment, including the death penalty, and very limited freedom of expression, as illustrated by the case of Raif Badawi. There are also high levels of torture, and the position of women is still abysmal, yet the current British Government have been extraordinarily reluctant to criticise the Saudi Government. I have mentioned the benefit to the UK economy of arms sales, which must come with tight controls. There are serious and sustained concerns that Saudi-led action in Yemen has included possible war crimes and, therefore, has breached the conditions of the current arms export licences.

**Seema Kennedy:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Diana Johnson:** I will continue, because I want to make these points. Again, the Government have been slow to engage with those allegations. First, they seemed to back an independent inquiry, and then they supported the Saudis' own investigation, but now they are calling for the inquiry to be speeded up. The Opposition remain convinced that the Saudi investigation will not be sufficiently independent or transparent, and we think it is right to halt arms sales to Saudi Arabia while the investigations are conducted.

The second state is Bahrain. Although the pace of reforms in Bahrain is greater than in Saudi Arabia, there are still serious concerns about the position of opposition and civil society groups, the detention of political prisoners and the use of torture in the justice system. The reforms introduced by the Bahraini Government, although highly welcome, have not been fully implemented, and both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have raised concerns about the situation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith said, the UK Government have been working with the Bahraini Government on those reforms, so we should be prepared to recognise where the reforms have not been fully implemented and to publicly push the Bahrainis to go further.

**Margaret Ferrier:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Diana Johnson:** I will continue. The two countries that I have highlighted shine light on the reluctance among Foreign Office Ministers to raise human rights issues in the region, which, as has already been said, was highlighted by the recent reports of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

**Sir Alan Duncan:** May I say something about Yemen?

**Diana Johnson:** I will continue. In the recent UK-Kuwait joint steering group, for example, human rights, women's rights, democratic reforms, support for the humanitarian crisis in the middle east and labour rights for migrant workers were not discussed, nor was trafficking. The US State Department singled out Kuwait as having one of the worst records on human trafficking. I know the UK Government take that issue seriously, so I am surprised that it was not raised with the Kuwaiti authorities.

The situation is equally problematic in Qatar, where exploitation and trafficking remain commonplace, including on the World cup construction sites, as exposed by the recent Trades Union Congress investigation. A similar story could be told on environmental issues. The British Government could do more to make that clear and to push the Gulf states to meet their international obligations on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

I want the Minister to have ample opportunity to respond to all the points raised in today's debate, so I will conclude by saying that we need from the Government a broad strategy for the region that recognises the strength of our current relationships and looks to utilise those relationships to support British aims in the region, including more democratic and open societies.

10.45 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** I am grateful for your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. Before I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on a formidable speech and on securing this debate, as others have done, I thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for a measured and appropriately balanced speech that pressed the Government while illustrating the many areas where there are synergies between what the Government and the official Opposition believe. The Gulf is an important part of the world for us, and we are grateful for the depth of knowledge that she has illustrated today, which underlines why we need to understand the region before we can comment on it.

That takes me nicely to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West, who articulated the reasons why it is important not only that we debate such matters here, but that Britain continues this vital relationship. She has just come back from a series of visits, and speeches from both sides of the Chamber have reflected the importance of our engaging with and understanding the region. I encourage all hon. Members to do what they can to visit the region as frequently as possible, because that helps to dispel myths and allows us to have the frank conversations that we need in order to advance democracy, human rights and the rule of law—all the things that matter so much.

**Margaret Ferrier:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Ellwood:** I will make some progress first and then, time permitting, I will be delighted to give way. There are a lot of issues to cover, but I will give way if there is time.

I welcome the breadth of knowledge that has been displayed in this debate, and I ask for that to continue. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West spelled out some of the challenges with which the middle east, with its diversity, is having to contend in a modern setting. We have obviously had the Arab spring and its aftermath, and the drop in oil prices is having an enormous effect on all countries in the region. The growth of extremism is hugely challenging in that neck of the woods, and then there is the advance of the internet in a culturally conservative part of the world that is suddenly having to deal with a very liberal way of sharing information and making comment. That has to be mapped out with a growing youth population, which is looking over its shoulder and saying, “We want a very different set of views, values and outlook on life from our parents or the generation before them.”

The Gulf is going through immense challenges, which provides opportunities, but it also means that the Gulf’s friendships outside the region are all the more important. Without mentioning any names, there are other parts of the world that have disengaged somewhat from the middle east, and it is therefore all the more important for us to remember our strong bonds, which are not just about today or about the visits. As has been said, the bonds go back to historical agreements over 200 years that established maritime, trade and diplomatic relationships and allowed us to develop the enormously strong bonds and bilateral ties that are evident today.

The Gulf’s stability is our stability, and we must recognise that the Gulf states have been the custodians of much of the world’s oil and gas supplies in recent decades, helping the world to keep the lights on. The region’s security is tied to our security, but the region’s prosperity is also our prosperity. That was reflected in the last security and defence review, and it has been illustrated today by a number of hon. Members who referred to our commitments from a military perspective right across the Gulf.

However, we also must recognise that it is not just on security and hydrocarbons that we have established strong relationships; our relationships are now diversifying. I can share with the House that we now have six-monthly bilateral working groups with every single Gulf nation—I will go with a team to one of the countries or they will come here. The last one was with Oman, and we go through the entire relationship, from security, defence and hydrocarbons—those norms that we understand—to, now, education: how the British Council can do more work on getting English taught in schools or developing the curriculum. We also discuss how we can help work with police reforms, ombudsmen, processes to allow women’s rights to be established, and so forth.

Many of these things are happening behind the scenes, because that is the way those countries prefer to do business, and we have success; we are able to move forward, which is very positive. I stress to the House that just because people do not see the headlines or hear us shouting out about things, that does not mean they do not happen. That is very important to remember.

Any hon. Friends or hon. Members who have taken the time to visit the region will be aware of that themselves.

**Margaret Ferrier:** On that point, there has been much talk today about visiting the region, so will the Foreign Office guarantee my safety if I decide to go and visit Saudi Arabia?

**Mr Ellwood:** I am not sure how helpful that comment is. Anybody travelling to the region needs to read the travel advice. I encourage the hon. Lady to go to Saudi Arabia, because—as others have found—she will come back having learned something. She will discover, especially if it is a visit endorsed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, that she will have access to many of the programmes that are taking place in what is very much a culturally conservative society.

There is a desire in this House for immediate, 21st-century change—to slide across our values, our standards, our processes and our democratic systems all in one. That is not going to happen quickly, in the same way that it did not happen quickly in this country, from giving women the vote to getting rid of slavery. The other day, I went back to my old stomping ground of the London Stock Exchange, where I worked—I made a visit there for a listing that was taking place with Morocco. Women were not allowed on the trading floor in the UK until the 1970s. Our first female ambassador was not appointed until 1976. These things take time.

Of course, in the 21st century we expect countries to take advantage of best practice and of the support and programmes that are available, so that they do not have to take the 800 years that we have taken since Magna Carta to develop the standards that we enjoy today.

**Lady Hermon:** Will the Minister take this opportunity to put on record the gratitude that is felt by a number of countries in the Gulf that have benefited from former members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary—very distinguished members of the RUC, from Northern Ireland—who have gone out to Gulf states and improved their human rights records in policing?

**Mr Ellwood:** The hon. Lady makes a valid point. That is a great example of countries using that experience of dealing with diverse groups and communities that have been broken in the past and that need to heal and move forward. That experience and knowledge can be taken to countries in the Gulf, so that it can be shared. I pay huge tribute to the teams who have gone from Northern Ireland to the Gulf. In fact, it is not only in the Gulf where they are doing such work; they are doing it even further afield. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point and putting it on the record.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** My hon. Friend the Minister was talking about the role of women. Does he agree that the Bahrainis themselves have shown remarkable foresight, as their previous ambassador here was not only female but a Christian? Does that example not illustrate the kind of diversity that we see in Bahrain, which is one of our closest allies and best friends?

**Mr Ellwood:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Change is happening, but of course we want to increase that change, so we are doing our best to advance it and expedite it. On the Shura council in Saudi Arabia, there were no women before; now there are women on it. In

municipal elections, the most recent of which have just taken place, previously there were no women involved; now there are women being elected. In fact, when women were first elected to the Shura council, guess what happened? They were placed behind a glass screen, because the men on the council did not want them in the room. However, the women banged on the glass and said, “We want to be part of the actual debate,” and the chairman had no choice but to invite them in. When I visited Saudi Arabia a couple of months ago, I was delighted to meet some of the women connected with the British relationship—the British grouping—we were all able to sit in the same room together and have a conversation. That might seem quite small, but in the period that I have been honoured to have this role, it was an important step to allow those voices to come across.

There is even debate now about women drivers, partly because there is an economic cause. The drop in oil prices means that if a country has a workforce capable of driving, why not take advantage of it? The reasons for such a debate happening are not perhaps the ones we would want, but the fact is that the debate is now happening and that is very much encouraged.

I simply make the point that we have developed the strengths of our democratic society over many, many years, but as nation states the Gulf countries are very new. Saudi Arabia was not really formed, as such, until 1932. Oman and, indeed, the other Gulf nations did not gain their independence until the 1970s. It is from that starting point that those countries then had to develop from a centralised model of governance and move forward to provide change at a pace that is acceptable to their people. If we try to expedite the pace too quickly, we will find that the religiously conservative groups will not accept it, and we will end up seeing what we have seen in Syria taking hold in other parts of the region. That would mean that change had gone too fast to be accepted.

It is important that we stand with the Gulf countries. We encourage change—we do not step back from it at all—and we use the strength of our friendship and the trust bestowed upon us. However, there is also an expectation, because of the depth of the relationship, that we are there with them—that we have these conversations—and we do that better with them, rather than shouting from afar and expecting change to happen.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the challenge of extremism, which is something that Gulf nations are working incredibly hard to address. All the nations in the Gulf are part of the counter-Daesh coalition and

are playing a formidable role in providing funds to tackle the movement of foreign fighters, in making efforts to stop the flow of money that is going into Daesh accounts and in helping with humanitarian support. All the Gulf nations have taken refugees, but again that is not shouted about perhaps as much as one would anticipate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West mentioned the Sawab centre and the Hedayah centre, which are important aspects of allowing imams—the grand muftis and so forth—to recognise that there is a responsible way of preaching the Koran and of ensuring that the word of Allah is shared correctly, because it is among the vulnerable where Islam is misused, with the false promise of paradise that then encourages people to become suicide bombers and continue extremism. The United Arab Emirates is doing an incredible job in challenging extremism as it grows.

Time is against me, so I will end shortly, because I want to give my hon. Friend at least a minute to comment on this debate. I will just say, finally, that our mature relationships with our Gulf partners are deeply rooted in our shared history, and our future security and, indeed, prosperity are closely linked with theirs. The Gulf states have significant regional influence that they can bring to bear on issues that affect our national security, such as regional conflicts and violent extremism, so it is in our national interest to deepen co-operation with them, building on our existing relationships with them to our mutual benefit.

10.59 am

**Charlotte Leslie:** I want to pay tribute to the Minister, who in many ways—through the style of his delivery and his experience—sums up what for me has been the thing to take away from this debate, which is the enormous value of experience and the nuance that it gives to consideration of this topic, versus the arrogance of ignorance. There are practical benefits of understanding the region—of actually being practical—versus the luxury, and it is a luxury, of impotent moralising from a far-off position.

I am so sorry that we did not get to hear about the enormous wealth of nuanced experience of so many hon. Members, which could actually serve to change things that we all want to change in the region—because we care about the people—and I hope that in time to come that experience and those practical benefits will trump the arrogance of ignorance.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## West Cumbria Health Services

11 am

**Mr Jamie Reed** (Copeland) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered health services in West Cumbria.

I thank you, Mr Nuttall, for chairing this debate, which is on the particularly important subject of health services in west Cumbria and the ongoing work of the success regime process in my part of the world. I am pleased to see the Minister in his place. He responded to my debate concerning these matters in December last year, and he is well aware of the numerous difficult issues that I will raise with him today. He will know that any criticisms I make are not personal or even necessarily politically partisan. In all the years I have fought for this argument and this cause, I have represented thousands of constituents who do not vote for me or my party. I always have and always will place my constituency interests above any superficial party political interests. Most of all, I seek solutions in this debate for the ongoing problems facing the north, east and west Cumbrian health economy. The problems have persisted for too long. They have worsened and can no longer be allowed to defy resolution. The Minister has responded positively to my questions and requests in the past—I am exceptionally grateful for that—and I hope he can do so again today.

I will start by outlining the issues facing my constituents in accessing health services in west Cumbria. The problems facing the North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust are well known. There is intense pressure on overworked and under-resourced staff. I am grateful for the work undertaken by *The Cumberland News* and the *News and Star*, particularly that of the journalists Emily Parsons and Pamela McGowan, in helping to illustrate the scale of the problems within the trust. I will return to those later.

In such a rural county with such dispersed areas of urban population, the pressures on ambulance services are enormous. There is unprecedented pressure on primary care and GP services as a result of doctor shortages and truly catastrophic cuts to adult social services as a result of the Government's choice to cut Cumbria County Council's budget. A new threat in the guise of the potential closure of beds in the area's community hospitals has emerged to widespread anger and condemnation from every community that relies upon them.

Added to those problems are the problems—caused exclusively by Government, I fear—facing the success regime. In particular, I want to address the success regime and, despite the initial optimism, the manifest problems and difficulties the process has been presented with. Critically, I will talk about the consequences of the success regime's failure, how we can avoid them and how we can solve the problems facing our health economy, which is undoubtedly the most challenged in Britain. I will also talk about the recent floods, the effects of which are still being keenly felt throughout the county. They have magnified the issues at the heart of the debate over health services in the area.

Finally, I will pose as many of the questions sent to me as I can before outlining the health needs of my community and those of neighbouring communities—those needs, after all, are what it comes down to. The key issue for decision makers, Government and Ministers is: what do the people of west Cumbria need from their health

services and how can that be delivered? That is a very different question from, "What are the Government prepared to provide?" Make no mistake, at the heart of the issue is the question: is the national health service worthy of the name? When we answer those questions, we should have the humility and wisdom to recognise that the consequences of the decisions we take now will outlast the lifespan of this Government. They will certainly outlast my and the Minister's political careers. That is the gravity, the reality and the privilege of the situation we find ourselves in.

The simple answer is that the people of west Cumbria need better access to health services, particularly the hospital services provided by the West Cumberland Hospital in Whitehaven. It serves a vast rural area with many tightly compacted urban communities, with all the attendant challenges that has. In that context, access can be defined in a number of ways. It means the actual services provided locally, ensuring that those services are staffed appropriately so that they are of a high quality, and empowering the community so that it is listened to when decisions about its services are taken. It also means proper planning for the significant population expansion forecast for the area. In west Cumbria, each area is immensely challenging and we must address that. It is what the success regime was meant to address.

At this point, I have to thank the hundreds of patients, medical professionals past and present and members of the public who responded to my request for questions or evidence relating to the success regime process and the condition of the local health service in general. Time limits mean that I will not be able to put every question to the Minister today, but those I cannot ask I will either table as parliamentary questions or I will write to the Secretary of State for Health expressing the concerns. I am particularly grateful to the Royal College of Nursing, the Joint League of Friends of Community Hospitals, West Cumbrians' Voice for Health Care—it has undertaken phenomenal work—and healthcare campaigners in Millom, Keswick and right across Allerdale, Carlisle and Penrith and the Border. I hope the Minister will ensure that the Secretary of State replies honestly and at length.

The Minister will be well aware that in July 2013, Sir Bruce Keogh published his review into mortality rates at a number of hospital trusts around the country. North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust was one of them. Along with 10 other trusts, it was placed in special measures. The trust had higher than average mortality rates and action to remedy that was obviously welcome and necessary. At the time, Ministers were unable to provide basic information about what special measures actually meant for the trust, but it was patently clear that the major reason for care failings at the trust was—it remains the case—a chronic staff shortage.

It is only right that I again take this opportunity to thank, on a personal level as a parent and on behalf of my constituents, the amazing staff who work tirelessly in trying conditions to provide high-quality care. Many work unpaid overtime because they care about their patients, their work and, by extension, the service they provide to my community. I and my constituents know that they work in extraordinary circumstances beyond their control, and we are so grateful for their work. I doubt that any community in the country prizes its medical professionals so highly.

The truth is that every part of the health economy in west, east and north Cumbria simply needs more staff in primary care, secondary care, acute care and across our preventive services. Government must intervene to ensure that the problem is resolved, assisting with local initiatives wherever possible. That request has fallen on deaf ears for too long. The most recent report on the North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust by the Care Quality Commission, which was published in September 2015, illustrated the scale of the challenge. It stated:

“The recruitment of nursing staff also remained an on-going challenge. At the time of our inspection nurse staffing levels, although improved, were still of concern and there was a heavy reliance on staff working extra shifts and on bank and agency staff to maintain staffing levels. There were times when the wards were not appropriately staffed to meet the needs of patients.”

I am sure the Minister would agree that that simply is not acceptable. In 2013-14, the trust spent £16 million on agency staff. That is clearly a false economy. Agency staff are a short-term expensive solution to a long-term problem.

Stable, long-term recruitment is key to turning around the finances of the local health economy and the hospital trust in particular. If my local trust has to pay over the odds to secure services taken for granted in other parts of the country, it should be able to do that and be funded appropriately by the Department of Health. That must be accepted by the success regime and by Government. Sadly, that is not currently the case. Sadly, it is not a conflation of the issues to point out that the Secretary of State’s antagonistic and insulting behaviour towards junior doctors is severely worsening the recruitment problem in challenged health economies such as that in Cumbria.

In my constituency, I have been working with the trust and the University of Central Lancashire to bring a medical school to west Cumbria so that we can “grow our own medics”. It would be a long-term sustainable solution to one of the key problems we face. I am delighted to say that the new West Cumberland medical education campus now exists at the Westlakes science park, immediately adjacent to the new West Cumberland hospital in my constituency. So far that has succeeded without the support or involvement of Government, but I hope that the Government will be able to support the development, not just in spirit as I know the Minister does, but with practical assistance, including money.

In addition to growing our own medics in west Cumbria for the benefit of the entire Cumbrian health economy, we are providing the basis for policy solutions by becoming a rural health policy laboratory. The campus can and should become a crucible of innovation, providing solutions to the problems facing rural areas through the provision of high-quality, accessible, universal health services. The Minister has expressed support for that in the past, but the Government should now support it financially and in terms of policy. Will he request that Health Education England works with the University of Central Lancashire and the North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust as a matter of urgency so that innovative models of healthcare training, such as earn-while-you-learn models, can be rolled out, not only in Cumbria but in other challenged health economies?

I hope that the Government will look again at nursing bursaries. The Chancellor’s decision to scrap those will only make it harder for us to train and recruit the

medical staff that we need. The market will not deliver the workforce that the national health service requires; it will deliver only inefficiency and inequality. We need proper workforce planning right across the national health service.

On the subject of the local health workforce, will the Minister commit to looking into the morale issues affecting health professionals in the area covered by the success regime and undertake action to improve this?

In December, I told the Minister that sooner or later our luck would run out and that patients would pay the price. Tragically, as documented in the *News and Star* and *The Cumberland News* recently, the signs are that that is already happening. It was reported yesterday that in March a patient was transferred from the West Cumberland Hospital in Whitehaven to the Cumberland Infirmary in Carlisle, but died—according to the medics who have come forward—because specialist staff were not alerted to the patient’s arrival in Carlisle. The patient subsequently had a cardiac arrest and died. If that is true, it is not only a direct result and a damning indictment of policy, but the inevitable consequence of an overburdened, underfunded and understaffed system. I cannot imagine the despair that the family of the deceased must feel, and I cannot describe how angry I am that, in all likelihood, a constituent of mine has died as a result of being transferred from the West Cumberland Hospital to the Cumberland Infirmary.

The community has repeatedly warned of such an event. It has not been listened to and so I ask the Minister to commit as a matter of urgency to making a statement in the House about this and other so-called never events that occur across the North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust. We need to solve these problems, and we need to determine accountability for them, too. I know that the medics and the new chief executive, Stephen Eames, are determined to get this right.

At the beginning of 2015, I wrote to the NHS chief executive, Simon Stevens, and asked him to visit Cumbria to see for himself the geographical challenges; to speak to patients and staff; and to work with me to develop a comprehensive recovery plan for the Cumbrian health economy. Nowhere in the country is quite like Cumbria. The health inequalities, the demographic differences, the challenging geography and the contrast between the affluent and those who are less well-off all present unique challenges with regard to providing services—right across the board, not just in the health service.

The national health service should ensure equality of standards and accessibility of services, but how that is delivered must be flexible enough to accommodate unique local circumstances such as those in Cumbria. The success regime is the response to my request for a comprehensive recovery plan. That new regime was intended to develop a locally tailored solution to the problems that we face. I was a shadow Health Minister at the time I made the request. Sadly, it is unusual for an Opposition spokesperson to ask Ministers in the Department that they cover to work together on an issue of joint concern for the greater good.

In December, I expressed my concerns about the then management team at the hospitals trust. I pointed out how it had attempted to defy the NHS chief executive and sabotage the work of the success regime. The appointment of Stephen Eames and his team has changed

[Mr Jamie Reed]

all that to date, but the public are still understandably worried about the prospect of key services being removed from the West Cumberland Hospital.

I was present at a meeting with Simon Stevens and the success regime when the trust management was told categorically that the continued “asset-stripping”—that was the precise phrase—of services from the West Cumberland Hospital should not continue. It was an uncomfortable meeting, but a welcome one in which the primacy of the success regime in determining what services would be provided where was asserted.

In December, I told the Minister that unless the previous trust management committed fully to the success regime process, it should have no part to play in the future of healthcare service design in west, north and east Cumbria. Information now coming from many people from within the success regime process is that the process is not working and that the reason for that is Government intransigence, a refusal to listen to the experts on the ground and a refusal to grant the additional resources that the process requires to succeed.

In the rest of the country, the Government and the NHS would be hard pushed to find more committed, willing, well-informed and passionate communities when it comes to health services than the communities of west, north and east Cumbria. We want the success regime to work and the people within the success regime want it to work, but right now the Government are stopping it working. I am told, from within the process, that the success regime and the people in it know what they need to do to put the health economy right, but that, as soon as ideas are put forward, they are knocked down.

I have been asked to ask the Minister whether the Government recognise that a premium is required to continue to enable the people of west Cumbria to access certain acute services at the West Cumberland Hospital. Do the Government recognise that centralising services in Carlisle is about service cost, not service quality, and that this will lead to worse outcomes for patients? Again, I am told from within the success regime that the exercise is now becoming one that is not as has been advertised. Rather than a process of investigation and improvement, it has become a cost-management tool and the people within the process do not want it to be that way, yet the Government insist that cuts, not quality, are king. I have been asked, again from within the success regime, what happened to the Prime Minister’s promise of a bare-knuckle fight for district general hospitals and maternity services, because it either has not materialised or was a knowing deception.

There are more questions, all of which I will forward to the Secretary of State, but the most incredible intervention in the work of the success regime was recently made by the Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. In an open letter to the success regime, governors of the trust have given notice of their intention not to approve the work of the success regime, accusing its emerging options proposals of lacking logic, transparency, financial evidence and meaningful detail. The letter states:

“Our problem is that on every significant issue, the Success Regime appears to us to be shrouded in impenetrable fog.”

The letter adds that the success regime’s vision is

“woefully lacking in sensitivity to the health-related implications of geography and demography in Cumbria.”

Nowhere can this be seen more than in the unjustifiable proposals to remove beds from community hospitals. They deserve better in Millom, Keswick, Maryport, Workington, Brampton and Alston. This demonstrates precisely what we risk destroying here: a process that the people, public and medical professionals of Cumbria supported with optimism at the outset, but that now risks collapse and failure because the Government have changed the remit of the success regime as its work has progressed.

The point underpinning all of this is relatively simple: access to a full and comprehensive range of acute hospital services for the people of west Cumbria is non-negotiable, and the success regime requires freedom from Government interference to complete its work. The work requires additional funding. If the success regime is to succeed, it has to be funded to succeed. Let us not pretend that that is not the case.

The recent flooding in the county has shown that if services were transferred from the West Cumberland Hospital, in times of emergency patients simply would not be able to access them as they would not be able to get to the Cumberland Infirmary. Again, that is not acceptable. In times of emergency, the people of west Cumbria need to be able to access their services, and that can be assured only by retaining the services in their local hospital—the West Cumberland Hospital—a fantastic new facility that the Minister knows I have campaigned for for more than 10 years, and which should now become a model for how we provide care in non-metropolitan communities in the 21st century.

I have a specific request for the Minister. Will he move to unblock the funding for phase 2 of the West Cumberland Hospital new build programme? I have been told that the money has been allocated but is not accessible. I ask that this is done as soon as possible so as to provide confidence and help build trust. Will the Minister tell my constituents that this will be done soon as a central part of the success regime process, and will he confirm that this project is not included among those deferred capital spending programmes identified in the *Health Service Journal* this week? There can be no agreement of any kind without this money being unlocked.

West Cumbria is home to one of the most nationally and strategically important sites in the shape of Sellafield. Over the coming years, with new nuclear reactors at Moorside, thousands of jobs will be created, and my constituency will become one of the fastest growing regional economies in the country. This is due to the plan I developed in 2005: the plan that my community has worked towards ever since. As a result, the local population will grow significantly and quickly.

The people who live in west Cumbria now need better access to the health services they rely on, but it is simply mind-boggling that when a local population is growing, anyone should believe it is sensible to move services 40 miles along a road in need of serious upgrading and subject to frequent closure.

The local NHS must take into account strategic infrastructure and the local population of host communities when planning services. The Minister has been unequivocal about this in the past, and I thank him again for that. Will he ensure that the local population growth and the



national obligation owed to my community as a result of its strategic importance is addressed prominently and clearly as part of the work of the success regime?

The fundamental principles in this debate are straightforward. Moving services 40 miles away from the West Cumberland Hospital is the antithesis of the principles that underpin a truly national health service. I said in December that unless the patients and taxpayers of my community can access the same level of healthcare routinely provided by the NHS in other communities, the NHS exists in name only. Forty miles is not a reasonable distance to ask people in need of medical care to travel, particularly when that 40 miles is served by such inadequate infrastructure. Mothers giving birth do not want to sit in an ambulance on the A595 hoping that they do not get stuck behind a tractor or encounter a road traffic accident.

A fully operational A&E department, supported by associated departments, consultant-led maternity services and paediatric services, must remain at West Cumberland hospital. If we need to adopt a flexible approach to achieve that, that is what we must do. Fully functioning community hospitals with the beds that they have provide an invaluable service in the communities of west, north and east Cumbria. Those services should be built upon, expanded and improved in the face of growing demand, not cut. The Government must allow the success regime the freedom and finances to make that happen.

The Government and local authority partners in Cumbria recently attempted to reach an agreement on a devolution deal. The deal was appalling, but local partners tried hard, on a cross-party basis, to make it work. Negotiations continued right up until the eve of the Budget, so keen was the Chancellor to include the deal in his Budget statement, but they collapsed because the Government refused to accommodate the wishes of local partners with regard to the NHS in Cumbria. Will the Minister tell me whether the Department was consulted, or whether the deal was driven purely by the Treasury?

I have today written to the Secretary of State to invite him to my constituency to listen to local people, hear their concerns and answer their questions. He will be accountable for this process, come hell or high water. To summarise, will the Minister commit to giving the success regime the freedom it needs, and the west, east and north Cumbrian health economy the additional resources it requires? Will he commit to making a statement to the House on the recent never events in the local hospitals trust, how they happened and who is responsible? Will he commit to retaining existing acute services at the West Cumberland hospital? Will he commit to supporting the west Cumbria medical campus with both funding and assistance from Health Education England? Will he commit to releasing the funds for phase 2 of the West Cumberland hospital new build?

I want the success regime process to work and the Minister wants it to work, but it will do so only if the Government work with my community, not against it. There is no doubt in my mind that we can solve the problems, but the Government have to want to solve them and they have to let the process work. The choice is clear: together, we can produce something truly special, groundbreaking and innovative, or we can watch a hollowed-out, under-funded, fraudulent process break the notion of a truly national health service. The NHS is our country's religion; what happens next in Cumbria will demonstrate whether the Government believe in it.

11.22 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer):** It is very kind of you to oversee this debate, Mr Nuttall. I thank the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr Reed) for his kind words and I of course accept the fact that he speaks on behalf of all his constituents—he has a fine track record of doing so. It is good to see the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) by his side, and to see here present my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson), who has also taken a profound interest in this intractable and difficult matter. I do not have much time, so I will address the points that the hon. Member for Copeland raised in turn.

The hon. Gentleman said that the NHS is our national religion. One of his great forebears, the creator of the NHS, Nye Bevan, said that socialism is the religion of priorities. I know that the hon. Gentleman understands the nonconformist antecedents of the British Labour party, perhaps better than some of the party's current leadership. He will also know that we need to get priorities right in Cumbria. That is something that neither we nor our predecessors in Government have achieved for many years.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not mind if I start by refuting his central contention that the success regime has been perverted in its course. That is absolutely not the case. The success regime has had no further instruction from its co-sponsors, NHS England and NHS Improvement, since its foundation. I have certainly made no intervention, other than to listen carefully to Sir Neil McKay when he came to see me a few weeks ago so that I could understand the challenges that he has in bringing the success regime to a conclusion.

I am as frustrated as the hon. Gentleman is about the time the success regime is taking to formulate a plan, and I expressed that frustration to Sir Neil. He is going through the proper consultation process, which in Cumbria above all places needs to be done properly, given the failure of previous consultations either to be done properly or to result in a conclusion. That is why I understand why he feels he needs to go through the process as rigorously as possible, but I do want to see a conclusion. We need to see a proper clinical resolution to the problems. It is not for me to say what that clinical resolution will be, so I cannot comment on the hon. Gentleman's specific questions about service delivery at West Cumberland hospital and its relationship with Carlisle, or, for that matter—he did not mention this—with other partners in the north, be they the Northumbria NHS Foundation Trust or other possible partners for the trusts in Cumbria.

We will give Cumbria all the means to be able to achieve what it needs to achieve, whether they be financial or representative. I hope the hon. Gentleman will understand that the 3% funding increase for the clinical commissioning group in Cumbria this year alone shows our commitment to ensuring that Cumbria has the funds it requires to achieve the changes it needs to make. Nevertheless, those changes will not come just from more money; there will need to be reform, which is why I urge him to look at the success regime's emerging thoughts on integrated care communities. Those thoughts have been brought together not by me, NHS England or NHS Improvement bureaucrats—I count myself as a bureaucrat in that sense—but by local clinicians who understand the problems on the ground.

[*Ben Gummer*]

I cannot comment on the devolution deal, which is a matter for the Treasury, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I will ensure that he has an answer from the correct person on the recent never events, of which I was informed. He should know that the Secretary of State keeps in his office a board of never events throughout the NHS. He takes a keen interest in them and in their reduction. I hope that I can ensure that the hon. Gentleman gets a proper answer to those questions.

I have previously endorsed the moves by the University of Central Lancashire that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and I will of course ask Health Education England to engage with that process as fully as possible. I disagree with him about the impact of nurse bursaries. It is exactly by reforming health education funding that we can release 10,000 additional places in nurse training school. Those places will mean that we can staff areas of the country that have been difficult to staff in the past. We cannot provide such massive expansion by the traditional means, and nor could the Labour party have promised to do so, because the costs involved are so considerable. It is by that reform that we will achieve the ends he wants to see. I want to be outlining more items of medical education reform in the next few months, and I hope that they will be to the advantage of places such as the University of Central Lancashire. In the meantime, I shall ensure that Health Education England takes a keen interest in that work—I know that it already is.

On the second phase of funding for the West Cumberland hospital A&E department, it is incumbent on me to say that £90 million has already been spent. That shows our commitment to ensuring that services in West Cumberland are of a consistent and proper level. Nevertheless, I will

find out what the blockage is. I know there is a problem with increased costs and the fact that, as anticipated, the budget has been broken. We cannot have a situation anywhere in the NHS where, just because a budget is broken, we pay for capital increases, but I shall ensure that that particular matter is addressed as quickly as possible and that that is not part of the success regime reasoning, as it is part of a phased deal for that hospital.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman raised the issue of GPs. I know that he will have noted NHS England's announcement last week about the improved deal for GPs: there will be in excess of £2 billion over the Parliament to increase support for GPs. A lot of that will be going into under-doctor areas and those areas into which it is hard to recruit. Those are subtly different things, but both apply to Cumbria. I hope that, over the next few years, he will see the impact as the 5,000 additional GPs that the Government have committed to providing feed through to improved services on the ground.

West Cumbria and Cumbria as a whole are indeed a mark of whether we get the NHS to be a national service. Bevan coined the term “universalise the best”, but that also means universalising the best that we learn from elsewhere in the world. We must learn from elsewhere in the world about how to deal with scarcely populated areas and make sure that we have specific solutions for places such as Cumbria. We have not yet done that successfully, which is why I want the success regime to be concluded as quickly as possible, and with community buy-in, so that we can have the results that Members present want to see.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

11.30 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## North East Ambulance Service

[MR ADRIAN BAILEY *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the performance of the North East Ambulance Service.

We as a country pride ourselves on our world-class NHS services, which are the envy of the world. It is therefore always important that we highlight failures and shortcomings to ensure that our services do not fail our constituents when they need them most.

Strains on services are part and parcel of life in the NHS, but in recent years the pressures have been exacerbated by the Government's policies. Ever since the Conservatives were elected to office in 2010, the NHS has struggled due to their mismanagement. In particular, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 implemented a costly, top-down reorganisation, which was neither needed nor wanted. It led to a disjointed funding model and resulted in my local ambulance trust, the North East Ambulance Service, running an expected budget deficit of £3.5 million for 2015-16. It comes as no surprise that I have received a growing number of complaints and concerns about the NHS in recent years, which is why this northern group of MPs decided that we had to call for the debate.

All the services that the NHS provides are important, but when someone suddenly falls ill in an emergency such as a stroke or a heart attack, or has a fall or an accident, it is understandable that they have high expectations of our ambulance service. The important work that paramedics do in our region day in, day out is undeniable, but, as the cases that my constituents have brought to my attention and those that have been reported in the press show, patient safety is in jeopardy. That is mainly due to waiting times, which, as the cases I will outline illustrate, have increased and are causing distress to many of my constituents.

For red 1 and red 2 cases—potentially life-threatening incidents—the trust remains below the national standard. Although that is reflected across the country—only two ambulance trusts in England met red 1 standards—it is concerning that, in our region, that failure has continued for the past three years, despite the fact that our response time of eight minutes is higher than the national average. That is exacerbated by the fact that red demand calls have increased by 21.3% in the past 12 months. The performance targets for the fourth quarter of 2015-16 were breached, leading to the trust's third consecutive quarter breach.

I called this debate to give myself and my fellow north-eastern colleagues the opportunity to raise cases and concerns directly with the Government to ensure that our constituents receive the very best standard of service, which they rightly expect. It is right that we raise concerns with the Government, who are ultimately responsible for the service and can ensure that something is done about the problems we raise. I will touch on some of the many cases ranging from 2012 to 2016 that my constituents have brought to my attention, and I know that other Members will do the same.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this extremely important debate. I am very concerned about the management. That was highlighted to me when I wrote a letter to the North East Ambulance Service about ambulance services in Teesdale. I got a letter back headed, "Ambulance services in Weardale". The worst thing that happened was to Violet Alliston, whose partner rang three times in an hour. No ambulance came, and she died. That is obviously totally unacceptable.

**Mrs Hodgson:** I thank my hon. Friend for that very sad example, which I fear and predict will be one of many—perhaps not all with such a tragic ending—that we will hear this afternoon.

The correspondence I have received about ambulance waiting times in my constituency makes it clear this has been a persistent problem since 2012. I was first told about the problem with waiting times by the league chairman of the Wearside football league after he raised concerns with the North East Ambulance Service directly about numerous incidents. In his correspondence, he said that waiting times for football players who had broken their leg had continually gone over 70 minutes. In one case, after a player broke his leg, the league chairman called 999 at 11.40 am, but he was called back and informed that no ambulance was available and that he should take the player by car. He rang 999 back and complained that that went against what trained first aiders were told about not moving people with broken bones. An ambulance then arrived at 1 pm—80 minutes after the initial call—and the young man was taken to hospital.

Ever since that case, I have received a range of correspondence from other constituents highlighting failures and shortcomings in ambulances going out to emergencies. An issue particular to my local area—I do not think it is replicated in other parts of the region, although we may hear differently when other colleagues speak—is that ambulances struggle to get to certain parts of my constituency due to confusion in finding the address. That has been repeatedly brought to my attention by my constituent, Mr Walker, who for the past two years has highlighted the difficulty that ambulance crews have getting to the Usworth Hall estate in Washington. When a shocking murder took place in the area in 2014, the ambulance did not arrive for more than an hour and the man died.

An example of that failure happened when a woman was in labour and her sister-in-law had to deliver the baby because the ambulance went to the wrong street. The children of the woman in labour had to search the streets for the ambulance. When they found it, they guided it by foot, as they were not allowed on board, for more than a mile to where it should have been.

I could give many other examples. It has been a persistent issue for the residents of Usworth Hall, who, through Mr Walker, have highlighted their concerns and their exasperation at those problems. On each occasion, I forwarded their concerns to the North East Ambulance Service, which looked into each issue. To its credit, it has tried to address them. That was highlighted in a letter to me in July 2014, in which it explained that it had set up an electronic flag system for all residents in Usworth Hall and had a duty manager from its control room go out and survey the area for problems. However,

[Mrs Hodgson]

Mr Walker contacted me again at the beginning of April and informed me that an ambulance was parked outside his house one evening. When he went out to speak to the staff, he found that they were lost and supposed to be in another street.

Paramedics understandably do not have the local knowledge that residents have, but sat-nav equipment is provided to help ambulances get to the right destination at the right time.

**Mary Glindon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend think that those delays could be because of the shortage of paramedics and the fact that, as the service has admitted, it uses volunteers and private contractors to provide ambulances? That exacerbates the problem of people not knowing how to get to where they need to be.

**Mrs Hodgson:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I will come on to the shortage, which is running at about 15%, and the stress on paramedics, to which she alluded.

If the sat-nav equipment continues to fail, and if my interventions on behalf of my constituents and the ambulance trust's action do not rectify the situation, there needs to be a serious investigation into what is going wrong. We cannot have our ambulances driving round lost on estates looking for the right street.

My most recent piece of casework is from February and is deeply concerning. It concerns my constituent, Mrs Ellen Sherriff. I feel that using the words emailed to me by my constituent's husband, Mr David Sherriff, can help to highlight the situation and the distress that can come from having to wait hours and hours for an ambulance to arrive. I hope that you will allow me a moment to read out Mr Sherriff's words, Mr Bailey. He said:

"Ellen became unwell at 10.35am yesterday morning with severe head pain on the right-hand side. She felt like she was going to pass out. I checked her blood pressure which was very high, so phoned 111 at 11am and spoke to a call handler who told me he was sending an emergency ambulance and not to be worried if it arrived with blue lights.

Two and a half hours later no one had come. Ellen remained unwell and could not stand any light.

I phoned 999 and was told the ambulance that was coming had been diverted to Cramlington but that we would be next unless a more urgent call came in.

At 2.40pm, a patient transportation ambulance arrived with two ambulance men. I asked why it had taken so long. They said given the circumstances Ellen should have been seen earlier. They had no equipment, not even a blood pressure machine. They said they couldn't risk moving Ellen in case they caused the bleed in her brain to become life threatening and they would send for a paramedic. They would also remain here till he arrived. They also complained to the control room regarding the wait.

They sat outside until 5.30pm, 6 and a half hours after I first phoned. When the paramedic first arrived he examined Ellen and said she should have been in hospital 5 hours earlier."

It was not until 6 pm, more than eight hours after the initial phone call, that my constituent, Mrs Sherriff, was admitted to hospital, where it was discovered that she did indeed have a bleed in the brain and that she should have been there much sooner.

Until Friday, Mr Sherriff was still awaiting a response to his complaint, which was sent in February. Perhaps the prospect of this debate ensured that he eventually got it. The trust has admitted errors in the handling and categorising of Mrs Sherriff's condition, meaning that it was continually not treated with the urgency required. The trust has apologised and said that a "reflection and learning session" has been given to the original call handler, but this case could easily have had a tragic ending.

**Pat Glass** (North West Durham) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate, which is important to all of us. Does she agree that the issue is not only with the ambulance service? Last summer, in the middle of the night, I took a relative to the university hospital in Durham. In the morning, when I came outside, I counted 12 ambulances stood outside the hospital and unable to discharge their passengers and get patients admitted. The whole system in the north-east is now simply not working.

**Mrs Hodgson:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point—we often hear about the queues of ambulances at accident and emergency. Patients have waited hours and hours for the ambulance to come, but when they get to the hospital, they sit in a queue outside. I have raised that with my local hospital. There is a huge breakdown in the system. Something is going seriously wrong, and it is completely unacceptable. Mrs Sherriff, a patient who had a suspected bleed in the brain, had to wait for more than eight hours before getting to A&E. That is truly shocking, and all those cases mentioned highlight concerns that the Government and the North East Ambulance Service must address.

I have one more issue to discuss before concluding, and that is to do with the numbers of qualified paramedics, which my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) mentioned in her intervention. When waiting times are going up and demand is rising, we clearly need to look at workforce retention and recruitment. Our paramedics do an amazing job, but they cannot be in two places at the same time.

At this point, I want to place clearly on the record that I am not apportioning any blame or criticism at all to any paramedic or ambulance crew. They do an amazing job, under very difficult and trying circumstances, day in, day out, and they should not be placed in situations whereby, once allocated, they race through traffic to a call, within the appropriate time allowed, only to be faced with stressed and sometimes angry people, who say, "Where've you been? I've been waiting four, five, six or seven hours."

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. I have an example from my constituency. A young lad, a teenager, had a road traffic accident, getting a compound fracture of the leg, but it took three hours for an ambulance to get to him.

When I met the ambulance chief executive, she told me that the problem is that the organisations that do employment and support allowance assessments are poaching qualified paramedics from the ambulance

service, creating a great hole. There is a role there for Government, perhaps, to talk to the whole organisation, to see what can be done to put a stop to that.

**Mrs Hodgson:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point, which I will touch on, although he made the case well. We have to look at the slippage, to where in the rest of the health service the paramedics are haemorrhaging, and why. I will say more about that in a moment.

Paramedics are there to treat people and give them emergency—perhaps life-saving—healthcare, but before they can even start to treat them, they might first have to calm the patient and relatives down, because of something that was completely out of their hands. It is therefore no surprise that, nationally, there is a shortage of qualified paramedics, and all trusts are struggling to fill vacancies so that they can operate at full capacity. The North East Ambulance Service has a 15% shortage, and is plugging the gap with private and voluntary organisations, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside mentioned. The service has said, however, that it will be up to full establishment in a year, but how many more people will wait for hours and hours before we get to that stage?

Something therefore needs to be done about the recruitment and retention of paramedics, especially since evidence has shown that more staff are leaving the profession than ever. Also, mental health charity Mind reported that 62% of blue-light emergency service workers have experienced a mental health problem and, worryingly, one in four has considered ending their own life. It is shocking to think about the stress that those people are working under.

It is no surprise that research conducted jointly by Unite, Unison and the GMB revealed at the end of last year that more than 1,500 paramedics had left the service in 2014-15, compared with 845 in 2010-11—still a high number, but a little more than half the later figure. Of paramedics surveyed as part of other research by the three unions, 75% had considered leaving the profession due to stress and pay.

Action therefore needs to be taken on recruitment, which is why I welcome the work of my local university, the University of Sunderland, which in partnership with the North East Ambulance Service has launched a diploma programme in paramedic practice. It will pair theoretical study with practical training over two years, and it will help to address the shortages faced by not only our regional trust, but other trusts around the country. That innovative work by my local university, alongside that of the outstanding paramedic practice degree at Teesside University, which is seen as a beacon of best practice in our region, if not the country, is important and will help.

It is, however, unsustainable not to address strategically the staffing shortages and the increasing demoralisation of a workforce who are haemorrhaging away, because that is clearly having an impact on waiting and call-out times for emergencies. That is why I hope that the Minister will address those concerns, and outline what the Government are doing to deal with recruitment and retention. How will she work with my local ambulance service trust to ensure that it reaches the target of being fully operational by this time next year? How will the ambulance trust ensure that those who are recruited

into the field are retained and do not slip off to work for other parts of the health service, so that we do not see further shortages down the line?

It is important that our emergency ambulance services are up to the standard that we all expect. That means working collaboratively among ourselves, as the local Members of Parliament who represent our constituents and their concerns, and with the Department of Health, NHS England and the North East Ambulance Service Trust. Our constituents deserve the best standards in our NHS, and it is up to the Government seriously to address pressures on our NHS services, especially the case of the workforce in the ambulance service.

I hope that the Minister has listened carefully to my concerns, and will listen to those that my colleagues from the north-east who have attended the debate today express. I look forward to hearing what she has to say at the end of the debate.

**Mr Adrian Bailey (in the Chair):** I will call the Front-Bench spokespersons at 3.40 pm. Simple arithmetic will demonstrate that if I am to get everyone who wants to speak to speak—I want you to speak as well—you need to confine your remarks to about six or seven minutes. I will be grateful if you follow that guidance.

2.49 pm

**Mr Nicholas Brown** (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): I wish to make a brief contribution to the debate. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on securing a debate on a matter that is of importance throughout the north-east of England. This is an important service, run by good people under extraordinary pressure. To give an example, on Monday 7 December last year, there were 1,837 emergency calls to the service. That is equivalent to new year's eve and was a 46% increase on the year before. That was accompanied by 1,664 calls taken by the 111 service.

The service is fast becoming a gateway to healthcare as others become more difficult to access and some, such as walk-in centres, are no longer there at all. Repeated requests to the public to call the service only in life-threatening situations can do only so much. I accept that a certain amount of problems are caused by hoax calls and other misuse of the service. People who do such things are completely irresponsible and stand to be condemned, but that is not at the heart of the problems faced by the service in our region.

I would like to touch briefly on a number of issues. The first is commissioning, which is not one of the strongest features of the Government's national health service reorganisation. How focused are the commissioners on the service they are supposed to be in charge of? Are they working alongside the chief executive in a supportive and encouraging way? When has their role ever been reviewed or carefully considered by those in charge? There is a case for looking at that and at staff morale, as my hon. Friend rightly said, and asking ourselves why it is as it is. Surveys of the service show that 90% of staff are stressed. That is consistent with the picture that came from her address—and no doubt will come from colleagues—of a service that is trying to do its best under enormous pressure.

[*Mr Nicholas Brown*]

Like my hon. Friend, I welcome the establishment of the diploma of higher education in paramedic practice, which will start in September at the University of Sunderland. That two-year course has been created to try to meet the shortage of paramedics in the region as well as the national shortage. Evidence suggests that the grading of posts may be too low, and I would be interested to hear the Minister's views on that. It seems odd that, in a region such as the north-east, where unemployment levels are still higher than the national average, there should be a persistent vacancy rate of between 10% and 15% in the service.

**Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op):** One of the issues raised with me on recruitment challenges is that it costs £1,200 to get a driving entitlement for C1 vehicles. For many people, that cost is extremely prohibitive and constituents have said to me that that has put them off applying for those kinds of jobs.

**Mr Brown:** My hon. Friend is on to a good point. There is something odd if, in a region of higher than average unemployment, it is difficult to fill those vacancies not just in a single moment in time but persistently. We should look at all barriers to entry into the service. I accept what she said, but I harbour the thought that gradings may have been set too low and that there is a case for upgrading the job.

I have two other points to mention briefly. Legal highs are again putting more pressure on the service as young people in particular misuse them. I suggest that it is not a good idea to take them at all, but taking them results in the ambulance service being called out. There were something like 20 incidents, including a cardiac arrest, in a single day—8 February—and so far this year there have been about 300 call-outs because of the use of legal highs. I harbour the view that they should not be legal, but perhaps that is a different debate.

Finally, I want to mention the pressures that will be put on the service if the supported accommodation proposals that the Government are considering come to pass. If vulnerable people who are housed in projects and given support to lead their day-to-day lives are denied that support and left to their own devices, the consequence for the police, accident and emergency services at hospitals and ambulance services will be much greater, rather than lesser, pressure. That is not the right direction of travel for our society.

2.56 pm

**Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con):** I represent a very rural seat in north Northumberland, where, in January 2015, we had the tragic case of the entirely avoidable death of a young man because an ambulance did not get there in time. The Secretary of State instituted a national review on the back of that to look at the issues that triggered that tragedy. I am grateful for that, and we have made progress.

Some issues have come out of that, and the North East Ambulance Service should be commended. In my area, ambulances go to Northumbria hospital—our new emergency-only hospital. Some colleagues have already mentioned that we have been seeing the queuing of ambulances as they arrive at the various hospitals.

I am not familiar with the wider north-east hospital framework, but at Northumbria it was quickly evident that that was a problem. To its credit, the North East Ambulance Service sent a paramedic to help in the triaging process, along with a specialist nurse who was diverted from other duties, to improve the process when the ambulances arrive—the hospital knows when they are going to turn up because they phone ahead—and to do a better job in ensuring that patients were removed from said ambulance and that the kit was returned to paramedics so that they could crack on with the next case.

That has been working well. We have seen a much speedier process, so I would commend that to colleagues, who could encourage other hospitals in the region to look at doing that. That has been an investment, but without doubt the cost-benefit not directly to the hospital but to the overall health package for our constituents has been hugely improved, because ambulances are back in the system. We were also then able to ensure that Northumberland-based ambulances were coming back up into Northumberland and not being taken to 999 calls elsewhere in the region, leaving paramedics working 14 or 15-hour days to get the ambulance back to Berwick or Alnwick. I commend the ambulance service for listening on the challenging problems we had and trying to make improvements.

At Northumbria hospital, the figures for urgent and emergency attendances read like this for the past three months: January had 12,911, which was a 12% increase on 2015; February had 13,731, which was a 30% increase on 2015; and March had 15,146, which was a 24% increase on 2015. However, only 24% of those cases needed emergency hospital admission. Something is broken. We are overloading our ambulance service with calls that demand an emergency ambulance, but, once at the hospital, only 24% needed emergency care.

My concern is twofold, and I ask the Minister to look at how we can make progress on this. First, the algorithm that the 111 and 999 systems demand that staff in the call centres use is dramatically risk-averse. I do not want anyone who is having a cardiac arrest to be told they have heartburn and not be sent an ambulance; quite the opposite should happen. However, a few years ago, the North East Ambulance Service built the lower-level 111 system and tested it before it was rolled out around the country.

**Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab):** I hear what the hon. Lady says, but is not the real problem that 111 was rushed in and relied on technology? When it originally started, we had trained paramedics in the call centres who could categorise cases. There is clear evidence, which I will present, that, if something is not deemed life-threatening or someone is not having difficulty breathing, the case is categorised as green. The figures produced are meaningless.

**Mrs Trevelyan:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comment. Quite a few of my constituents were among those experienced staff. Some were retired midwives or had worked as nurses and then moved into the call centre framework. There was a big shift a few years ago to downgrade the medical qualifications required for those staff. We are starting to see a change in that, because the new chief executive is mindful that the huge increase in demand is partly down to staff's inability to

assess cases correctly. If they took another 30 seconds, they could assess properly the situation on the end of the phone.

Will the Minister work with the people who are writing the algorithm and building the system to get it right? The ambulance service personnel would then have a better tool to work with. That would also encourage ambulance services, and not just our own in the north-east, to go back to higher-value trained personnel who can ask the right questions and get the right answers, so that we do not end up with over 70% of emergency calls ending in someone getting to hospital and finding that urgent care was not needed.

The other side of this issue, which I have been campaigning on with St John Ambulance, is the need to help families to be better educated so that they can assess their own medical conditions. Other than for cardiac arrests, strokes and such evidently dramatic changes, it is often not emergency care but urgent care that is required. We need to encourage people and build their confidence in assessing for themselves whether they should go to the pharmacy or the doctor or call for an emergency service. We need to do that across the board, focus on it and drive it forward.

St John Ambulance wants to get into every single school, so that we are teaching young children the difference between what to do if they burn their finger on the kettle—put it under the tap, instead of dialling 999—and what to do in an emergency, such as if granny falls down the stairs. The next generation would then have confidence in knowing the difference between when emergency care is needed and when they can manage and find the right care over a longer period.

Our paramedics will not be able to continue meeting the demand, much of which is inappropriately placed on the ambulance service. We should make much better use of our amazing paramedics and ensure that retention is higher, because they are valuable members of our community.

3.3 pm

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on securing this debate. In the past 18 months, I have heard about 12 quite serious cases. The ambulance service is in crisis, and that is not down to the men and women who work in it; it is down to the management. Urgent action is needed if we are to avoid people dying and prevent the suffering that my constituents are going through.

I will give a flavour of that suffering. In July 2014, in Chester-le-Street, a woman's husband has severe angina. The first responder arrives and says he needs an ambulance. Three hours later, the ambulance arrives. A gentleman falls in Chester-le-Street from a six-foot fence and bangs his head. He is told to stay and wait for an ambulance. He waits two hours for an ambulance that does not arrive, so his neighbour takes him to hospital. A lady in Sacriston, which is about 10 minutes from the local hospital, has severe abdominal pains and is passed out, unconscious, waiting two hours for an ambulance to arrive. In Tanfield Lea, an 86-year-old lady has a fall at 9.30 pm on 13 February. Her partner is told by the ambulance crew not to move her. After several calls, the ambulance arrives on Saturday morning at quarter to 1. Apparently it had been diverted to Newcastle.

Patient transport is also an issue. One constituent, who had had a stroke and severe mobility problems, was waiting for patient transport to a medical appointment but was told that the ambulance would not attend. Another constituent from Stanley was transferred from his home to the Freeman hospital for regular dialysis. He had to wait two hours for transport back home, leaving him in severe discomfort. Another constituent who lives in Chester-le-Street found a young lady passed out outside her front door. She called an ambulance, and an hour and a half later, the ambulance arrived.

In New Kyo, a constituent complained that a young woman was having a fit in the local bus station. One hour and 10 minutes later, there was no response. She called the police, and they got the ambulance to arrive. Another constituent from Chester-le-Street needed to be transferred from Bishop Auckland hospital to the university hospital of North Durham. The request was made at 5 pm. She arrived in hospital at 1 am the following morning.

In Beamish, a lady fell down a flight of stairs and called an ambulance immediately. The first responder said she should not be moved. Two and a half hours later, an ambulance arrived. In March this year, an elderly lady in Sacriston—literally a 10-minute ride from the local hospital—waited an hour and 47 minutes in the cold north-east winter, being comforted by her neighbours with blankets, having broken her shoulder.

The last case I will touch on, which I have permission to mention, was raised with me by Mrs Irwin in east Stanley. Her 69-year-old mother-in-law, Joyce Irwin, had a fall on 14 March at 7.20 pm. Her son, who lives with her, came home and rang for an ambulance at 7.25 pm. He was advised by the controller that an ambulance would be there within the hour. Nothing happened. Her eldest son arrived and rang both 999 and 111. The first responder arrived at midnight, without any pain relief, and Joyce Irwin therefore had to wait until 1.10 am—four and a half hours later, having been on the floor in excruciating pain—for an ambulance to arrive. When she was finally delivered to the university hospital of North Durham, she found she had a broken hip. It is worth reading what Mrs Irwin says. She states clearly that her mother-in-law was in excruciating pain and was promised an ambulance that she did not receive. She says that Joyce has

“worked and paid her duties all of her life”.

Is that the way to treat our constituents in the 21st century? I suggest not.

There is something severely wrong with the North East Ambulance Service. I have a particular problem with the way in which it treats elderly people. My hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West said that the service is missing its targets for red 1s and 2s, but fall cases such as those I mentioned are not even put down as red 1s and 2s; they are put down as greens. In many cases, these are elderly people who have broken bones and are in severe pain, but they are put down at the bottom of the queue. Will the Minister interrogate the hospital trust about the way it is prioritising cases?

I have been told anecdotally by a firefighter and a policeman that if someone wants an ambulance to arrive quickly, they should ring them up and say that a person either has chest pains or is unconscious. They will

[Mr Kevan Jones]

then get an ambulance straight away. In this day and age, it is not acceptable that our constituents—elderly, vulnerable people like Joyce Irwin, who have done the right thing all their lives—are treated like that. They have worked hard and paid into the system, and they expect in their old age that if they need the NHS in an emergency, it will deliver. It is not only the individual who is affected. The trauma also affects their families and loved ones, who, in Joyce Irwin's case, saw her on the floor for four and a half hours in excruciating pain. That is simply not acceptable.

May I also ask the Minister to tackle the North East ambulance trust about its response to Members of Parliament, because it is absolutely diabolical at responding to Members' complaints? I have had many complaints from people who have called an ambulance when they have seen an incident and they ask why the ambulance took so long. When I inquire, the ambulance trust responds, "We cannot discuss that case because of patient confidentiality," because the complainant was not affected. That is complete rubbish. Those people do not want to know what happened to the individual; they just want to know why an ambulance did not turn up. It is interesting that we have got this debate today, because I recently had a flurry of answers to my questions, but I say to the Minister that there is a serious issue about how Members of Parliament can represent their constituents who complain to them.

I have a similar problem—if the Minister wants to intervene, that would be helpful—with the North Durham clinical commissioning group, which has failed to answer any complaints at all, so I have raised the matter with NHS England. There is something seriously wrong with the North East ambulance trust, although it is not down to the hard work of the individuals who work for it. They do a tremendous job in very difficult circumstances. There is also a question about the priority system that uses algorithms, as the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) suggested.

There is a question about rurality as ambulances are diverted to more urban areas rather than rural areas. I did not think I would say this, but it might be time to break up the North East Ambulance Service and put it into special measures. It covers a large area and is completely failing. Will the Minister look into whether it is fit for purpose in the long term? I do not think it is. Urgent action is needed. People are not only suffering, but they have lost faith in the service, which is a terrible thing. What should be a flagship service—North East Ambulance Service—that people call upon only in a time of need is clearly failing.

3.12 pm

**Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on securing this debate.

I declare an interest as a former chairman of the northern region of the National Union of Public Employees and as a former president of Unison. For 15 years I had the privilege of representing ambulance staff. I first became their representative a year after they were described by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe

(Mr Clarke) as little more than glorified taxi drivers. We were in the middle of an ambulance dispute at the time, so he probably did not really mean what he said, but there is one thing for sure: the staff are true professionals trying their hardest against insurmountable odds to try to deliver the quality public service that we all rely on, and it was to them I turned for this debate.

A constituent of mine retired from the ambulance service last year due to stress-related illness. I asked him, "What is the picture today? Can you give us some idea?" and he sent me an email this morning in which he said a number of issues have been going on for quite some time. He said that there is huge pressure on the services, especially over the winter period, and they ask the public to call only in genuine emergencies. Increased waiting times outside A&E hold up crews continually. The shortage of funding and paramedics results in long waiting times for patients. He goes on to say that they rely on charities to supplement the shortfall. They recently had to call on a charity to supply volunteer doctors over Easter to help with the response to the most urgent calls. There is a shortage of at least 15% of qualified paramedics and a large increase in the use of private companies, but the capabilities of such staff are not known. According to Unison, staff stress levels have increased and 90% of staff say they have suffered work-related stress owing to long hours and staff shortages. One member is quoted as saying that the levels are dangerous. There is also the ongoing issue of the Government continuing to put pressure on people whose morale is low by keeping in place an eight-year public sector pay freeze. People doing very important work are being penalised for doing it.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), I asked my office to give me a snapshot of the information that people have been feeding to us. I will quote from some emails. Pam, who lives in my constituency, wrote:

"Hi Dave, developed a problem with my left leg which according to 111 merits an emergency ambulance to take me to A&E. I have had a phone call from a paramedic apologising for the delay but please can you tell the Tory toffs that I have waited 2 hours for this ambulance and still no signs."

Someone from Swalwell, near the very busy A1 in my constituency, wrote:

"An old man, aged 74, had to wait (lying bleeding on the cold ground in the rain) for 80 minutes for an ambulance. He fell just outside of my house...He was bleeding profusely throughout the entire 80 minute wait. Another neighbour repeatedly called for the ambulance and kept being told they were busy and that ambulances were being diverted to more urgent cases. We were unable to move the gentleman because of the amount of blood he was losing and also we weren't sure if he had broken anything. He was cold and uncomfortable lying on the wet pavement. I brought out pillows and blankets. Other neighbours brought out bandages and towels and held umbrellas over him. I ended up calling a friend of mine who is a nurse, specialised in head injuries. She arrived very quickly and was able to work out that he was bleeding so heavily due to medication he was taking which was stopping his blood from clotting."

She concludes:

"I understand there are limited resources but an old man lying in the rain bleeding heavily should not be left for so long. By the time the ambulance arrived, his wife was feeling dizzy and struggling with...shock."

A 76-year-old went to a councillor's surgery in my part of the world. She told the councillor that she had had to wait an hour and a half for an ambulance and



that when she was contacted she asked why she could not go to the hospital in Hexham, which is closer and where she would normally go. She was told that she was not allowed to go there. She had to go to the Queen Elizabeth hospital, which is at the other end of the A1 and in rush hour is a nightmare to reach. However, they insisted, so she had an hour and a half of waiting and then went to a hospital that made the wait even worse.

Another constituent, Mrs Waller, wrote:

"I recently contacted your secretary...regarding my husband...who is a palliative patient, he had a fall in the bathroom 14th March at 10.05 am and it was 15.20pm before an ambulance arrived. I rang 999 which was the advice given if this ever happened, I had to make a further two calls and my husband's palliative nurse also made a call as well",

as did my secretary from my office.

"I do not wish to have a go at the ambulance service but this is the problem that Mr David Cameron has caused due to the cutbacks in the NHS. No one should have to spend almost five and a half hours on a cold wet room floor. There was no way I could get my husband up due to his reduced mobility because of his cancer."

The North East Ambulance Service is in the Minister's remit. Basically, she is presiding over unmanaged decline. A hands-off attitude is unacceptable and not worthy of such a cherished institution. My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham spoke about the people who created the health service: the people who can remember what it was like before 1948 and how desperate it was. They have paid into the service all their lives and it is a cherished institution in this country, yet it is being rubbished because of the failures of the service that is in place. We must give the people who run and work in the service the chance to get it back where it was. The Minister needs to talk and listen to the people on the frontline.

Also, we need to listen to the people who pay for the service and for all of us to stand here and talk about it. They are the people who are important in this debate and they are the people who are being let down. The Minister needs to take action and put the ambulance service right.

3.18 pm

**Ian Lavery** (Wansbeck) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. Great credit must be given to my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) for securing this timely debate.

The North East Ambulance Service is not creaking at the seams; it is totally and utterly broken. It is in meltdown, and that causes great concern. As has already been said, there is a total lack of any confidence at all in the North East Ambulance Service among the residents. It is failing people of all ages in their time of most need. As my hon. Friends have said, we must place on the record our thanks for the commitment and passion of the workforce in the North East Ambulance Service.

Unfortunately, there is a staff shortfall of between 10% and perhaps 15%, which has been mentioned. That puts huge stress on the remaining individuals, who must make up for the shortfall. My hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West suggested that 64% of people have complained about stress. There is a high rate of people employed in the service who cannot go to work any more because of stress; and is it not really alarming that one in four people has considered

taking their own life: paramedics—people working in the ambulance service, who we are terribly proud of? We urgently need to look at the situation.

There is a complete lack of staff. The service is undermanned and underfunded, and we have not got the resources we need for the situation we have in the north-east. We have to ask why there is a shortage in the first place. I believe that the wages in the North East Ambulance Service are the lowest in the country. That is one factor. We do not have the resources to pay even on a par with the counties next to us. The wages, terms and conditions are much lower than those of other ambulance services.

Like all the other hon. Members who have spoken I want to mention a few instances. My hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West mentioned a young fellow playing football, who broke his leg on the pitch. Now, you would expect an ambulance to come and pick you up, wouldn't you? Is that too much to ask if someone is lying in agony with a broken bone from playing football on a cold Saturday afternoon? Of course they would want an ambulance. We cannot just push people to the side and wait, and explain to them, "There'll be somebody coming shortly."

That is not even the most important example. Everyone who has spoken has given examples of what has been happening—mainly to elderly people. There are lots of elderly people in my constituency—Mrs Robson, for one. She is 78 years old. She slipped on a pavement in the middle of winter. She had to wait one hour and 40 minutes for an ambulance; but the message that comes is: "I'm sorry; you're going to have to wait, because it is not at crisis point. You are not an emergency." Of course she is an emergency. If a 78-year-old lady is lying on the floor crumpled in absolute agony, that is an emergency; but on paper—"Sorry, you're not an emergency."

I will tell hon. Members what happens. Someone rings up, and they have got a crib sheet in the central office. My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) mentioned that if someone is unconscious or has got pains in the chest, the service will come to them. The first question is "Are they conscious? Are they breathing?" "Yes." "Right. Are they bleeding?" "No." Then, if they are conscious and not bleeding, they are put right down the pecking order. Quite frankly, it is simply not acceptable.

**Mary Glendon:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the morale of the call centre staff has been lowered? They can no longer care when they talk to people, but are like call centre handlers, with things being very automated; and they do the minimum to reassure patients because everything is down to time and hitting targets. They are no longer people dealing with callers who are in distress. They are not able or allowed to show any emotion or any support, because they simply have to deal with the call as quickly as they can, to get on to the next one.

**Ian Lavery:** What I am saying is not meant to be any criticism of the people in the call centre, either—because if they veer from the crib sheet they have got, they are in trouble; but it shows how bad the whole situation is.

I want to mention Mr Taylor. I must say that he is a relative of my wife, who waited 11 and a half hours for an ambulance to arrive. He was really poorly. Plenty of

[*Ian Lavery*]

people came from the NHS and said, “He needs an ambulance”—and then someone says “He doesn’t” and someone says “He does,” and someone else says “He doesn’t”. When he actually got the ambulance, at 1.45 in the morning, he was in a coma. That was seven months ago, and he is still lying in a coma as we speak. If that ambulance had turned up before, he might not be.

I will not dwell on that point other than to say that that brings me on to the complaints procedure, because MPs have complained, as well, about what happens to our constituents. We get a chronological list of what happened, and why the ambulances could not come, because they were diverted to other more serious incidents. That is not good enough. It is not good enough for me to say to one of my constituents, “Your mam couldn’t get an ambulance because somebody else was more important”—when she was lying suffering. Or if someone has a terminal disease and is desperate, or someone has a chest disease—it is not good enough; and the complaints procedure is not good enough. They are not treating people like human beings.

I have got lots to say and not a lot of time to say it, but I am going to reiterate the fact that these delays are utterly unacceptable and we cannot continue on this basis with the North East Ambulance Service operating as badly as it is. Someone mentioned that the service will be fully operational in 12 months. I have heard that before. It is not good enough for the people who will trip, fall and stumble. It is not good enough for elderly people, or young people playing football.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** My hon. Friend has obviously had the same letter from the North East trust that I have had; but does he agree, also, that it is not good enough because it is a question of our constituents’ confidence in the service? It should be a first world service, but it is more reminiscent of the third world.

**Ian Lavery:** I fully concur with my hon. Friend’s sentiments, and I am pleased about that intervention, because I think I might otherwise have needed an ambulance myself. I feel as if my blood pressure it is getting exceedingly high.

More seriously, we have to look at the North East Ambulance Service now. We cannot announce a review in weeks to come. We have got to get to the bottom of why the service is operating so badly. It is not meeting its major targets in almost every single category. It has been mentioned that it may perhaps be put in special measures, or that it should be broken up. To be honest, I do not have the answers, but one thing I will say is that the Government have to look at the North East Ambulance Service and improve it in the same way as in other areas of the country. There is no reason why people in my area, in the north-east, should be treated differently from anywhere else in the country. We need to get hold of the situation immediately.

3.27 pm

**Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I, too, thank my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), not just for securing

the debate, but for the passionate and thoughtful speech she gave, which got right to the heart of the issue. She articulated something that has been brewing among my constituents since I was elected last May. It gives me great concern and I want to share some experiences I have had.

Like my colleagues, I have become deeply concerned about the pressures on the North East Ambulance Service and their impact on my constituents. If someone is waiting for an ambulance, they are probably at one of the most distressed and vulnerable times of their life. Every minute waiting for an ambulance feels like an hour. Every moment is precious—vital; and there is a critical impact on people’s distress levels, and, as we have heard, their chances of survival. The Government must look at the situation to make sure that the service improves. I have heard far too many stories from constituents about people waiting several hours for an ambulance to arrive. As others have mentioned, that has affected elderly people particularly, and not just in minor cases—people who are elderly and vulnerable.

I want to mention a recent case, which happened just last month. A 72-year-old woman in Marske in my constituency fell and fractured her hip in the street in the centre of the village. She was left lying in immense pain on the pavement in the freezing cold. It is a seaside town and she was left virtually on the sea front for three hours. Thanks to members of the public and many local business owners who came out of their shops, she was cared for by the community; but we can imagine not just her distress but the distress and horror of the community at seeing such a thing happening in their village—someone at a vulnerable time in her life, waiting in agony for the ambulance that they had paid for with their taxes, and which they expected to come to support a community member. It was completely unacceptable that she had to wait in pain for so long.

Another constituent, an elderly lady of 99 years who was born during the first world war, fell in her home at the end of last year, breaking her arm in three places. She was in so much pain that her family did not want to transport her themselves so they called an ambulance. Again, it arrived three hours later. She was 99 years old. What sort of society are we? If a 99 year-old woman who has had a fall and broken her arm is not an emergency and top of the priority list, I cannot imagine who is. Thankfully, she was at home in the warmth of her house and not outside on a pavement, but who is to say that she would have been any more of a priority if she had been outside on a stone-cold pavement.

As many of my colleagues have said, something is wrong with the prioritisation of people, particularly of elderly people, who have paid, worked and strived for their whole lives. How can we as a society look ourselves in the eye when that is how we treat someone who was born before the NHS started and has contributed to the system?

A local district nurse told me recently of another incident, involving a bed-bound patient with a suspected ruptured bladder. Although a blue light was not needed, the patient required an urgent ambulance. They were given an initial response time of one hour, but the ambulance eventually arrived after five hours. That waiting time was completely unacceptable; and again, there was an issue of the ambulance being diverted.

That is important. If ambulances keep being diverted to more important calls, the original call becomes increasingly more urgent. The knock-on cost of the crisis in the service and the level of support that people need falls on the NHS, but more crucially on those affected, in the increasing danger they are in while waiting longer and in the agony and the tragedy they experience. That is where cuts have a serious impact, because they cost more down the line, as the service becomes increasingly crisis-led and ambulances are diverted to more urgent calls. What was a lesser priority becomes more urgent and more costly to the NHS and the individual's life.

In highlighting these cases, I am not criticising the work of paramedics and switchboard staff, because they do a fantastic job on the frontline that I do not think I could do. We owe them a massive debt of gratitude. They work under extreme pressure, dealing with people in life-or-death situations, and often in dangerous situations. Many are underpaid or struggling with their terms and conditions. They sometimes have to deal with distressed or angry families, and who can blame those families when they have waited hours and seen their loved ones in agony while failing to get the most basic service they need?

I want to comment on the failure of the North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust. According to the ambulance clinical quality indicators, the North East Ambulance Service takes longer than any other region in the country to answer calls. It also has the highest number of abandoned calls in the country. Colleagues have given plenty of examples showing that the service is in crisis and cannot continue as at present. Our elderly and vulnerable constituents are suffering.

Constituents have told me that a crew said that the Teesside service has a lower headcount than it should have and that ambulances have had to come from Durham, which is why we get delays. Parts of the north-east are geographically spread out and rural, and it is just not acceptable that ambulances are having to come from Durham. The morale of our ambulance workers is low. They are overstretched and, despite their heroic efforts, pressure is leading to targets being missed and patients and our constituents suffering.

I look forward to hearing from the Minister what the Government plan to do to tackle the problem and ensure that the investment they have promised for the NHS will go to this vital, front-line service in the north-east to save the lives of our most vulnerable constituents.

3.34 pm

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on securing this very important debate and on the eloquent way she made the case for her constituents, as have other right hon. and hon. Members for their constituents. People deserve a better service from the North East Ambulance Service.

I join other Members in praising the dedication and commitment shown by the thousands of paramedics who work in the NHS today. They are the best the NHS has to offer and they work under incredibly difficult circumstances delivering life-saving treatment. I add my

thanks for the service they provide to us and to all our constituents every day of the week. Although ambulance services continue to deliver a good service for most, as we have heard today, they do not do so for everyone and the service is patchy across the country.

Members have spoken in detail this afternoon about the difficulties facing the North East Ambulance Service and the poor care that many patients have received from it. Over the past few years, the North East Ambulance Service has seen a dramatic deterioration in its performance against national response time standards. Between June 2012 and March 2013, the trust responded to 77% of the most serious emergency calls within eight minutes but, three years later, only 70% of ambulances were arriving within eight minutes. That is compared with the national target of 75%. The decline in standards is even worse for other emergency calls: that figure has fallen from 77% to 62%.

Behind each of these statistics are seriously ill patients and tragic stories of failed care. I hope that my hon. Friend will allow me to say that, when researching this matter, I was deeply shocked to read about an elderly man in her constituency who was told in December that he faced a five-hour wait for an ambulance after collapsing from a suspected stroke—a five-hour wait for an ambulance on the street in the middle of December. That is not what we should expect for our loved ones from our NHS.

When the Minister responds, I hope she will set out what actions the Department of Health is taking to prevent such incidents from ever happening again. The sad truth is that that decline in performance is not restricted to the north-east. The House of Commons Library has forecast that this year only three trusts in the whole of England will meet the national performance target for responding to emergency calls. The service in England has met the target only twice during the past 12 months, and more than 45,000 seriously ill patients have had to wait longer than eight minutes for an ambulance to arrive.

That is a worrying decline in performance. Too many people are being failed by the system and services are starting to fray at the edges. What does the Minister intend to do to improve the quality of care provided by ambulance trusts in England? What conversations has she or her colleagues in the Department had with NHS England about the performance of this ambulance service? What assessment is the Department making of the impact the decline in standards is having on the rest of the NHS in this region?

As we have heard, the truth is that that decline in performance is a symptom of a system that is at breaking point. All aspects of emergency care, from ambulance services to A&E departments, are struggling. In February, A&E departments in England reported their worse performance on record, with just 88% of patients being treated within four hours, compared with a target of 95%. During that period, every hospital in the north-east missed its A&E target and one in 10 patients had to wait more than four hours in A&E before receiving treatment.

Dr Cliff Mann, president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, told a national newspaper the month before last:

“The pressures have become unrelenting. In recent days I've been contacted by a number of senior doctors, medical directors, high-level people, who are saying the situation now is like nothing

[Andrew Gwynne]

they've seen before... My own hospital had the busiest day I had ever experienced two weeks ago—these are situations where every time you turn round, there are another four ambulances queueing.”

Those are worrying reports. I ask the Minister to address some of the concerns raised by Dr Mann and to say whether she believes that they are isolated incidents or whether those pressures have become the norm in our NHS.

The North East Ambulance Service's board has acknowledged that the decline in A&E services has had an impact on its performance. The trust's most recent board paper said that there were 59% more handover delays of more than one hour in the first quarter of 2015-16 compared with the previous year and 60% more delays of more than two hours. The reality is that too often ambulance crews with vulnerable patients have to wait outside A&E departments because hospitals just do not have the space to admit them. I hope that, when the Minister responds, she will offer an explanation for that decline in A&E performance and explain how she will help trusts to turn the situation around, because A&E is struggling and in need of help.

Staff shortages are also a key factor contributing to the challenges facing the North East Ambulance Service. The region currently reports 15% vacancy rates for paramedics, which puts added pressure on existing staff. Local unions have warned that nine in 10 north-east ambulance staff are suffering from work-related stress due to excessive hours and staff shortages. Across England, the recent NHS staff survey found that almost half of ambulance staff felt unwell as a result of work-related stress and one quarter say that their employer does not take positive action on health and wellbeing.

It is clear that not enough is being done to support ambulance staff, and that is bad for patient care. Unhealthy staff mean unhealthy patients, and we cannot allow that situation to continue in the north-east or elsewhere in England. I therefore ask the Minister what steps her Department is taking to address staff shortages in the ambulance services in the north-east and across the country. Does she agree that more needs to be done to support the health and wellbeing of front-line paramedics?

It is clear from the speeches that we have heard today that this trust is struggling against a number of key performance indicators that are widely available. I hope that, when the Minister responds, she will agree that patients in the north-east deserve better than that. I hope that she will also agree that we cannot allow that dramatic decline in performance to continue and that something has to be done to stem the tide.

3.43 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I thank all who have contributed to this important debate. Some extremely serious issues of principle and general practice and some very serious constituency cases have been raised. I doubt that I will be able to deal with some of the specific issues, particularly in relation to individual constituents, during the debate, but I have made a careful note, as have my officials, of some of the specific points and we will go through *Hansard* after the debate and ensure that we pick up individual points. I am extremely disappointed to hear

that colleagues have not always found the trust as responsive as they would wish. I spoke to the chief executive yesterday in preparation for the debate and will certainly go back to that specific point, but I will come to some of the other general points as I move through my speech.

**Mrs Hodgson:** Will the Minister give way?

**Jane Ellison:** It is quite early, but I will.

**Mrs Hodgson:** I just want to say that we are all aware that the chief executive, Yvonne Ormston, is new and has obviously inherited many of the cases. I would like to say that things have massively improved. I know that she is trying to turn the situation around, but what has happened will not all have been on her watch.

**Jane Ellison:** The hon. Lady makes that point very well and with her characteristic generosity of spirit. I am sure that that will be noted. I will take the issue forward with that very much in mind and I thank her for her comments.

Ambulance services are obviously vital to the healthcare system. We have heard this afternoon some of the reasons why. They provide rapid assistance to people in urgent need of help. Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have rightly put on the record their appreciation of the work done by staff in trusts across the country and by the front-line staff in the NEAS. I add my thanks to theirs. Inevitably, we bring problems before the House—that is right, because we want to talk about how we can move things on for our constituents—but it is possible for a member of staff reading the record of a debate afterwards to think that we had only blame and criticism. Today, however, all hon. Members have been careful to praise the very hard-working staff. As has been said, they are working under quite considerable pressure.

It will probably be helpful to provide some context about the national picture. We recognise that the NHS is busier than ever, which is why we are backing the NHS's own plan for its future, the Five Year Forward View, with an extra £10 billion by 2020-21. The challenges faced by the North East Ambulance Service are reflected in many services across the country. Ambulance services are facing unprecedented demand, delivering over 2,800 more emergency journeys every day compared with 2010. That demand has an impact on performance indicators, such as response times, with ambulance services continuing to struggle with their targets. The Department is working closely with NHS England and with NHS Improvement to monitor and support performance in 2016-17.

In relation to the North East Ambulance Service, I spoke briefly to the service yesterday, in addition to having received quite a detailed briefing from it ahead of the debate. I am advised by the NEAS that the average number of the most serious incidents—red incidents—that it has responded to within eight minutes has changed very little over the past three financial years, but the volume of red incidents to which the NEAS has to respond to reach the 75% performance target has increased by more than 20%, from 370 a day in August 2015 to more than 440 a day now. That change in demand in particular has placed our front-line emergency care services under real pressure, rather than the responsiveness and capacity of service provision.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** I hear this from the Minister and I hear it from the trust, but could I ask her officials or NHS England to actually delve into the figures? The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan) raised an interesting issue. This is actually about the ways in which ambulance calls are classified. There are clearly reds that are not reds, but the other point that I would like the Minister to address, even if she cannot answer it today, is the way older people are being treated, because they are being put down as greens, whereby they get no priority at all, and they are some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

**Jane Ellison:** Indeed. I have very much taken that point on board and I will try to respond, but if I do not do so today, I will certainly write to the hon. Gentleman, because it is a fair point. The more general point is where the ambulance service sits in terms of our response and general position on urgent and emergency care. I will respond to some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan), because I think that this sits within a wider, systemic challenge and I want to touch on that.

Every patient should expect to receive first-class care from the ambulance service, but the nature of emergency response work means that there will always be incidents in which unfortunate timing leads to a person assessed as being in a non-life threatening situation calling 999 at the same time as several other people who are in life-threatening situations. I am sure that hon. Members are realistic about that, but clearly we do not want to hear about such problems occurring on a very regular basis. Where that does occur, obviously the life-threatening situations must be prioritised and resources focused on those calls. Very rarely—unfortunately, we have heard about such cases this afternoon—waits may be unacceptably long. I do not shy away from that, but it is important to remember that the vast majority of people receive a timely response when they dial 999.

I have already said, echoing the words of the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who led the debate, that although the NEAS has not met the performance targets, that does not reflect on the hard work, dedication and skills of the local staff. A number of speeches brought that out. I am advised that although ambulance delays are the main reason for patient complaints, the number of complaints received in 2015-16 fell, but we do not want any complaints; that would be the situation in an ideal world. However, the fall is indicative of the fact that the efforts of the local ambulance staff are paying dividends. Although the performance target is effective in driving improvements and maintaining response times to the most critically ill and injured patients, it does not, inevitably, paint the complete picture of how a trust is doing.

I will talk about some things that the North East Ambulance Service, has put in place to bring about improvements to service, because that is the focus of the debate and people want to hear that the direction of travel is positive. The NEAS continues to expand the number of specialist clinicians working in its clinical hub who can provide telephone assessment and advice, and who can prevent the dispatch of an emergency response if it is not deemed necessary. That goes to one of the points made earlier. The trust expects that that will have a positive effect on response times.

Last winter, the NEAS piloted an end-of-life-care transport service, which provided three dedicated ambulances that were on call to respond to transport requests from healthcare professionals to take a person to their final place to die. The scheme has meant that emergency ambulances are not tied up in transporting patients when they are needed for more serious cases, and that terminally ill patients are not waiting a long time for transport to their preferred place of death. Although we do not often like to talk about end-of-life care, the preferred place of death is an important part of reducing stress at an inevitably very difficult time for an individual and their family. Results from the pilot were overwhelmingly positive and eased pressure on vital services.

Hon. Members have raised valid concerns about handover times between ambulance crews and emergency departments in the local area, and that is an issue across the country. Patient handover needs to be as efficient as possible to achieve the best possible outcome for the patients and to free up ambulance resource, but more can be done and is being done. Measures include hospital ambulance liaison officers, which are being put in place by the NEAS. HALOs are present in hospitals across the trust territory and I am advised that the trust has sought to make use of dedicated ambulance resource assistants as well.

The urgent and emergency care vanguard programme in the north-east will include the development of a standardised handover process for all acute providers, intended to minimise delays across the patch. That goes to the shadow Minister's point about looking at the wider system. That will be to the benefit of crews and emergency departments. I understand that, as part of the vanguard, the NEAS also hopes to secure funding for a new "flight deck" information system that will enable diverts by ambulance crews to other hospitals to be proactively managed and will prevent ambulances from stacking up outside already full A&E departments. The trust believes that those initiatives will help to distribute A&E workload evenly and will be welcomed.

Several hon. Members have rightly commented on the recruitment challenge. It is very much recognised that there is currently a shortage of paramedics nationally and the NEAS trust is no different. We recognise that front-line staff are the vital component of a safe, effective and high-performing service, and work is being done by the NEAS to rise to the recruitment challenge. The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West mentioned some things that are being done. Efforts include developing new advanced technician roles to support front-line services, and the trust is running a substantive recruitment of paramedics nationally and internationally.

The trust expects 77 student paramedics to graduate by February 2017, in addition to recruiting an additional 36 qualified paramedics in 2016-17. The trust has also recruited a total of 56 emergency care clinical managers, and that represents a significant investment in front-line clinical leadership. It also advises me that it expects to be up to full paramedic establishment by April 2017. I know that that commitment will be keenly watched by hon. Members.

**Mr Anderson:** Ambulance staff, along with other public servants, have effectively had an eight-year pay freeze. Their standard of living has gone down every

[Mr Anderson]

year for the past eight years. Comparative jobs, particularly in the private sector, have not seen that level of control. There have also been pointers that the situation will not be alleviated in the next two or three years at least. Does the Minister not see that as a real reason that people will not come into the job? Yes, it is a vocation, but people have to put bread on the table.

**Jane Ellison:** Of course I accept that issues of pay are incredibly important. Although we cannot go into the wider economic picture, I gently say that the previous Government and this Government have made reducing the tax bill for some of our lowest paid public servants a huge priority. A huge amount of money is being spent on raising the threshold and that has made a huge difference to people's take-home pay and standard of living. However, I hear the hon. Gentleman's point.

I am encouraged that the trust is looking to the future by doubling the number of places on its two-year in-house graduate training programme. Hon. Members have made several thoughtful points regarding some of the wider issues around recruitment and retention. Maintaining staff morale has been mentioned. That is very important and the trust is looking at whether things could be done, other than pay, to attract and retain paramedics. We are looking at that nationally. The debate sits in the context of urgent and emergency care.

**Ian Lavery:** Will the Minister give way?

**Jane Ellison:** If there is time, because I want to get to a really important point right at the end of my remarks, and I am starting to run the clock down. Will the hon. Gentleman make his intervention very brief?

**Ian Lavery:** I thank the Minister for allowing the intervention. She mentioned the fact that we will probably be fully operational by April 2017. Will she guarantee the people of the north-east that she will take action to ensure that the NEAS will look after the people in our area in the intervening period?

**Jane Ellison:** I intend to follow up on this debate with my colleague in the Department of Health, Lord Prior of Brampton, who leads on the topic, and I will follow up with the service itself. I will make sure that all points raised by hon. Members are drawn to its attention.

The root causes of the increase in demand often lie outside the hands of the ambulance service. NHS England's review of urgent and emergency care is taking a system-wide approach to redesigning the way that care is delivered. It is important to look at the provision of ambulance services in that context. We need to ensure that people with life-threatening emergency needs are treated in centres of excellence to reduce risk and maximise their chance of survival and recovery. The first part of that is about relieving the pressure on emergency services.

The response time targets are being considered as part of NHS England's review to ensure that they incentivise the most clinically appropriate response. My hon.

Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed and the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) talked about having the clinically appropriate response in all contexts. I will ensure that we pick up on those points and draw attention to them. We hope to have advice from NHS England later in the summer on potential changes to ambulance standards in the context of that wider review of urgent and emergency care.

**Mr Nicholas Brown:** Will the Minister give way?

**Jane Ellison:** No, because I have an important point to make at the conclusion. If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, there might be another opportunity.

Ambulance services are vital to emergency care and the whole NHS. We all want to be sure that when loved ones suffer heart attacks or are involved in a serious accident, they will not be left waiting, although we have heard about some distressing cases. National targets in response to red, life-threatening calls exist to ensure that that happens, and we all have an interest in ensuring that the ambulance services perform well against them. I will follow up on the points made in the debate.

I draw hon. Members' attention to the fact that a comprehensive Care Quality Commission inspection was carried out at the NEAS during the week commencing 18 April 2016. CQC's formal report will be important for all hon. Members and Ministers to read. In the light of the strong feelings expressed in the debate, I think it would be appropriate for hon. Members whose constituencies are served by the NEAS to meet my colleague, the noble Lord Prior of Brampton, who leads on this portfolio, when the report is available to discuss. I hope that that will be helpful for hon. Members. In the context of that report, many of the points made this afternoon can be discussed with Lord Prior. I encourage all hon. Members to engage with the local NHS and to continue to work together to address the challenges in this critical element of our healthcare system.

If the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) can make his intervention in less than a minute, he may do so now.

**Mr Nicholas Brown:** How does the Minister account for the rise in demand for the service?

**Jane Ellison:** I definitely do not think that that question can be answered in less than a minute. Much of the answer lies in the work that Sir Bruce Keogh is doing as part of the NHS's wider urgent and emergency care review. It is vital that we get people the right care in the right place at the right time. It is a complex picture, of which ambulance services are just one piece. More will be said when we know more about that review later this year.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the performance of the North East Ambulance Service.

## Knife Crime (Sentencing)

[PHILIP DAVIES *in the Chair*]

4 pm

**Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered sentencing for knife crime.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab), for being here to respond on behalf of the Government.

In this House we are all deeply concerned about rising levels of knife crime. When I was elected in May last year, I pledged to my constituents that I would do all I could to address the scourge of knife crime. Why? Because Colchester has seen too many young lives destroyed by crimes involving weapons. Many in this House will be aware of the tragic murders of James Attfield and Nahid Almanea, both of whom lost their life far too early. Two weeks ago an individual was convicted of their murders, and he has been sentenced to 27 years.

Too many people, particularly our young people, still find it acceptable to carry blades and knives. They wrongly believe that doing so will keep them safe, but let us be clear that carrying a knife does not keep people safe; it is illegal and it puts them and others in grave danger.

**Stephen McPartland** (Stevenage) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing such an important debate. Does he agree that education is a huge part of addressing the knife crime problem? Many young people consider themselves to be safe when carrying a knife. I am the chairman of the all-party child and youth crime group, and we have done work demonstrating that a lot of the knives are taken off those children and used against them.

**Will Quince:** My hon. Friend is right that education plays a key role, and I will return to that later in my speech. We have to get the message out loud and clear that, statistically, people are far more likely to be the victim of a knife crime if they are carrying a knife themselves.

What is troubling about the case involving James Attfield and Nahid Almanea is not just that the perpetrator was only 15 at the time of the murders but that, on 26 March 2014, he was in court being given a youth referral order for criminal damage and robbery at knifepoint. Seventy-two hours later, he stabbed James Attfield 102 times. Three months later, he brutally murdered Nahid Almanea with a knife.

I understand that, under our legal system, judges decide the appropriate action in each case, taking into account a number of different factors, including the facts of the case, the age of the offender, the maximum penalty and any sentencing guidelines.

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. He is making a powerful case. We also need to consider access to knives. I have come across a case in the west midlands involving

the so-called “zombie” knife, which is a brutal weapon up to two feet in length and including several serrated blades. It has no practical usage, yet it is available online for just £8. Will he comment on access to knives?

**Will Quince:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. The Government have introduced measures on “zombie” knives. Where there are such weapons that serve no purpose other than to cause damage to another individual, it is absolutely right that the Government take action.

As Members of Parliament, we must trust judges to make the right decisions. However, there is undoubtedly a feeling in my constituency that the judiciary failed my constituents. There will also be people across the country who question how someone who robbed a newsagent at knifepoint, regardless of age, failed to receive a custodial sentence.

To be fair, the Government have done much to address knife crime. I welcome steps such as minimum custodial sentences for repeated knife possession and the commitment on police budgets, but we need to do more on education. I am fortunate to have two fantastic charities offering weapons awareness training in my constituency: KnifeCrimes.org, run by Ann Oakes-Odger, and Only Cowards Carry, run by Caroline Shearer. Those two inspirational women lost their sons to knife crime. There is a strong case for schools to teach pupils about the dangers of carrying knives.

**Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): In Derby we have recently had reports of increased levels of knife crime. Last week, somebody was threatened with a penknife in a school. Does my hon. Friend agree that projects such as Project Zao, which is run by the police in Derby to educate parents and children, are a way forward in addressing such crimes?

**Will Quince:** I agree. There is no question but that education will play a key role in addressing knife crime. There is no question but that there is a strong case for more schools to teach pupils about the danger of carrying knives. As I have found, Ministers regularly throw back the challenge that the demands on the curriculum are great, which I accept, but we are talking about one 45-minute lesson in years 9 or 10. I do not believe that would be a huge burden on the curriculum.

The purpose of this debate is to consider whether enough is being done on sentencing. It is often said that sentencing guidelines are just that, “guidelines, not tramlines.” I appreciate the need for judges to have discretion to sentence according to the circumstances of each case, but let us look at the statistics. In 2015, there were 54 instances of 10 to 15-year-olds being convicted or cautioned for threatening with a knife or offensive weapon, of whom three already had two previous convictions for possession of a knife or offensive weapon. Two of those three received a community sentence. Despite having already been sentenced twice, they received, in effect, a slap on the wrist.

Let us look more generally at simply possessing a knife or offensive weapon. In 2014, 2,725 10 to 17-year-olds were sentenced for possession of a knife or offensive weapon. In 2015, the figure went up to 3,103, a rise of 14%. Of those sentenced for possession of a knife or offensive weapon in 2014, 44 had two previous convictions and 17 had three previous convictions. How about last

[Will Quince]

year? Seventy-five had two previous convictions, an increase of 70%, and 27 had three previous convictions, an increase of 59%. It is deeply troubling that we are sentencing more and more repeat offenders for carrying knives.

Let us look at first-time offenders. Of those sentenced in 2014 for possession of a knife or offensive weapon, 2,398 had no previous convictions. In 2015, the number went up to 2,699 with no previous convictions, an increase of 13%. If we are sentencing more and more children with no previous convictions for knife offences, is our approach to deterrence working? Lord Thomas, the most senior judge in England and Wales, said in 2014:

“There is obviously a really serious problem in relation to knives. The carrying of knives has become commonplace in gangs and with children who are very young... I think we need to look very, very carefully at the best way of using the various levels of sentencing to control the use of knives. I think this is something which is urgently required. We’ve been extraordinarily successful in this country in controlling the use of guns, but knives, particularly knives carried by 12, 13, 14-year-olds, is a major problem... This is a problem which is very, very serious, which is rightly a real concern.”

I welcome the new “two strikes” sentence, which means that adults convicted more than once of being in possession of a blade face a minimum six-month prison sentence and a maximum of four years. Young offenders, aged 16 and 17, will face a minimum four-month detention and training order. However, there is no provision for those under 16. During a debate on 3 March 2016, I said that the answer to youth violence is threefold: deterrence, education and intervention. As I have said, I want the national curriculum to be modified to include weapons awareness training. The Government should take another look at encouraging more schools to introduce weapons awareness lessons.

On deterrence, let me be clear that I do not want to throw vast swathes of teenagers in prison for possession of a knife or offensive weapon; it is far better to rehabilitate them in the community. However, there are three changes that I would like to see.

First, where an under-16 with a previous knife-related conviction is found to be using a knife in any violent crime or offence involving threatening another person, there should be a mandatory detention and training order. I believe that, in those cases, there is enough doubt about the effectiveness of a community sentence that the public safety argument alone requires a custodial response.

Secondly, where an under-16 with no previous convictions commits a threatening or violent crime involving a knife or offensive weapon, there should be a mandatory psychiatric assessment in addition to their sentence. Finally, I would like to see any under-18 who is convicted or cautioned for a first-time knife-related offence to be sent on a mandatory weapons awareness course as part of their sentence.

**Julian Knight:** Would my hon. Friend like to see these interventions take place prior to sentencing or after sentencing?

**Will Quince:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. The psychiatric testing would almost certainly have to be done prior to sentencing, but the weapons awareness

course, by its design, would happen as part of the sentence; it would happen after sentencing. I would see that working in a similar way to the speed awareness courses for someone who has been caught speeding. They have to go on a course. The courses are often very shocking, as they are hit with hard facts. Often, young people—especially first-time offenders—need a hard look at what could have happened and what could happen again if they continue to carry and use a knife.

I am aware that making law around a tragedy is often the wrong approach. However, the evidence suggests that we are sentencing more and more teenagers for first-time knife offences, as well as more and more teenagers with a history of knife-related convictions. This Government have rightly recognised the importance of tackling youth knife crime and I hope that they will take on board my suggestions.

4.12 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab):** May I say at the outset that it is a great honour to serve, I think for the first time, under your chairmanship, Mr Davies? I know you take a very close interest in these matters.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) on securing this vital debate. I also note with interest the thoughtful interventions made by other hon. Friends. I think I can safely say that we collectively share a desire to stamp out the scourge of knife crime.

I am particularly privileged to be able to respond to this debate. I should say at the outset that the Government are committed to keeping our streets safe from knives, which includes sending a simple, uncluttered and clear message: if someone carries a knife, they are more likely than ever to get a custodial sentence.

Unlawful possession of a knife or offensive weapon is a serious crime, which carries a maximum four-year custodial sentence. If someone is harmed, there are a range of existing offences against the person, including—as my hon. Friends will be aware—wounding or causing grievous bodily harm, which reflect the seriousness of the behaviour and the harm that is caused. The maximum sentence available for grievous bodily harm with intent is up to life imprisonment, and the use of a weapon is an aggravating factor in sentencing. I note that 87% of people convicted of this offence receive a prison term and the average length of that term has risen by more than a third since 2010.

Within that sentencing framework, it is for judges and magistrates to decide the proper sentence in individual cases, and they must take full account of the harm to the victim and the culpability of the offender. As politicians, we may sometimes be tempted to try to second-guess judges or do their job, but we have to respect judicial independence in sentencing on the specific facts of the individual case before the court.

At the same time, it is quite right, and not inconsistent, to say that we must also address victims’ concerns and fears, and the concerns and fears of the wider public. In December 2012, we introduced new offences of threatening someone with a knife in a public place or a school and causing an immediate risk of physical harm, which carry a minimum custodial sentence. Under the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015, we banned the use of



cautions for offenders convicted of serious offences, including those who carry knives. Consequently, more people face the full force of the law.

**Stephen McPartland:** In the sentencing guidelines that the Minister quite rightly referred to, is there anything that allows judges to take into account whether or not the individuals concerned are members of a gang?

**Mr Raab:** I need to check the specific guidelines, but I think there is enough latitude for the courts to address that issue and take into account any involvement in a gang, and the particular characteristics of that gang, in relation to the sentencing framework. Of course, whether the courts place the right weight on that factor is difficult to say; as politicians, we can sit here and second-guess individual cases. However, I do not think there is any question but that judges have the power to consider all the facts of a case.

To continue with the measures the Government have taken, in July 2015 we commenced the provisions introducing a minimum custodial sentence for anyone aged 16 or over who is convicted of a second or further knife possession offence—that issue was raised earlier. I pay tribute to the tenacity shown by my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and Nick de Bois, the previous Member for Enfield North, in securing that change to the legislation.

That is the law, but often the real question is: how well is it being enforced? The latest figures show that an immediate custodial sentence is now the most common disposal for knife possession, compared with 2010, when most offenders could reasonably expect to receive a community sentence. In the fourth quarter of 2015, 31% of all offenders convicted of knife possession offences received an immediate custodial sentence, compared with 23% back in 2010.

The latest figures also show that 38% of adults were given an immediate custodial sentence, which is an increase of six percentage points from a year ago and an increase of 11 percentage points since recording began in 2008. Over the same period of seven years, the use of adult cautions for this offence has more than halved. Sentencing for young offenders has also become more consistently robust—that point was rightly raised earlier.

In the fourth quarter of 2015, 10% of young offenders received an immediate custodial sentence for possession of a knife, compared with 6% in the same quarter of 2007. The average length of custodial sentence for possessing a knife has also increased. In the latest figures, the average length was 7.7 months, an increase of almost two months on the same quarter in 2008. More people are being sent to prison, and for longer, for carrying a knife, which reflects the changes this Government have made.

**Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con):** Clearly, the sentencing that the Minister has been describing has been significantly tightened by this Government over the last few years, and I think all of us welcome that. However, does he agree that there is another side to this issue, which is about preventing knife crime in the first place? There is a real role for charities, county councils and police and crime commissioners to get together and ensure a serious education campaign in schools about

the risks of carrying a knife and the devastation that knife crime can cause to the families who suffer losses as a result.

**Mr Raab:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right; as usual, he hits the nail on the head. Of course, there is nothing inherently contradictory or inconsistent in saying that we want to send a very clear message from law enforcement and the criminal justice system, while also trying to do as much as we can through education and raising public awareness to prevent these awful crimes from happening in the first place—for the victims, but also for the offenders, who sometimes, through gullibility or naivety, get dragged into things that, with some education, awareness and nurturing, they could have avoided in the first place.

I want to refer to the Sentencing Council, because it is currently preparing a draft sentencing guideline on possession of knives and offensive weapons. It will be subject to full public consultation later in the year, which will provide an opportunity to inform the definitive sentencing guideline and the approach to be taken by the courts in dealing with these very serious offences. That will be another opportunity for us to consider whether we have got the balance right.

In relation to the question about gangs, having taken advice, I can confirm that if an offender is acting as a member of a gang, where two or more offenders are acting together to commit the offence, that is an aggravating factor in the sentencing guidelines and, of course, all courts must follow those guidelines. My hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland) raised the important issue of gangs, and I am glad that I can provide some clarification about it.

The introduction of minimum sentences for offences of possession of a knife, blade or offensive weapon sends a crystal clear message: if people carry a knife, they can expect to face a custodial sentence. That message from the law enforcement community and the criminal justice system is crucial for victims, their families, the wider communities affected, the general public and those who might be tempted to break the law.

I am aware of the tragic murders by James Fairweather and the circumstances around that case. I note the interest and concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester. He will know that I cannot comment on individual court cases, as sentencing is a matter for the judiciary, independent of us politicians. I send my deepest personal condolences to the families of his constituents Nahid Almanea and James Attfield. I note that this is a complex case, given the mental health assessment of the perpetrator. I note in particular that four separate psychiatrists were required to give expert evidence at the trial. James Fairweather was sentenced on 29 April to detention at Her Majesty's pleasure with a minimum term of 27 years. I also note that the critical learning report into James Fairweather's earlier offence and referral order concluded that the subsequent murders were neither preventable nor predictable. Clearly that is zero consolation for the victims' families, and I reaffirm that in such cases as this, we always seek to learn lessons for the future.

Tackling knife crime is an ongoing high-level priority for the Government. As my hon. Friend has already mentioned, it requires a team effort across Government and law enforcement agencies. Knife crime offences

[Mr Raab]

recorded by the police remain 12% lower than in 2010, but I accept that there is more to do. In February, we supported 13 police forces to undertake co-ordinated action against knife crime. That involved targeting habitual knife carriers, weapon sweeps, test purchases of knives from identified retailers and the use of surrender bins. A new week of activity was held at the end of April, with 11 police forces taking part. That is exactly the kind of preventive work that we should be doing, and we continue to attach a high priority to it.

In February, the Home Office jointly hosted a meeting with the Metropolitan Police Service and the national policing lead aimed at retailers selling knives. More than 80 retailers attended. On 23 March, the Government published the “Modern Crime Prevention Strategy”, which sets out a range of measures to strengthen our response to knife crime, including: working with the police and industry to ensure effective controls on the sale of knives and other offensive weapons; identifying and spreading best practice; and delivering measures designed to deter young people from carrying knives. As my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) called for, that will also include a ban on the sale and importation of “zombie-killer” knives, which so horrifically glamorise senseless violence.

When it comes to the sale of knives more generally, the law is clear that a retailer commits a crime if they do not take proper steps to ensure that they are not selling knives to under-18s, with the exception of smaller-bladed pocket knives. On 23 March, the Home Office agreed a set of principles with major retailers to prevent under-age sales of knives in their stores and on their websites. That point was made earlier. The Home Office will work with the British Retail Consortium to develop the principles and to encourage other retailers to sign up to them. We want retailers to buy into and be proactively engaged with them.

I am conscious of the time and, in particular, the fact that we have a vote coming up. In case others wish to contribute, I will quickly make a couple of points about the education of young people. That issue was rightly raised. We know that intervening early can stop young people becoming involved in the gang culture that fuels youth violence. On 17 November, the Early Intervention Foundation published a report setting out its research

into the risks and protective factors that can lead to young people becoming involved in youth violence and gangs. It attached importance to early identification and intervention. The Home Office is working with the Department for Education to promote these messages to schools and children’s care homes, which are another important area.

I again take this opportunity to pay tribute to the vital work that my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester does at a local level in Essex with the local charity Only Cowards Carry. That is incredibly important work. A lot of that localised work is as important, if not more important, than the stuff that comes out of central Government. We have a role to play in supporting and spreading awareness of that work. There is also Charlie Taylor’s wider review of youth justice, which provides a timely opportunity to assess the causes of youth offending and how better to respond to drive down reoffending.

Ridding our streets of the scourge of knife crime will remain a high-level priority for the Government and for future Governments. We can never be remotely complacent, not even for a moment. That means educating youngsters to steer clear of knives and gangs in the first place; preventing retailers from selling knives to youngsters; targeting the police response in the most effective possible way—that, I suppose, is the role of the Ministry of Justice—and continuing to send a clear message from the criminal justice system that carrying knives will not be tolerated and that those who do are more likely than ever to be sent to prison, and to be sent to prison for longer.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Philip Davies (in the Chair):** In five minutes we are due to start the next debate. The Minister is not yet here—not unreasonably, because we are not due to start as yet. There will be a vote very shortly in the Chamber. Taking those factors into account, the sitting will be suspended until no later than 4.45 pm, after the vote has taken place. We will start back as soon as everyone else arrives. It is courteous to wait until the debate is scheduled to start, by which time there will be a vote.

4.26 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Anglo-Russian Relations

4.40 pm

**Philip Davies (in the Chair):** For those people who have not done an hour debate before, the normal format is that the two Opposition parties get five minutes each for the winding-up speeches and the Minister gets 10 minutes. Hopefully, the Minister will leave a couple of minutes at the end for the proposer to wind up the debate. I intend to call the Front Benchers no later than a quarter-past 5 or thereabouts.

**Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered Anglo-Russian relations.

It is, as always, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I called this debate because I am very concerned about the growing anti-Russian sentiment in the House of Commons. Even for having called for the debate, a senior member of the Government today called me “Comrade Kawczynski”. I have been accused of being an apologist for President Putin and criticised for even daring to raise this subject, so I have prepared a personal statement, which I hope you will allow me to make, Mr Davies.

Of all the Members of this House, I have deep and personal reasons to dislike and distrust Russia and its actions. As many hon. Members know, I am of Polish heritage. Poland suffered terribly at the hands of the former Soviet Union, and like so many Polish families, mine was no exception in experiencing that suffering. My grandfather was a successful landowner and farmer whose life was ruined by the interference of the Soviet system, which was often brutally unfair, corrupt and flawed. It would be easy to cling to prejudice and allow it to colour my view of the world today, yet as a British citizen and a proud Member of this House it is my job and my duty to argue strongly in favour of what I believe will best serve Britain’s long-term security, stability and prosperity, even if that means encouraging détente and dialogue with a country that was born out of the remnants of the oppressive regime that so crippled my grandfather in Poland.

I could not go back to Poland to begin with, because of martial law in the Soviet-imposed regime and what was happening in Poland, but when I first went back in 1983 and met my grandfather, he spoke to me at great length about what it was like living under communism. He spoke about the oppression during the second world war from the Soviets and the Russians. He died in 1986—just three years before the fall of communism—but before he died, he said to me, “I will never see the end of communism, but you will.” He knew that the financially illiterate and politically Orwellian system that the Soviets had imposed on us was completely incompatible with the human spirit and soul.

When I think of the period in which my grandfather died, during those early years of détente, I think of the extraordinary lengths Reagan went to to meet Andrei Gromyko in 1984; I think of how Margaret Thatcher met Gorbachev for the first time in December 1984, despite all the difficulties that we had at that time with the Soviet Union—it was still in Afghanistan and was posing a huge threat to our country. It saddens me that today there does not appear to be the same level of

good will and determination among our Government Ministers to engage in the same way with the Russian Administration.

There is a one-sided debate, and it is all negative towards Russia. My experience over the past 11 years—you and I have been in the House for the same amount of time, Mr Davies—is that when we do not have proper debates in this House, that is when tactical and strategic errors are made. That is why it is so important that we debate this issue.

**Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. May I suggest another reason why we do not understand Russia well enough? It is that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office needs greater resources to better understand events on the ground generally. It is a known fact, now widely recognised, that there were, for example, no Crimea experts in the FCO at the time of the Russian intervention in Crimea. Since the end of the cold war, the FCO has continuously wound down its Russian coverage. Does he agree that that needs to be put right, so that we understand events on the ground better, including the complexity that is Russia?

**Daniel Kawczynski:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. It is a privilege to serve with him on the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. I very much hope that the report that we are starting on Anglo-Russian relations will delve deeper into some of the shortcomings and lack of resources available to the Foreign Office to understand Russia and our engagement with it better.

**Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con):** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Daniel Kawczynski:** I will, but briefly. Then I would like to make some progress.

**Julian Knight:** I thank my hon. Friend very much for giving way. He is clearly passionate and knows a lot about the subject. However, one shadow hangs over all this: the murder of Alexander Litvinenko. Speaking as an observer who comes to Anglo-Russian relations from a different angle—or from an angle that is not too used to them—that was a crime carried out on British soil, seemingly with the connivance of the Russian state, so until it is dealt with, our relationship will always be poisoned to a certain extent.

**Daniel Kawczynski:** I will come on to that later in my speech, but it is important that my hon. Friend also reads the Russian submission on the subject, which was made to the inquiry on Anglo-Russian relations being undertaken by the Foreign Affairs Committee. I very much hope that he reads it.

President Putin is now being treated almost as a pantomime villain in this House. I would like a pound for every time someone says, “The only person who wants us to pull out of the European Union is President Putin, because that will destabilise the European Union and cause difficulties.” In fact, the Russian Government are one of the few Governments that have not made any statement on the matter. Unlike certain people I could mention who have come to our country and tried to interfere in our domestic referendum, the Russians have

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not made any official statements on whether they believe we ought to continue to be a member of the European Union.

I debated this issue at the Conservative party conference against a close friend, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), who is very hawkish towards Russia and has a very different view from mine. I respect him greatly and I voted for him to be leader of the Conservative party in 2005, but we disagree fundamentally on Russia. Amazingly, it was the one time at a Conservative party conference when I have been mobbed—in a nice way—by young people, because they were so surprised that a Conservative Member of Parliament was challenging the situation and talking about how to lower tensions with Russia and to improve relations. They were so pleased that someone was doing that and they wanted to engage with me.

The Foreign Affairs Committee is now undertaking a report on Anglo-Russian relations. We started to take evidence yesterday with two leading academics, Dr Derek Averre, senior lecturer in Russian, foreign and security policy at the University of Birmingham, and Dr Andrew Monaghan, a senior research fellow at Chatham House. They gave us a very enlightened view and a very different perspective from the one given by our Government. I am pleased to say that, later this month, as part of our inquiry the Foreign Affairs Committee will be visiting Moscow and spending five days there, meeting our Russian counterparts. To get the most balanced perspective, we will be returning to the region in July to meet people in countries that neighbour Russia—Ukraine will be one and Moldova another, but I will be participating in the second leg, which is a visit to Poland and Latvia.

I am pleased that I have managed to convince the Committee to visit Poland. Anyone who thinks that the distrust of and hostility towards Russia are bad in London should try Warsaw. The Poles are even more sceptical and antagonistic about Russian motives, and to a degree I am becoming very unpopular in certain Polish political circles for daring to challenge that. Why do I do it? I do it because I still remember what my grandfather said to me and the complete destruction of Warsaw in 1944 and thereafter. We must do everything possible to avoid war, and to avoid war for future generations. I am greatly worried about the ramifications further down the line if we continue this abject hostility towards Russia.

My intention is to make the report as robust as possible in order to highlight FCO mistakes in dealing with the Russians and to put forward constructive proposals on how our Government should be going the extra mile and showing the British public that they are straining every sinew to ensure that no stone is left unturned in our determination to seek a constructive relationship with the Russians and something we can work on towards peace.

As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, I had the privilege—I am not sure that it is a privilege—a few weeks of going to Brussels as part of the Committee's delegation. There were 28 representatives from the 28 countries and we had an opportunity to meet Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary-General of NATO. I posed the question to him: "What are you, as the Secretary-General of NATO, doing specifically to lower tensions

with Russia?" In a public way he said something very constructive—much more constructive than I have heard from any British politician. He said, "Well, you know, I was Prime Minister of Norway. We have a border with Russia and I had to engage with the Russians on all sorts of different issues, whether to do with fishing, security or the Arctic circle and exploration. We built quite a good relationship with the Russians and we found it very constructive to engage with them." Needless to say, I am delighted that the Secretary-General of NATO spoke in those terms in such a public way to me and other representatives during our meeting in Brussels.

It is not the politicians who suffer from the ongoing sanctions—we politicians will continue to receive our salaries and to do our jobs—but the small and medium-sized enterprises who have tried to work with and export to Russia and seen their exports blocked or destroyed. I represent an important agricultural community in which cattle farming is one of the main sources of income. As I could not make an official delegation to Bryansk in Russia, I sent a cattle farmer from my constituency to represent me. Those discussions went so well that ultimately the Russians sent 15 of their top agronomists to Shrewsbury to meet with us and spend time with our cattle farmers to try to understand the cattle industry in Shropshire. As a result of those discussions, I am proud to say that we struck an agreement with the Russians to lift the ban on British beef imposed after the BSE crisis. That is potentially worth hundreds of millions of pounds to the British cattle industry. My right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), who was then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, signed the agreement in Moscow, which would have led to great export opportunities in the cattle industry. Of course, all of that has been washed down the plughole as a result of the sanctions.

It is not just the beef industry. There are not any representatives from Scotland here, but the Scottish fishing industry is losing a great deal.

**Philip Boswell** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP) *indicated dissent.*

**Daniel Kawczynski:** I am sorry. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman will come on to say, the Scottish fishing industry is suffering greatly as a result of the sanctions imposed, as is the dairy industry. The Shropshire dairy industry is on its knees as a result of bovine tuberculosis and the lowering of prices that our farmers are paid by supermarkets. My Shropshire dairy farmers are going out of business in unprecedented numbers and all their exports to Russia—not just cheese and milk, but other dairy products—have been wiped out as a result of the sanctions.

I direct the Minister to some information I received from France the other day. Last week, the French National Assembly adopted a non-binding resolution inviting the French Government to lift the economic sanctions and other retaliation measures imposed on Russia by the European Union. The resolution was presented by a conservative Member of Parliament called Thierry Mariani. Although non-binding, several of his fellow conservative Members of Parliament have welcomed the move—in particular, former French Prime Minister François Fillon—and it will clearly put pressure on the French Government ahead of the next review of sanctions in July 2016.

Through their Foreign Ministry, the French Government factually stated that EU sanctions remain linked to the implementation of the Minsk agreements, and expressed their willingness to ensure the unity of the EU on this matter. That is very important. The French National Assembly's resolution gives me the impression that many in the French Parliament want sanctions to be rescinded, and that they could be lifted if the Minsk agreements are implemented. What is the British Government's perspective on that? The key question I would like the Minister to answer is: were the Minsk agreements implemented, would the British Government support the removal of EU sanctions? Or do they have an extra requirement, as I have been led to believe in the past: that Crimea would have to be returned to Ukraine before they would support the removal of sanctions?

In all my interactions with Foreign Office Ministers, I have been given the impression that the British Government would not support the removal of sanctions unless the Minsk agreements were implemented and Crimea were returned to Russia. As somebody who has visited Crimea on several occasions, I have to say that there is not a cat in hell's chance of the Russians returning Crimea to Ukraine during the course of my political or biological life, and I will eat my hat if they do so.

Sanctions should be in place only with something tangible and achievable as the end result. I genuinely believe that, if the implementation of the Minsk II agreement were secured, that would be the sensible moment for us to start to talk to the Russians about getting rid of sanctions. If the Government's attitude is, "No, we want Crimea returned," they are doing us a great disservice by putting our constituents, ourselves, our prosperity and the likelihood of improving relations in jeopardy and peril.

I know others want to speak, so I will try to wind up quickly, but I want to say how pleased I was with the Iran agreement. We were facing the insoluble, difficult and highly complex problem of nuclear proliferation in Iran. I pay tribute to the Foreign Office and its diplomats for the leadership they displayed in securing the agreement. There is no doubt in my mind that the agreement would not have been achieved without the unique contribution of British diplomacy, but Russia was also a part of the agreement. It made an extraordinary contribution and is doing the heavy lifting on the agreement to protect the region and to protect peace.

The American Secretary of State, John Kerry, said in a press release:

"A number of commercial transactions made this shipment possible, with many countries playing important roles in this effort. Russia, as a participant in the JCPOA and a country with significant experience in transporting and securing nuclear material, played an essential role by taking this material out of Iran and providing natural uranium in exchange."

That goes to show that, if we work with the Russians constructively, they can bring different things to the table. They have different experiences and different contacts. If we can work with the Russians on securing this vital deal with Iran, why can we not work with them in other important theatres such as Syria?

**Mr Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op):** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He has spoken at some length about his background and heritage and, indeed, about the welfare of cattle and the potentially

lucrative nature of the cattle business in his constituency. He mentioned the Minsk agreement but said nothing whatsoever about the reasons for that agreement, which were Russian aggression, the conduct of hybrid warfare and thousands of lives being lost in eastern Ukraine and, to some extent, Crimea. That cannot be simply brushed under the carpet. The Minsk agreement and the sanctions are there for a good reason. Will he address those points?

**Daniel Kawczynski:** We all know what led to the conflagration and the difficulties that ensued in Donetsk and Lugansk. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I am focusing on trying to secure peace now. Implementing the Minsk agreement and getting back to normalised relations are more important than what specifically led to the conflagration in the first place. I am glad he intervened. As I discussed with him yesterday, as a fellow member of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, he has said in the past that he thinks the British Government ought not to have ruled out military action over Crimea. He has stated that Britain should have potentially got involved militarily. Well, if he wants a third world war and nuclear destruction of both entities, he is going the right way about it.

**Mr Hendrick:** Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to correct him?

**Daniel Kawczynski:** Yes.

**Mr Hendrick:** The point I made was that I felt it was unwise of the Prime Minister at the time to verbally rule out military action, not on the part of Britain but on the part of NATO or anyone else. Saying nothing is far better than saying we will not do anything.

**Daniel Kawczynski:** Let us agree to disagree on that. I think that that sort of sentiment is highly dangerous and could lead to significant destabilisation in our relations with Russia.

The Russians believe we have acted unilaterally in the world, and they have seen some of the terrible difficulties we have got into with Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan. They want to ensure we can work constructively with them to bring peace about in Syria. As I have said, the Russians bring different things to the table. We need to compartmentalise the relationship. We can still disagree with the Russians profoundly over Syria and Ukraine, but let us get back to dialogue over matters of security and energy security while we continue to disagree with them. *[Interruption.]* I will wrap up my comments because you have indicated, Mr Davies, that I have spoken for long enough.

Russia has watched our disastrous intervention in Libya and our prevarication over Syria. Russians would argue that their intervention in Syria has helped to stop or temper the ongoing bloodbath of the past five years and that they have saved the European Union the misery and suffering of having to deal with hundreds of thousands more migrants coming across the sea to Greece.

When I think of the tremendous work done in Tehran, which I visited recently, between Churchill and Stalin to put their differences aside in fighting fascism during the

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second world war—when we had even more differences of opinion with the Soviet Union than we do with Russia today—I think to myself that we ought to also have the courage and vision to put our differences aside and work with the Russians to fight modern-day fascism. ISIS poses a similar threat to both entities in Syria, Libya and on the streets of European capitals, with the bombing and terrorism that is taking place. Let us put our differences aside and work with the Russians to deal with that threat.

My final statement is this. On 15 March, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) said:

“The Foreign Secretary said that he has not talked to Mr Lavrov. Is that because Mr Lavrov is refusing to take his call, or that he has not yet tried? If it is the latter, why not?”

The Foreign Secretary’s response—I want you to remember this, Mr. Davies—was:

“Again, experience is the answer. I have not tried to make the call, and I am in no doubt that I could predict quite confidently the outcome of such a call to Foreign Minister Lavrov. I have had many conversations with him over the course of our regular meetings at Syria-related events, none of which has been fruitful.”  
—[*Official Report*, 15 March 2016; Vol. 607, c. 800.]

What a terrible statement to make: “None of my discussions with Mr Lavrov has been fruitful, so there is no point in making a telephone call.” No, no, no. The Government have got to change their stance and engage with the Russians, for the security of our country and the international community.

5.5 pm

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Our relationship with foreign powers is, I believe, totally inconsistent. We chide Russia for abuses—and, by the way, nothing I say is pro-Putin; I am not getting involved in that. I am just talking about double standards. We chide Russia for abuses but kowtow to China, whose abuses are far worse. If we were outside observers looking at that situation, what conclusion would we draw? That there is a double standard; and that is the only conclusion that Russians draw. We in the west have failed totally to take into account the Russian mentality when dealing with these problems. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) on the way he moved the motion, and on trying to understand how Russians think. That is important in framing our foreign policy.

Ukraine is a perfect example. The country is ideally placed as a bridge between the two worlds—Europe and Russia. Indeed, in Russian, Ukraine means “borderland”. To Russians, Ukraine is not a foreign country. Russian orthodoxy, as far as they are concerned, was founded in the Kievan Rus 1,000 years ago. We may not agree with this, but for them Kiev is as much the spiritual home of Russian orthodoxy as Canterbury is to us the home of the Anglican Church. Clever Ukrainian statesmen could have held a fine balance, playing one side against the other for the good of their country, as of course India did during the cold war. Instead, Europe and the west had to barge in with, I believe, an insufficient understanding of Russian or, indeed, Ukrainian history, or people’s thinking in the region.

We in the European Union invested millions of pounds, euros and dollars to influence Ukraine away from Russia and towards the west. Because one side insisted on owning the bridge and the other side, naturally, would not let it, now the bridge is in tatters and burning; and it is the ordinary people of Ukraine—and of Russia, subject to sanctions—who are suffering. Of course, as my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham says, Russia will never in our lifetime give up Crimea. After all, the Russians believe and know that the overwhelming majority of people in Crimea want to be part of Russia. So they believe that we are playing with double standards. They all remember that Krushchev signed away Crimea to Ukraine with a stroke of a pen in the mid-1950s.

The psychotic zeal for permanent expansion of the western European sphere of influence, at Russia’s expense, gains us nothing. Actually, all we have done is significantly destabilise our eastern flank; and what about the good of Ukraine? Crimea is now permanently lost to it. We know that—it is a reality. The eastern regions are enveloped in a low-level violent conflict. Whatever we may think of Mr Putin or the Russian Government, clearly our interference has not worked out for the benefit of people living in Ukraine. Russia can, we all know, with little effort or cost to itself—I am not defending it, just describing the reality—support and maintain a constant low-boil conflict in eastern Ukraine for some time.

Therefore, any real effort to secure peace, stability and the rule of law in Ukraine—and peace and stability is what we should be about, is it not?—must of necessity take into account Russian fears and interests. That is the reality on the ground. If it does not, and if we just take an absolutist line, imposing sanctions, putting the Russian embassy in London and the Russian Government into deep freeze, and not talking to Mr Lavrov, we will achieve nothing and there will be no prospect of success. What would that mean for the relationship between our two countries? Our strategy for Anglo-Russian relations should be to engage, engage and engage. By all means be firm, but engage.

Last week, I chaired an investment forum—I am chairman of the all-party group on Russia—and there is significant interest among British and European businesses in strengthening their presence in Russia. The Governments of Germany, France and Italy are actually increasing their business, unlike our Government. Given our historical alliances with Russia, the Russians cannot understand why our Government and our Prime Minister are outriders. They are way beyond the Americans, the Germans and the French in their anti-Russian stance. The Russians cannot understand it. Let us remember for a moment who, frankly, saved our bacon in two world wars. How many tens of millions of Russians died in Nazi Germany’s invasion? We should remember that, with the unfortunate exception of the Crimean war, Russia has for centuries been our natural ally. We are two powers on the eastern and western extremities of Europe.

If we respectfully and confidentially engage with Russia, we will get the most out of that relationship and start making constructive advances. Blind and mindless Russophobia gets us absolutely nowhere. We should build economic links, strengthen cultural links and seek to work together on issues such as defeating Daesh, where UK and Russian interests overlap. Daesh is our

enemy; Russia is not. Russia poses absolutely no strategic threat to the people of the United Kingdom. It does not and never has done in our entire history, but Daesh does.

**Mr Hendrick:** What is the hon. Gentleman's reaction to the fact that Russian military aircraft regularly come into UK airspace in the full knowledge that it is UK airspace?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Of course Russia is a great power, and it naturally tests defences as part of its training of its own people, but does anybody in this Chamber seriously believe that it poses a strategic military threat to the United Kingdom? We are no longer in the cold war; it is over. I do not defend Russian aircraft approaching the United Kingdom, but I do not think for a moment that there is the remotest chance of their actually engaging in military action with us.

Daesh is our real enemy. Allowing its reign of terror to continue simply because we dare not co-ordinate our plans with nasty Mr Putin is cutting off our nose to spite our face. The only winner in that scenario is Daesh.

**Philip Boswell** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): If we are truly to help the people of Syria, as the Government purport to want to do, does the hon. Gentleman agree that we must have a positive and constructive dialogue with Russia—a key player in that theatre?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** That is precisely what my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham and I are saying and what we are trying to urge on the Minister. Assad and the Russians are not going to go away. As the Minister said very eloquently in the House of Commons yesterday, since the second world war, Russia has viewed Syria as an essential ally. I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. On every level, we must be constructive, confident and respectful—and I mean self-respect, not just respect for the other side. The way we kowtow to China can reach demeaning levels, which is why I say we are engaging in double standards.

**Mr Hendrick:** The hon. Gentleman made a good point when he said that Russia fought on our side in the second world war. So did the Chinese. To illustrate the significance of this issue, Xi Jinping, on his visit to the UK, was very complimentary about British membership of the European Union. Although the Russian Government have not made an official statement about their position, President Putin is known to believe that the UK should be outside the European Union.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** That is a remarkable statement. How do we know what Mr Putin thinks? All I can say is that I have discussed that with the Russian ambassador, and he gives the correct line on behalf of his Government. Mr Putin has made absolutely no comment, certainly in public—we have no idea what he says in private. There is simply no evidence that Mr Putin is somehow engaged in some massive conspiracy to encourage Great Britain to leave the European Union. I rather think that in practical terms he has other things on his mind. Russia has made no statement in public. It is neutral on this matter.

Constructive, confident and respectful engagement is the best way for our two countries to flourish together. If we engaged in that way, the appalling conflict in Syria might have some chance of being brought to a conclusion. Assad will not go away and the Russians will not go away, so the Minister should pick up the phone and encourage his boss to pick up the phone to do what Kerry is doing and speak to Lavrov every week. That does not in any way mean support for everything Mr Putin does, but only with constant engagement in building relationships can we make some progress towards peace in Syria.

5.15 pm

**Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) for bringing this important debate to the Chamber.

As we approach the end of President Obama's presidential term, it is helpful to remind ourselves that he started his presidency by looking for a reset of US-Russia relations. Before we move on to consider how the UK and NATO might be responsible for a share of the current crisis, it is worth noting that Russia could have been the principal beneficiary of any reset initiated by the American President, but instead pursued a policy that has made such thinking difficult.

From the occupation of Crimea to similar provocation in eastern Ukraine, Russia has shown scant respect for or acknowledgement of Ukraine's sovereignty, something it had to agree under the Budapest memorandum. However, I have just returned from Moscow and the Kremlin and it is clear that the Russians see themselves as merely defending their own backyard. There have been many incursions into UK waters and air space. For those of us in Scotland where no Royal Navy ships are based, the feeling of exposure is real.

We have witnessed military exercises simulating invasion of the Baltic states. Do the Russians intend to intimidate peoples who peacefully asserted their right to self-determination and have gone on to become valued members of the European Union? We note these developments because it is vital to us as a NATO member and as a member of the international community to ensure that these small states are protected from any undue influence on Moscow's part and that their sovereignty is protected. We do that not because we are allied to these states, but because small states play a vital role in the international system. They have consistently expanded international law to bring about the norms that are so important today.

Russia sees itself as a world power along with China and America and its view of Ukraine, the Baltics and the High North is that it is simply protecting its interests and its economic resources. However, we must not let the deterioration in Anglo-Russian relations, whether our fears are real or imagined, cloud our judgment of the new phase in our relationship with Moscow.

The Defence Committee, of which I am a member, has recently undertaken an inquiry into UK-Russian relations and it has become increasingly clear to me, the more evidence we hear underlining the threat that Russia poses to the west, that the debate is down to our inability to understand correctly where we stand as a

[Douglas Chapman]

nation. Although we may not agree on everything in this debate, the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham has taken a vital step along that path.

**Philip Boswell:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is long overdue not just for Britain, but for NATO to move away from this antagonistic position and instead to pursue a new, constructive relationship with Russia for the benefit of all?

**Douglas Chapman:** I agree absolutely with that statement. Our discussions with many ambassadors in Moscow last week suggested that there was almost a time warp of thinking at the moment and that people are still fighting the cold war and thinking it is still a reality. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said that this is a new era and time for a new relationship with Russia, and that fighting the wars of the past is just not appropriate in the modern world.

We must also think about the UK Government's position and where the blame lies for the current situation. Right from the start of the current Government, tough rhetoric has emanated from Downing Street and Whitehall. One would think that the UK knew where it was going on Russia, but the reality, the truth, is quite different. If people begin the discussion from the standpoint of seeing Russia as their No. 1 threat, that will not create a sense of trust or understanding with the Russian people or their Government.

In parliamentary answers that I and other Members have received in the past year, we see examples of disengagement at ministerial level. There is a sense that the UK has given up on trying to understand Russia properly. Not only have budgets for the BBC World Service's Russian service been cut, but there are now only 15 members of Her Majesty's armed forces who can speak Russian to a reasonable level. Substantial cuts are also forthcoming in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. They are aimed at devaluing our ability properly to understand Russia.

The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham cited the case in which we had discussion about the Syrian ceasefire and our own Foreign Secretary failed even to call his opposite number in the Kremlin. We cannot have it that our Foreign Secretary does not call, does not write, does not make contact with a key player in a foreign policy area. That is simply unacceptable.

The situation is not without positives. We had the NATO-Russia Council a few weeks ago. We hope that something positive will come from that as we reach the Warsaw summit. There seems to be very good news as well on cultural events and business. However, that does not change the fact that we need substantive talks in terms of where the UK is going on direct relationships with Russia. I think that everyone who has spoken so far is of the opinion that those relationships must be improved, and improved very quickly.

5.22 pm

**Pat Glass** (North West Durham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) for securing the debate. It has been exciting

for me: I spend so much of my time talking about the European Union that it has been great to get out and look at something slightly wider.

The UK has had a difficult relationship with Russia in recent years. It could well be described as complex and fluid, and occasionally hostile; it has rarely got above cool in the past 70 years. Economically, this country's trade with Russia is modest and has been on a decreasing trend in recent years. Nevertheless, it is important that disruption to our trading relationship with Russia is kept to a minimum, because it has an impact on companies in this country and particularly on pension funds that invest in companies such as BP.

Outside the economic and trade interest, several main potential threats to Anglo-Russian relations arise as a result of Russian foreign policy, particularly in Ukraine and Crimea, and NATO's response. They include: the presence of a number of Russians in the UK whom the UK has refused to extradite to Russia; Russian money—I am talking about criminal money, money laundering of Russian criminal money in the UK and its impact on our society, which is largely on the housing market in the capital—and the UK's response to recent Russian involvement in Syria.

The UK Government, in their 2015 national security strategy, stated that Russia's actions in Ukraine justified a stronger NATO response, but deemed Russian military action against NATO "highly unlikely". We have taken a quite pragmatic approach to Russia. We recognise that Russia is flexing its muscles, largely to impress and threaten those states on its borders, but is being very careful not to threaten larger and stronger states and organisations such as the UK, the EU and NATO. We would recognise that as typical bullying behaviour. Despite all that, the national security strategy, as has been said, seeks to build on successful co-operation with Russia where it can. We have seen that happen quite successfully in the Iranian nuclear programme and co-operation in seeking to address the global threat from ISIL/Daesh.

In the past decade, a number of controversial Russian figures have been granted political asylum in the UK, and the UK Government have refused to extradite them at the request of the Russian Government. That has put huge strains on the Anglo-Russian diplomatic relationship, with a series of expulsions on both sides. However, whatever the rights and wrongs of Russia's criticism of our asylum system, it is absolutely unacceptable that Russian criminals can come to this country and commit murder on the streets of London, as in the case of Alexander Litvinenko, only for the Russian Government to refuse to extradite those against whom a prima facie case has been established, in breach of international law. That case has renewed focus on Russian money in the UK, and its alleged links to Russian corruption.

In 2015, the National Crime Agency said that foreign criminals—it highlighted Russian criminals—are laundering billions of pounds of corrupt Russian money in London, pricing average Londoners out of being able to buy or even rent in central London. In 2016, the Prime Minister is to hold an anti-corruption summit and, among other things, I hope it will hold up a mirror to tax havens in the UK Crown dependencies and overseas territories, and so improve transparency in the UK property market.



Finally, I want to say something about the UK's response to Russian involvement in Syria. Russia has a long relationship with the Government of Syria and regards Syria as being in the Russian domain of influence. However, the recent Russian military intervention has had mixed results. Human rights organisations working in the region have reported that the Russian military targeted hospitals and civilians, claiming that, in the six months to February 2016, Russian air strikes killed 1,000 civilians, including 200 children. Equally clearly, the Russian military intervention has helped to drive back ISIL/Daesh and, without doubt, it has strengthened the position of Bashar al-Assad and his Syrian army. It has also had some impact on forcing him towards a shaky truce, which we hope will solidify and, in the days ahead, include Aleppo.

It is clear to me that Vladimir Putin understands strength and weakness, and very little else. He alone supports the UK voting to leave the European Union, when every other world leader and organisation that wish this country well want us to remain in the EU. That can only be because he sees a Brexit as resulting in a weaker UK and a weaker EU, which he views as a good thing. Anglo-Russian relations will remain stable and, we hope, improve only if the UK remains part of a strong NATO, a strong European Union and a strong western alliance that is prepared to stand up to the aggression of its neighbour to the east.

5.27 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** This has been a well-informed and useful debate. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) on bringing it to the Floor of the House.

My hon. Friend began with a personal statement and a reflection on his own journey and his understanding of the importance of such bilateral relations. I pay tribute to him for adding value to the House by bringing to our attention not only Russia, but other countries, and aspects of the relationships, concerns and issues that we might not necessarily have been aware of. That is important, and I pay tribute to him for it. I absolutely agree with him that we need to have such debates and that we need to understand better our complex relationship with Russia.

Russia is a country that I did not know an awful lot about before I came into the House. I took a huge interest in Afghanistan, but I had not really appreciated Russia and what had happened in Afghanistan until I did some reading. I read an amazing book, "Afgantsy", by Rodric Braithwaite, who did a fantastic job in letting me understand the details rather than the headlines, which might often articulate a very different picture. I recommend the book.

The lesson there is to ensure that we continue to develop relationships, to have dialogue and to further, where we can, the bilateral bond that exists, despite some of the challenges that have been focused on today. There is no doubt an aspiration for a more co-operative relationship with Russia. Indeed, at the end of the cold war, I remember those amazing scenes with Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Gorbachev, and I remember glasnost and perestroika—these words became known

and are now, I think, in the Oxford English Dictionary. The end of the cold war brought a new opportunity to re-engage with a country that, after the end of the second world war, had denied to Europe the chance to work as it should.

However, it is now clear that the integration of Russia into the international system was short-lived. Efforts were made to include Russia in the G8, the World Trade Organisation and the Council of Europe, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) was an active member, and to address the Russian perception that the west was determined, and had a strategy, to encircle Russia. Efforts were made across those fronts and to mollify Russia and say that NATO is not a threat but a reactive organisation, ready to go proactive if required.

For a time, those efforts brought Russia and the international community closer together, but a more mature and co-operative partnership has not blossomed. Much that we now see is because of President Putin's unfortunate disregard for international law and standards. One issue that affected us directly, and was on the front pages of all our newspapers, was the 2006 poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko, a British citizen, here in London with a radioactive substance. An independent judicial inquiry in January 2016 concluded that the crime was probably approved by the then FSB director, Nikolai Patrushev, which led to concerns about the manner in which Russia goes about dealing with those who wish to speak up or challenge what it says.

Other actions by Russia have also been raised in this debate, and concerns have been raised about its direction of travel. Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, and my hon. Friend talked about Crimea as if it had been written off. I wonder whether the people of Crimea are aware of how people in South Ossetia or Abkhazia are enjoying life now. They are completely isolated, and are recognised only by Argentina and Russia itself. The rest of the world has no formal relations with that part of the world. Is that really where Crimea wants to go? I do not know.

The occupation of Crimea in 2014 raises a question mark, and my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham asked the Prime Minister at Question Time whether he encourages greater relations. The international community must stand up when nations decide to redraw the lines on the map. It is important to recognise that the international community must work together, and we have seen Russia providing military support to separatist forces in eastern Ukraine in a blatant attempt to destabilise the country. The United Nations suggests that more than 9,000 people in eastern Ukraine have been killed, with more than 20,000 wounded. Sadly, the situation created the conditions for the Malaysia Airlines MH17 tragedy, in which 298 passengers and crew, including 10 British citizens, were killed.

All that instability, and human misery, was and is entirely avoidable. We can move forward from this—for those who are not aware, sanctions are divided into two separate categories: those affecting Crimea and those relating to the Minsk agreement on the eastern Ukraine—and, yes, we can get back towards more normalised relations if the Minsk agreement is recognised. It is in Russia's gift to do so, and we encourage it to take the necessary steps to provide a diplomatic solution to the crisis that we face.

[Mr Tobias Ellwood]

On a positive note, despite our differences, there is no desire to isolate or ostracise Russia, or to push it away. Quite the opposite: we want Russia to be included in the international community. We have heard examples of the role that Russia plays as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, participating in a range of foreign policy priorities, not least on the Iranian nuclear deal, which has profoundly changed the trajectory of where the middle east may go—I say “may” because there are an awful lot of caveats and concerns. To date, Iran still has yet to change its behaviour and outlook towards places such as Bahrain, Yemen, Damascus, Syria and Beirut. Nevertheless, the people of Iran now have an opportunity and that has been brought about because of the collaboration between the United States of America, Britain, France and so forth and, of course, Russia.

Syria has also been mentioned, but I can only repeat what I said in the Chamber yesterday. We look to Russia, with its unique influence over the regime, to ensure that the cessation of hostilities does not break down. Russia has a unique relationship with Assad because of a historical relationship and an influence in that neck of the woods that goes back to 1946 and the independence of the country. We expect Russia, and want Putin, to place pressure on Assad to stop the attacks, and to allow the ceasefire to embed and peace negotiations to continue.

I would just mention to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough that there has been a period of Russia unbalancing Syria, by not attacking Daesh, but deliberately attacking Assad’s opposition—and not only that, but denying airspace for us, the international community, to freely take on Daesh in the wider context of Syria.

On a positive note, there is an awful lot of engagement. The Prime Minister has met President Putin at the G20 summit, the Foreign Secretary does speak and engage with Foreign Minister Lavrov, on a number of multilateral engagements, and the Minister for Europe visited Moscow very recently indeed. I had the opportunity to meet President Putin at the European Games in Baku in Azerbaijan last year. I was not quite expecting to see him, but I told him that a friend of mine had cause to use Russian transport and was a bit concerned about international developments—the east and west—in case he got stuck at the end of his destination and was unable to get back. That friend of mine was called Tim Peake. He was using a Soyuz space capsule to get up to the international space station and did not want to be abandoned up there. Mr Putin grabbed my arm and said, “Mr Ellwood, tell Mr Peake that we will not

abandon him.” That gives an indication that it is possible to isolate some of the enormous concerns we have. The sanctions that are put in place allow us to work on the international stage to tackle some of the problems. Culturally, professionally and, indeed, from an industrial and commercial perspective, we are able to continue those relationships.

Since the cold war, successive British Governments, quite rightly, have wanted Europe to build a strategic partnership with Russia. However, this Russian Government have made it clear that they regard the west with mistrust and view NATO—and, increasingly, the EU—as a threat to their interests. A fundamental divergence of values and interests, combined with the unpredictability of Russian behaviour, has increasingly limited the scope of Anglo-Russian relations, but the Government’s objectives regarding Russia are to protect the UK’s interests and those of our allies and partners; to uphold the rules-based international order in the face of Russian aggression; to engage with Russia on global security issues; in key areas of shared interest, to promote our values, including the rule of law and human rights; and to build stronger links between the British and Russian people more widely. That balanced approach is aligned to British interests and I hope that hon. Members of all parties can support it.

**Philip Davies (in the Chair):** Mr Kawczynski, you have just over a minute to wind up the debate.

5.38 pm

**Daniel Kawczynski:** I thank the Minister for his remarks and some of his positive comments. We need to show strength towards the Russians. We must make them realise that we will always protect our NATO partners in central and eastern Europe. I am very much in favour of trying to ensure that we have a permanent NATO base east of Warsaw, because those new NATO countries need to know that we are serious about protecting them. That is extremely important. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), myself and others are looking to the Government to show an interest in the ability to engage with the Russians, to support greater cultural and scientific exchange with them, and to show us that they are doing everything possible to lower tensions at the same time as showing strength towards the Russians.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered Anglo-Russian relations.

5.40 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statement

*Wednesday 4 May 2016*

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### **Housing and Planning Bill: Standing Order 830 Assessment**

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis):** I am placing in the Library of the House today the Department's analysis of the application of Standing Order No. 830 in respect of the Lords amendments to the Housing and Planning Bill.

[HCWS710]



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